

Question

The Aligarh Movement was a pure educational venture but it had deep impacts on Indian politics. Discuss.

Answer:

Introduction:

The Aligarh movement initially started as an educational endeavour that brought intellectual renaissance to the Muslims of the sub-continent. This movement not only brought an educational revolution but also changed the whole political dynamics of the Indian sub-continent.

The alumni of Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College (MAO) and Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) rose as leaders of the independence struggle

“Yes the main purpose of this college (MAO) is to impart modern education to Muslims who are suffering because of lack of it but this institution is for all, Hindus and Muslims alike. Both of them need education.”

— Sir Syed Ahmad Khan

Impacts of the Aligarh Movement on Indian politics during the British Rule:

(i) Rehabilitation of relations between the Muslims and the British Raj:

Sir Syed tried to mediate the conflict between Muslims and the British Raj by publishing *Risala-e-Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind* in 1858.

Moreover, the Aligarh Movement also established the 'British Indian Association' in 1886 which served as the instruments of appeasement to the English government.

(ii) The Urdu Movement and Two-Nation Theory:

The Aligarh Movement also played a crucial role in the Urdu-Hindi controversy 1867 which sought to downplay Urdu as an official language.

Sir Syed developed his famous 'Two Nations Theory'. He was of the view that the Hindus and Muslims can never be a single

nation as they profoundly differ in their languages, cultures, religions, literature and social practices.

"Hindus and Muslims can never evolve as a common nationality, and this misconception of one Indian nation will lead India to ultimate destruction if we fail to revise our notions in time."

- Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah

(iii) Opposition to Congress and the development of the Muslim nationalism:

The establishment of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1885 stirred the core of Indian politics. Speaking in Meerut in March 1888, Sir Syed said,

"There was no such thing in India as one nation; Is it possible that under these circumstances two nations — the Mohammedans and the Hindus — could sit on the same throne and remain equal in power? ... To hope that both can remain equal is to desire

the impossible and the inconceivable."

Thus, the Aligarh Movement initiated a sense of Muslim nationalism among the oppressed Muslims of India.

(iv) MAO and AMU Alumni as the pioneers of the Khilafat and Pakistan Movements:

The alumni of MAO and AMU, such as Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, Nawab Wajid-ul-Mulk and Sir Ziauddin Ahmed became the political voice of millions of Muslims in India.

According to Stanley Wolpert, an American historian,

"Aligarh cricket ground and common grounds served as breeding ground for Muslim leaders."

(v) Birth of All India Muslim League:

Sir Syed established the All India Mohammedan Education Conference (AIMEC) as a mere educational venture in 1886.

The All India Muslim League, formed in the 20th session of AIMEC on December 27, 1906, in Dhaka became the first and sole representative of the Muslims of the sub-continent.

Critical Analysis:

Sir Syed's Aligarh movement has attracted criticism from supporters and opponents.

Some critics call it a 'luminous star in the dark'; others call it a 'British conspiracy'.

"Pakistan nationalism is the direct outcome of Muslim nationalism whose intellectual pioneer was Sir Syed Ahmad Khan."

— Nadeem F. Paracha, a Pakistani journalist

Hence, it can be said that the Aligarh Movement was the first step taken by the then-Indian Muslims towards the establishment of Pakistan.

Conclusion:

The Aligarh

Movement helped Muslims regain their lost respect and rekindle their relationship with the British authorities. It helped Muslims identify themselves as a separate entity and empowered them to fight for their political rights.

Thus, the influence of the Aligarh Movement on Indian politics is so deep-rooted that it changed the social and political landscapes in the sub-continent.

“I built this institution for you and I am sure, you will carry the light of this institution far and wide till darkness disappears from all around.”

-Sir Syed Ahmad Khan
