



Sir Syed Ahmed Khan

A Political Biography

SHAN MUHAMMAD

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A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY



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M.A., D. Phil.

With a Foreword by

Dr. TARA CHAND

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FOREWORD

AMONG THE GALAXY of great men who appeared in India in the second half of the nineteenth century, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was one of the most prominent. For, if greatness is to be measured by the depth of the impression made on society and the extent of transformation affected in its thought and action, then without any doubt Sir Syed has the right to be reckoned among the great.

India in the middle of the 19th century wallowed in the depth of despondency. Defeat, humiliation and despair overcast the sky. The failure of the Revolt of 1857 had extinguished all hopes of recovering independence and inaugurated an era of colonial economy and imperialist exploitation. It had burnt the mark of inferiority on the forehead of the Indian people.

Of all the Indian communities the worst sufferer were the Muslims. Their political powers were exterminated for ever and their aristocracy almost wholly decimated. One of the results of the devastation was that they lost their self-reliance and began to seek crutches on which to lean outside India. The Ottoman Sultan whose claim to Caliphate the Mughal emperors had rejected, suddenly assumed their leadership. The new loyalty had fateful consequences.

Their economic condition had fast deteriorated. Doors of employment under the government were closed; independent professional careers were unavailable because of religious taboos against English education; landowners had lost much of their property as a punishment for rebellion; trade and business were traditionally unsuitable; arts and crafts had been crushed by the competition of English factories and the unholy policies of the British rulers.

Sir Syed whose heart bled at the sight of the vast ruin—material and moral, which overwhelmed society—resolved with unparallel courage to rescue his community from its unfortunate predicament. The solution was most difficult, for the

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