

**Subject:- PERSIAN**

M.A. IInd Semester

Course No. Per 205

Unit-V

Topic- Study of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan

**Online Class Materials**

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# Syed Ahmad Khan

## Influence of Mirza Ghalib

In 1855, he finished his scholarly, well researched and illustrated edition of Abul Fazl's *Ai'n-e Akbari*, itself an extraordinarily difficult book. Having finished the work to his satisfaction, and believing that Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib was a person who would appreciate his labours, Syed Ahmad approached the great Ghalib to write a *taqriz* (in the convention of the times, a laudatory foreword) for it. Ghalib obliged, but what he did produce was a short Persian poem castigating the *Ai'n-e Akbari*, and by implication, the imperial, sumptuous, literate and learned Mughal culture of which it was a product. The least that could be said against it was that the book had little value even as an antique document. Ghalib practically reprimanded Syed Ahmad Khan for wasting his talents and time on dead things. Worse, he praised sky-high the "sahibs of England" who at that time held all the keys to all the a'ins in this world.

The poem was unexpected, but it came at the time when Syed Ahmad Khan's thought and feelings themselves were inclining toward change. Ghalib seemed to be acutely aware of a European[English]-sponsored change in world polity, especially Indian polity. Syed Ahmad might well have been piqued at Ghalib's admonitions, but he would also have realized that Ghalib's reading of the situation, though not nuanced enough, was basically accurate. Syed Ahmad Khan may also have felt that he, being better informed about the English and the outside world, should have himself seen the change that now seemed to be just round the corner.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan never again wrote a word in praise of the *Ai'n-e Akbari* and in fact gave up taking an active interest in history and archaeology. He did edit another two historical texts over the next few years, but neither of them was anything like the *Ai'n*: a vast and triumphalist document on the governance of Akbar.

## **Scholarly works**

First issue of the journal *Muhammadan Social Reformer* dated 24 December 1870, it was a pioneering publication initiated by Sir Syed to promote liberal ideas in Muslim society.

While continuing to work as a junior clerk, Sir Syed began focusing on writing, from the age of 23 (in 1840), on various subjects (from mechanics to educational issues), mainly in Urdu, where he wrote, at least, 6000 pages. His career as an author began when he published a series of treatises in Urdu on religious subjects in 1842. He published the book *Asaar-us-sanadeed* (The Remnants of Ancient Heroes) documenting antiquities of Delhi dating from the medieval era. This work earned him the reputation of a cultured scholar. In 1842, he completed the *Jila-ul-Qulub bi Zikr-il Mahbub* and the *Tuhfa-i-Hasan*, along with the *Tahsil fi jar-i-Saqil* in 1844. These works focused on religious and cultural subjects. In 1852, he published the two works *Namiqa dar bayan masala tasawwur-i-Shaikh* and *Silsilat ul-Mulk*. He released the second edition of *Ansar-as-sanadid* in 1854. He also started work on a commentary on the Bible – the first by a Muslim – in which he argued that Islam was the closest religion to Christianity, with a common lineage from Abrahamic religions. He began with *Genesis* and *Matthew*, the first books of the Old and New Testament, but quit his project before even completing those first two. His other writings such as *Loyal Muhammadans of India*, *Tabyin-ul-Kalam* and *A Series of Essays on the Life of Muhammad and Subjects Subsidiary Therein* helped to create cordial relations between the British authorities and the Muslim community.

He was also a reader of Darwin and, while not agreeing with all of his ideas, he could be described as a sort of theistic evolutionist like his contemporary Asa Gray, and one of the first in the Islamic world, finding the arguments supporting such view through his own scientific research but also quoting earlier Islamic scholars like *Al-Jahiz*, *Ibn Khaldun* and *Shah Waliullah*.