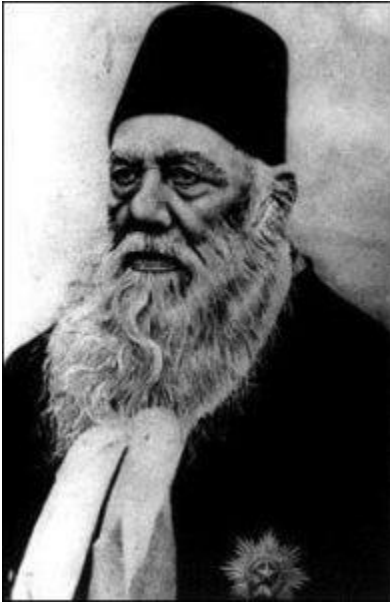


Sir Syed Ahmed Khan Birth - [October 17, 1817]

17 October 1817

Birth of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan

What happened?



On 17 October 1817, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was born in Delhi, Mughal Empire. He was the most eminent Muslim reformist and philosopher of the 19th century. Social and religious reformers of the 18th and 19th centuries are important from the [IAS exam](#) point of view.

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan

- Syed Ahmed Khan was born in Delhi, the capital of the Mughal Empire to an affluent and aristocratic family that had close ties with the Mughal court. He was educated in the Quran and the sciences.
- He also received an honorary law degree from the University of Edinburgh later in life. He was a widely read person and studied books on mathematics, medicine, Persian, Arabic, Urdu, etc.
- His elder brother had set up a printing press in Urdu. It was the first one in Delhi. After his father's death, he took up employment with his brother's journal as an editor. He rejected an offer of employment from the Mughal court despite his family being employed in the Mughal court for generations.
- Sir Syed was aware of the Mughal Empire's diminishing power. So he took up work as a clerk with the East India Company.

- During the 1857 revolt, he lost many relatives. He was highly affected by the defeat of the Mughal Empire.
- He wrote a profound booklet 'Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind' (Reasons for the Indian Revolt of 1857) which cited British ignorance and aggressive expansion policies as the chief causes of the revolt.
- Sir Syed stressed on the importance of modern scientific education for Muslims to advance their conditions. He advocated the learning of English. He was also against superstition and evil customs prevalent in society then.
- He also advocated inter-faith understanding. He was also a scholar on Christianity, and wrote a book, 'Commentary on the Holy Bible'.
- He believed that Muslim society could move ahead only if rigid orthodoxy was abandoned and pragmatism was adopted.
- In 1869, he received the Order of the Star of India from the British government.
- He set up many educational institutes to propagate education, the most significant being the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (MAOC) which he set up in 1875. This later became the **Aligarh Muslim University**. The MAOC was instrumental in the Aligarh Movement of the 19th century which was an important movement of a renaissance among Indian Muslims. This had lasting ramifications on the politics, religion and culture of the country. An unintended effect was the propounding of the two-nation theory that ultimately led to calls for creating Pakistan.
- Sir Syed is believed to be the first Indian Muslim who understood the need for a fresh orientation of Islam.
- He founded the Scientific Society of Aligarh modelling it on the Royal Society of England. This society held annual conferences and published and distributed scientific material in English and Urdu. Sir Syed knew that orthodox Muslim hostility to modern science and technology will come in the way of socio-economic improvement. He also gave rational interpretations of Islamic scriptures. Many orthodox groups of that time declared him to be a 'kafir'.
- He was an advocate of Urdu as the lingua franca of all Indian Muslims. His works propagated the language and also proposed to the government to use Urdu officially.
- He was nominated to the Viceroy's Legislative Council in 1878. He supported Dadabhai Naoroji and Surendranath Banerjee in obtaining representation for Indians in the government and the civil services.
- But he was wary of the rise of Indian nationalism as he thought power would pass into the hands of the Hindus alone. He advocated Muslims to have loyalty to the British. In his own words, "we do not want to become subjects of the Hindus instead of the subjects of the people of the Book."
- According to him, modern education was the most important path for improvement in the condition of Indian Muslims.
- He called for the study of European science and technology. He pointed out that there was no fundamental contradiction between Quran and Natural science.
- He founded Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh in 1875 to educate Muslims scientifically.
- He is regarded as one of the founders of the Two-Nation Theory which says that Hindus and Muslims cannot be one nation.

- Sir Syed was knighted by the British in 1888.
- He died on 27 March 1898 aged 80 in Aligarh.

[Also on this day](#)

1919: Khilafat Movement launched under the leadership of the Ali brothers. **1932:** Rani Gaidinliu, freedom fighter captured by the British and imprisoned. **1940:** Individual Satyagraha started by Mahatma Gandhi with Vinoba Bhave being the first Satyagrahi. **1979:** Mother Teresa awarded the Nobel Prize for peace.

See previous [‘This Day in History’ here](#).

