



The Evolution of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s Political Identity

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Abstract

The divide and rule policy adopted by the British India government, which had drive the British India society from religious complexity and social conflicted into even worse. With sectarian conflict in the British India and the invasion from the United Kingdom, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s initial reaction was to appeal solidarity and struggle for the independence of whole British Indian people. However, with the evolution of a series of events, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had abandoned the original intention gradually, and had played a vital role in promoted the British India Islamic Nationalism among the British India Muslims eventually.

Key words: Sir Syed Ahmad Khan; British India; Muslims; British India Islamic Nationalism; Evolution

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INTRODUCTION

In 19th century, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) was one of the advocators in the British India Islamic Nationalism Movement, and he was the leader of the Islamic Revival Movement. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, a nationalist of British Hindu-Muslim unity, had advocated the unity of British India initially—Hindu and Islamic

nation should belong to the whole British India. But in his latter career, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan advocated the British India Islamic Nationalism strongly in British India. This change had a deep affection on the development of British Indian education and politics. There was not so much academic research on this evolution, only focused on the relationship of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan with the Indian National Congress Party from cooperation to confrontation.

Many scholars believed that the policy of the Indian National Congress Party exclusion the British Indian Muslims, which led to a shifting in Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s thinking. Hu Shaohua hold such kind of view in his academic paper “Why Sir Syed Ahmad Khan Oppose to the Indian National Congress Party: On the Hindu Muslim Relations during the Second Half of the 19th Century”, which he tend to think the cause of the intensifying Muslims conflict, the attitude of the British India colonial authorities in 19th century, and the ignoring of Muslims’ requires by the Indian National Congress Party, which led to the changing of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s national Thought (Hu, 1989).

Another scholar named Du Bing, in his academic paper “Pakistan: The Background and Influence of Two Nations Theory”, which he hold the view that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan proposed the British India Islamic nationalism in 1883, that related to the political environment in South Asia Subcontinent closely, the British Indian government’ rule also increased discord the relationship between Muslim and Hindu, Hindu sectarianism also contributed to the rising of the British India Islamic nationalism (Du, 2013).

Another viewpoint was to criticize Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s the British India Islamic Nationalism, which was considered secessionism. Yang Yanming’s academic paper “The British Indian Muslim separatism: Set Syed, Iqbal and Jinnah as Examples” (Yang, 2006), in which Yang Yanming believed that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan overlooked

British India's political environment, transformed the confrontation between British India and United Kingdom into Hindus and Muslims, "rather British India government's rule than Hindu majority's rule." (Lin, 2004, p.188) In addition, Chen Huanyi's academic book *The British Labour Party and the Division of India*, discussed that the altering view of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, from Indian Muslim unity, to separatism (Chen, 2004, p.70).

These academic papers and academic books mostly focused on the reasons of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan ethnic ideology conversion. On the contrary, these scholars involved less on the specific differences in different periods. Based on previous, through researching and debating, the academic papers and academic books had focused on the unique aspects of different periods' national ideology via comparing Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's political thoughts between earlier and later career, in order to raise academic community attaches to these issues.

1. THE BEACON FOR BRITISH INDIAN NATIONAL UNITY

In the first half of 19th century, Hindu and Muslim in the South Asia subcontinent faced with the common threat: the rule of United Kingdom over the South Asia subcontinent. So that the atmosphere between the Hindus and the Muslims was tended to be united, and the religious friction between the Hindus and the Muslims could be well handle peacefully.

Before 1884, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan interpreted "nation" as "the word 'national', I included Hindus and Muslims, which is the only meaning I can give." (Chen, 2004, p.70) Compared with people with religion faith, many Muslims and Hindus had much in common. Therefore, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan defined Indians as people who live in British India, cause they were residents of Hindustan, so he said: "Hindus and Muslims share the common air in India, drink the holy water of Ganges. In fact Hindus and Muslims belong to a nation." (Chand, 1988, pp.357-358) Many of them had much common interests, which reflected in their frequently political relationship. The following would demonstrate their common aspects:

Firstly, in the family origin, Muslims and Hindus had a lot of common interests. During the Mughal Empire period, Muslims and Hindus lived in peace for a long time. After British invading South Asia subcontinent, Hindu and Muslim all united to against the British India government's rule. From the feudal princes and zamindars to poverty peasant, they all attended the uprisings against the common enemy: the British India government's rule. Moreover, Wahhabis believed that the British are infidels, preached jihad to drive away British rulers, because their doctrine said: "If India was ruled by British, it is no longer

a 'land of Islam', but 'pagan land'" (Lin, 2004, p.70). In addition, among Muslims in the South Asia subcontinent: "Some families existed in India for over 1,000 years, some less than 100 years. Compared to the same sect, many Muslims had common interests with Hinduism." (Robinson, 2008, p.345) Therefore, put religion faith aside, from the development of family origin, we could find out the link between Muslims and Hindus was inextricable, which could explain Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's viewpoint about unifying Hindus and Muslims as a nation.

Secondly, Muslims and Hindus also had a lot of common interests in politics. "In the late 1800s, in Uttar Pradesh, very important political ties based on common political views and interests of Hindu and Islam land owners and civil servants." (Robinson, 2008, p.345) Hindus whose interest focused on land and civil service posts were similar with Muslims. In the big land lord class, Rajputs and Muslims were two of the most influential groups. They once often cooperated in order to promote the interest of land lords. As warriors and elite class, the leaders of the Rajput were an important partner of the supreme ruler of the Muslims, and often put their daughter to marry with Muslim ruler families. Therefore, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan required that India should share equal status with Britain, as he said: "If a nation could not be equality with the dominant ethnic, do not participate their government, it could not obtained honor and respect." (Majumdar, 1986, p.964)

Thus, faced with the threat from British rule, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had jointed Hindus and Muslims to resist the British rule actively. These threats derived from not only western education, but hindered from bureaucracy, as well as the impact of electoral politics. Thus, to resist the threats, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan took varies measures to unity Hindus and Muslims.

The first measure was that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan preached the theory that India was a country to unify the Hinduism and Islam. Before 1884, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan committed to unite Muslims and Hindus. In Legislative Council, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was always eager for prosperity for the nation. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan maintained that Muslims and Hindus in South Asia subcontinent were belonging to a country. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had said:

They are two eyes of the India, hurt one would hurt the other one. So that we should seek to be one in spirit and action; once unified, we could support each other, otherwise the result would lead to another attack die. (Lin, 2004, p.183)

In 1888, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan founded the Association of India Patriots, including two kinds of members: Hindus and Muslims, for objecting the India National Congress Party.

The Second measure was that to establish the Hindu-Islamic Education Association. In 1859, Sir Syed

Ahmad Khan founded Morahabad University, which Sir Syed Ahmad Khan established in accordance with the traditional form of the Persian school, and added some new programs, such as attendance registration, fixed courses and exams. The most important innovation was the introduction of the modern history curriculum. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan believed that if the Indians had more knowledge about the modern history, they might prevent the mutiny.

With the help of local celebrities Committee, including Hindus and Muslims, the school was established. In 1863, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan proposed the establishment of a school. The Hindu and Muslim consisted of the associations, with no caste, religion and geographical discrimination, where the Commission responsible for translating of Hindi and Urdu print. In addition, if it could be done, the Commission should translate the Europe achievement into Indian language in order to benefit of Hindu and Muslim, and paid attention to avoid religious issues. As the cooperation mechanism between Hindu and Muslim, the proportion of Muslims and Hindus was considerable, so in 1864, there were four Muslims and three Hindus in the Executive Committee.

The Third measure was that the protection of dialect. Hindi and Urdu had been given equal attention. Hindu-Islamic Education Association translated English advanced scientific achievements into Hindi, Urdu version, and treated Islamic and Hindu cultures equally. In an article "India's public education" which Sir Syed Ahmad Khan concluded: "Even if the problem may be resolved by the British education supporters, but it would not beat the East Education, and unreliable in practice." The British India government should provide assistance to such suggestions. The British India association had asked the British India government to recommend two sets of textbooks translated by Social Science Institutions for each class, one was Hindi, and the other was Persian.

Through the operations above, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan united India to some extent. However, after the mutiny in 1857, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's attitude had changed dramatically. Then Sir Syed Ahmad Khan became a British India Islamic nationalist, worked hard to promote the "two nation theory."

2. ADVOCATOR OF THE BRITISH INDIA ISLAMIC NATIONALISM

Because of the Indian National Congress Party's politics and the divide and rule policy adopted by the British India government, as well as differences between Islam and Hindu religion, eventually which led Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's thought transmitted toward the British India Islamic nationalism. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's British India Islamic Nationalism thoughts were reflected as follows:

First of all, on the education, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan found the Aligarh College for Muslim. Hindus had already accepted the Western education, superior to Muslim who only accepted the traditional education. Thus, the British India colonial government officials mostly were Hindu, while as India's past ruler—Muslim, became the subjects. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan concerned that the Muslims were fallen behind owed to they refused to accept western education. So if they tended to have a conversion, the modern education system was an effective measure. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan said to Aligarh Institute Gazette: "The reason why British were so civilized is that their art and science are taught in English." (Graham, 2010, p.132)

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan decided to found such a university: only serve for the Muslim elite in the Muslim community. On December 26, 1871, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan set up a Committee for the better diffusion and advancement of Learning among the Muslims in the British India in Benares. The Committee announced that it would give prizes of Rs. 500, Rs. 300 and Rs. 150 for the best essays answering questions: Why was the proportion of Muslims at public schools and colleges less than that of the Hindus? What were the causes of the decline of oriental learning? Why had the study of modern sciences not been introduced among the Muslims? By September 1871, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan received 32 answers. On these basis, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan produced a report on Muslim education in the British India, urged the establishment of an independent college in Alighr city to accept modern education. This independent college was well-known as Muhammad Anglo—Oriental Institute.

Secondly, in order to avoid threats from the Indian National Congress Party, Muslim strongly rejected the rule of the Indian National Congress Party. In the Indian National Congress Party leaders over democratic system, the number of multi national interests would completely overwhelm the minority's interests. The democracy, the majority decision, claimed by the Indian National Congress Party did not respect the interests of Muslims who were the minority, so the democracy preached by the Indian National Congress Party did not meet with modern western democracy. Because Muslims account for only a quarter of Indian total population, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan fear of the Indian National Congress Party's political interests would overwhelm the Indian Muslims. In 1884, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had a lengthy conversation with the governor, and pronounced for the name of "Koran": "Our nation could not expect to find friendship and love from other people." (Chen, 2004, p.71)

In December 1887, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan asked the senators of Legislative Council could not be elect, and they should be appoint, cause by election means and everyone had the right to vote, if Muslim vote for Muslim, and Hindus vote for Hindu, then the numbers of voters of

Hindu will be as quadruple as Muslims, because the Hindu population was four times as the Muslim's population. If candidates' own property were restricted, then how Muslims and Hindus could have equal power? Muslim governor could even not get a seat in the Legislative Council. If Muslims did not have enough representation in the Legislative Assembly, how could Muslim protected their interests effectively? Therefore, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan advocated that representatives of Hindu and Muslim in each legislative session should be given equal (Phlips, 1962, p.188).

Moreover, only under British India government rule could ensure Muslims and Hindus share a common premise of political power. Therefore, the "divide and rule" policy, initially against Muslims turned against Hinduism.

Thirdly, in national sentiment, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan first proposed the theory of the British India Islamic nationalism, was an advocate of Islamic revivalism. In March 1888, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan gave a speech in Meerut, had declared the "Islamic nation" theory, claimed that Hindus and Muslims were two nations. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had said: "Once if British withdrawal from India completely, who would be the ruler of India? Could the two nations—Muslims and Hindus—sit on the same throne and share equal power? It was certainly not." (Chen, 2004, p.71)

In 1893, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had established British India Muslim Association of Self-defense, and the British and Muslim member, called on the majority of Muslims refusing to participate in the Indian National Congress Party, and separated with Hindus. In the latter part of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's career life, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan defended Islamic education positively, sought to maximize their voting rights for the Muslims. All those were result in national ideological shift; adhere to the "two nations" theory.

3. THE INFLUENCE ON THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF THE BRITISH INDIA BY THE CHANGING ROLE

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's the "two nations" theory had a big affect on large number of Muslims in South Asia subcontinent, and even set off the British Indian nationalism movement. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's successor, such as Iqbal, Jinnah not only inherited the "two nations" theory, but put into practice, then established the Pakistani eventually.

On one hand, the British India Muslims' political consciousness had been greatly improved, and maintained their power in cooperation with the Indian National Congress Party actively. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan called on Muslims not to participate in the Indian National Congress Party, and strived to improve their level of education,

so that they had the power to get jobs in the British India government and to obtain a higher level of wealth in the industry. In addition, during the constitutional development, "concerns about majority rule provoked Muslim requirements for nominees. They required quotas in favor of the district election." (Chen, 2004, p.72)

Not long after Sir Syed Ahmad Khan died, between 1900 and 1909, the British India Islamic nationalism movement reached a peak. Muslims claimed that "Election was the base on independent representatives of the Muslim community wherever." (Robinson, 2008, p.96)

On the other hand, the United Provinces had become the most active area of the British India Islamic nationalism movement. The Muslim statesmen of the United Provinces, requires not only district elections, in order to ensure that the interests of Muslims, but led to the establishment of the All India Muslim League. In 1906, some Muslim statesmen carried out massive British India Islamic nationalism movement. In addition, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan got support from Theodore Baker, Dean of UK Islam Oriental College. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's nationalism became a common idea among Muslim leaders in the British India. Thus, although Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Theodore Baker had died in 1898 and 1899 respectively, but their claims always had effect, and became the basis for the policy of Muslims in British India for quite some time, such as Iqbal's "Muslim countries" theory. "Further elaborated Sir Syed Ahmad Khan Islam was a separate theory, proposed the establishment of a separate Islamic state politics." Jinnah then developed the All India Muslim League subsequently, at last founded Pakistan eventually.

CONCLUSION

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's Islamic ideology of nationalism was not emphasized on the doctrine of Islam to distinguish between Muslims and Hindus. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's nationalism was political sense, which based on identity of Indian Muslim. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan hoped that such approval could be extended to the whole British India, and unified Hindus and Muslims in the whole British India. But Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's hope failed. Cause Hinduism and Islam were different varying from customs and doctrine, and the two sects with different internal factions. It lacked necessary elements of state formation to force the Muslims and Hindus to be one country. Thus, it was reasonable that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's thoughts were shifted. Finally, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan changed his mind, instead of promoting British India Islamic nationalism. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's shifting owed to ethnic differences and religious differences caused by British India itself to a large extent. This shifting may even owe more to the Indian National Congress party's policy. The Indian

National Congress party had ignored Indian Muslims' interests when they implemented the democratic system in British India.

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