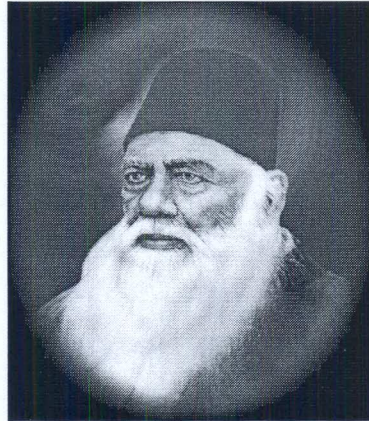


**Two-Day National Seminar**

**on**

***Sir Syed and Colonial Modernity: Issues and Debates***

***25-26 October 2017***



As part of

**Sir Syed Ahmed Khan Bicentenary Celebrations**

**Department of English & Sir Syed Academy  
Aligarh Muslim University  
Aligarh, India**

On the Occasion of Sir Syed Bicentenary Celebrations 2016-17, the Department of English and the Sir Syed Academy at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, are jointly organizing a two-day national seminar titled "Sir Syed and Colonial Modernity: Issues and Debates" on 25-26 October 2017.

**Keynote: Professor S. Irfan Habib** (Historian of science and the former Abul Kalam Azad Chair at the National University for Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi).

### **CALL FOR PAPERS**

#### *Sir Syed and Colonial Modernity: Issues and Debates*

It is, rather, the symptom of a crisis-and, to be precise, of a crisis of representation-within the experience of Indian nationhood itself: the (nationalist) claim for the existence of a singular Indian nation (state) seeks to place "the Muslims" in the place of the national minority. The principle of division, in other words, is contained within the discourse of the nation itself; it accompanies the very "first" enunciation, as it were, of "the people-as-one"; and repetition of the unity-in-diversity formula serves precisely to confirm its existence. The "minor" term within the national faces the burden of representation in a way radically different from the manner in which it falls upon the "major."

Aamir R. Mufti, "*Secularism and Minority: Elements of a Critique,*"  
Social Text 14, 4 (1995): pp. 75–96.

Modernity is a modular phenomenon which refuses to escape anybody. As Partha Chatterjee perceptively reminds us, we are all moderns, although the ways in which we cope with modernity may and must vary. Muslims have long concerned themselves with the idea of modernity and its place in Islamic thought. India presents a fertile ground for research into one of the earliest and most influential strands of Muslim modernism in the form of the Aligarh Movement founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898). The nerve-centre of this Movement or *tahrik* was the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College set up in 1877, which became Aligarh Muslim University in 1920—the most influential modern Muslim educational institution of South Asia. Scholarship on Sir Syed and the Aligarh Movement often describes them as reformer and reform movement, respectively. The reform aimed at was both religious and social, although both remained largely unaccomplished. The sine qua non of the movement was thus the promotion of English education and of refinement of manners and character-building among the Muslim gentry so that they could qualify for employment within the colonial bureaucracy, thereby keeping in check the perceived Muslim political and economic decline.

While Sir Syed and his movement have already been the subject of study by historians and other scholars, a critical engagement with the categories of modernity and reform undergirding Sir Syed's work and his movement is still overdue. Taking the terms of modernity and reform seriously, this seminar seeks to shed critical light on the morphology—the nature, contours,

