
**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SIR SYED AHMAD KHAN'S
EDUCATIONAL MODEL AND MODERN EDUCATION**

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ABSTRACT:

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan is among the foremost educational reformers of nineteenth-century India who sought to reconstruct Muslim society through modern, rational, and morally grounded education. Modern education has been shaped by globalization, technological advancement, and market demands, prioritizes skill development and innovation. 19th century Indian educationists established the intellectual and institutional foundations for the cause of modern education in India while experiencing the cultural upheaval and colonial disturbance. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan played his part in transforming Indian educational landscape by his multidisciplinary and holistic educational model. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan championed western styled education system by integrating the religious identity of Indian Muslims with scientific temperament. This research paper presents an in-depth analysis of multidisciplinary and holistic educational model proposed and implemented by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in context to modern education signifying his concord and conflict in ideological, cultural, and religious standpoints. This study is a qualitative content analysis-based literature review that examines his respective educational model aimed at tracing his long term impact on Muslim community in particular and Indian society in general. This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's educational model and modern education, highlighting areas of convergence and divergence in philosophy, curriculum, pedagogy, and social orientation. It argues that while modern education excels in technological and interdisciplinary advancement, Sir Syed's model offers a value-centric framework that remains relevant for addressing contemporary ethical and identity challenges.

KEYWORDS: Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Aligarh Muslim University, Modern Indian Education, AMU, Sir Syed's Educational Model.

INTRODUCTION

Education has historically functioned as a catalyst for social transformation. Indian education celebrates rich and interesting history as it blends in itself different cultures and civilizations which contributed to its growth and sustenance. British records reveal that education was prominent in 18th century, with a learning centre or school for every Temple, Mosque or Village centre. India marked a socio-political upheaval, colonial dominance, and the early stirrings of reform in 19th century. Apparently, education emerged as a powerful tool for the conglomeration of social transformation, scientific innovation and cultural preservation. During this period Sir Syed Ahmad Khan stood determinant to modernize the Indian society by means of education. His educational model featured his religious, ideological, and pedagogical standpoint. In colonial India, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan conceptualized education as an instrument for intellectual emancipation and communal upliftment. Modern education that emerged from industrialization and digital revolutions, emphasizes adaptability, innovation, and employability. A comparative study of this educational model enables a deeper understanding of how education negotiates between values and utility, tradition and progress in modern perspective.

Statement of the Problem

In this research, the relevance of educational model of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan to the contemporary education system is examined in a comparative method. It is worth mentioning that in this review, the educational philosophy of this great thinker is analyzed and compared to modern education, but it should be noted that the concord and conflict has been traced briefly and in general. The aforesaid principles are applied to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the core educational philosophy behind educational model of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan?
2. What are other significant parameters in the educational model of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan?
3. What relevance do the educational model holds in the contemporary education system of India highlighting the main points of concord and conflict?

Literature Review

Scholarly discourse on Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's educational philosophy has largely examined his role as a modernist reformer responding to the socio-political and intellectual crisis of nineteenth-century Indian Muslims. Early scholarship situates Sir Syed within colonial modernity, emphasizing his attempt to reconcile religious belief with rational inquiry and scientific knowledge. Troll's influential analysis conceptualizes Sir Syed as a rationalist theologian whose educational vision was grounded in the compatibility of reason (*'aql*) and revelation, thereby rejecting traditionalist resistance to modern science. This rational synthesis formed the philosophical foundation of his educational reforms.

Institutional studies, particularly Lelyveld's work on the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental (MAO) College, highlight Sir Syed's strategic engagement with British educational models. Lelyveld argues that the adoption of the Oxbridge framework was not an act of cultural imitation but a pragmatic response to political marginalization and educational backwardness. Education, in this context, was envisioned as a mechanism for leadership formation, social cohesion, and community empowerment rather than mere individual advancement.

Primary writings such as *Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq* reveal Sir Syed's sustained critique of blind imitation (*taqlid*) and his emphasis on moral discipline, intellectual rigor, and ethical refinement. These texts demonstrate that Sir Syed's educational model was inherently value-oriented, integrating moral education with scientific and rational learning. Unlike contemporary utilitarian education, knowledge for Sir Syed was inseparable from character formation. In *Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind*, Sir Syed extends the scope of education to include socio-political awareness and civic responsibility, suggesting that ignorance, rather than religion, was the primary cause of conflict between rulers and subjects. Scholars interpret this as evidence of his belief in education as a stabilizing force capable of fostering social harmony and political maturity.

Comparative perspectives emerge in Metcalf's analysis of Islamic reform movements, where Sir Syed's modernist orientation is contrasted with orthodox educational institutions such as Deoband. Metcalf situates Sir Syed within a broader spectrum of Muslim responses to colonialism, arguing that his openness to Western knowledge systems rendered his educational philosophy more adaptable to modern educational paradigms. Broader critiques of Indian education, notably by Naik, provide an analytical framework to assess Sir Syed's model alongside contemporary systems. Naik's articulation of tensions between equality, quality, and relevance offers insight into the limitations of Sir Syed's elite-focused approach

while simultaneously exposing structural weaknesses in modern mass education, particularly its instrumental orientation.

Recent scholarship revisits Sir Syed's educational reforms in light of contemporary challenges such as ethical erosion, commodification of education, and identity crises. Siddiqui argues that Sir Syed's integration of moral values with modern knowledge remains pedagogically relevant, especially in addressing the value-neutrality of modern education. Such studies emphasize that while modern education excels in technological innovation and interdisciplinary expansion, it often lacks a coherent ethical framework. Despite substantial scholarship, existing literature reveals a notable gap in systematic comparative analysis between Sir Syed's educational model and modern education. Most studies remain either historically descriptive or normatively appreciative, with limited engagement in conceptual comparison focusing on aims, curriculum, moral orientation, and social purpose. This gap necessitates a structured comparative framework that situates Sir Syed's philosophy within contemporary educational discourse. In sum, the literature establishes Sir Syed Ahmad Khan as a seminal educational thinker whose ideas extend beyond historical constraints. However, there remains scope for further research that critically examines the relevance of his value-centric educational model in relation to modern education's skill-driven paradigm. Such an inquiry contributes to ongoing debates on the purpose of education in an era marked by technological advancement and moral uncertainty.

Research Methodology:

This research methodology employs document review method based on qualitative content analysis of the various parameters of educational model of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Using historical and comparative method, his works and educational ideas are reviewed and analyzed in the following ways:

1. Studying thoroughly the educational model of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan;
2. Comparing his educational model in defined set of parameters;
3. Juxtaposing the relevance of his educational models to contemporary education system of in India.

Educational Model of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan is celebrated as one of the renowned Indian educationist of 19th century for his efforts in the development of modern scientific education among Muslims in particular and Indian society in general. Moreover, he was not only a pioneer of Muslim

nationalism in the sub-continent but is remembered as a pragmatist, a philosopher, and a reformer with an extreme heritage of scientific and theological understanding. Akhtarul Wasey says that, “Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was a great pioneer of Muslim revival in the sub-continent.” He framed such an educational model that aimed on the all-round development of each individual while inculcating scientific and spiritual values. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan laid foundation of the MAO College and scientific society. His educational model is briefly discussed as following:

Sir Syed’s Educational Philosophy:

His educational philosophy was based on rationalism, modernism and Muslim identity. His educational philosophy was based on prioritizing occidental learning over oriental learning. He emphasized on Western education and persuaded his Muslim community to abandon orthodox approach and traditional system of education. He once said, “They (English) are religiously engaged in hardwork of industrial development of their country.” He opined that education must be accessible to all irrespective of social, cultural, economical and religious differences.

Sir Syed’s Aims of Education:

Sir Syed’s main aim of education was to focus on the excellence of Muslim community in the social, economical, scientific and religious fields. He also aimed at modernization of Muslim community by ensuring a well defined collaboration with British. He aimed at the development of free enquiry and scientific temperament by the introduction of leading western literature. He famously once said, “A true Muslim is one who must have Holy Quran in one hand and science in the other.” He aimed at vocational training and practical based knowledge for securing employment and self-reliance in the rapidly advancing world.

Sir Syed’s Curriculum:

Sir Syed’s curriculum was multidisciplinary which included both modern and traditional elements in it. He categorized curriculum into two broader sections as general education curriculum and special education curriculum. Dr. Nasrin says, “To address the secular and spiritual needs of Muslims, he proposed general education curriculum while as special education; according to him, was to develop a scientific temper.” His general education curriculum included natural sciences, mathematics, moral sciences, religion, and etc. while as special education curriculum included philosophy and pure and applied science subjects.

Sir Syed's Integrated (Modern and Religious) Education:

Sir Syed was a creative thinker who opposed the conservative, irrational, superstitious ideas in Muslim community sparking an Islamic renaissance in the history of Muslim world. He was pioneer in being the modern Muslim who was duly attracted by the progress and advancement of the west in the fields of science, technology and literature. So he presented an integrated model of education for all round development of the learners.

Sir Syed's Women Education:

Sir Syed aimed at women education in his multidisciplinary educational model. He opined to impart education to women in a progressive and phased manner. He debated that only education can make a difference in order to regain the lost status of women in Indian society thereby making them aware enough and capable of the attainment of their proper and fundamental rights.

Educational Model of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan: A Comparative Analysis with Modern Education

Sir Syed was titled as 'Prophet of Education' by Mahatama Gandhi for his untiring efforts in the field of education. He is identified as a humanist in his thought as he believed in modernization of Indian education by abandoning the orthodox approach and traditional system of education for the welfare of nation.

Sir Syed's educational philosophy was rooted in rationalism, rejecting blind imitation and advocating critical inquiry. He maintained that reason and revelation were not contradictory but complementary. Modern education similarly promotes rationality and empirical inquiry; however, it often detaches knowledge from moral and metaphysical concerns. This separation marks a key philosophical divergence between the two models.

For Sir Syed, the primary aim of education was social reform and moral regeneration alongside intellectual advancement. Education was viewed as a civilizational necessity to restore dignity and confidence among Muslims. Modern education, in contrast, largely focuses on individual success, professional competence, and economic productivity. While societal development remains an implicit goal, it is often secondary to personal achievement. Sir Syed advocated the inclusion of modern sciences, mathematics, philosophy, and English literature while retaining ethical and religious consciousness. This integrative curriculum contrasts with modern education's highly specialized and compartmentalized structure, where ethical education is often marginal or optional. Contemporary interdisciplinary initiatives

partially address this gap, yet moral instruction remains largely external to the core curriculum.

In Sir Syed's model, teachers were regarded as moral exemplars and intellectual authorities responsible for character formation. Pedagogy emphasized discipline and intellectual rigor. Modern education redefines teachers as facilitators and mentors, prioritizing learner autonomy, creativity, and experiential learning. While pedagogical methods have evolved, the moral authority of the teacher has diminished in contemporary systems.

Sir Syed emphasized English education as a gateway to modern knowledge and global intellectual discourse, without dismissing indigenous languages. This vision of Sir Syed remains relevant, as modern education continues to privilege English as a dominant language of academia, science, and professional mobility.

Sir Syed's educational vision was community-centric, aimed at collective progress and socio-political awareness. Modern education, shaped by neoliberal and market-driven frameworks, is predominantly individual-centric, often leading to social fragmentation and ethical relativism. This contrast underscores the enduring relevance of Sir Syed's emphasis on collective responsibility and moral purpose in education.

Sir Syed's educational model was limited by its elite orientation and historical context, which restricted access to broader sections of society. Modern education, while more inclusive, frequently suffers from moral disengagement and excessive instrumentalism. A balanced synthesis of Sir Syed's moral-intellectual framework and modern education's technological strengths may address these limitations.

CONCLUSION:

An analytical evaluation of educational model of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan reveals that the educational philosophy of Sir Syed is comprehensive and at par with the contemporary setting touching all aspects of teaching and learning process such as social, political, economical, religious, and spiritual aspect. Critically, he outshined as an orthodox religious thinker, but at the same time manifested a liberal touch in his religious thought. The comparative analysis reveals that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's educational model and modern education share a commitment to rational inquiry and scientific advancement, yet differ fundamentally in moral orientation and social purpose. Sir Syed's integration of ethics, reason, and social responsibility provides a corrective framework for contemporary education systems that prioritize skills over values. His educational philosophy thus remains intellectually and socially relevant in the modern era.

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