

## POLEMICAL DISCOURSE OF SAYYID AHMAD KHAN

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### *Introduction*

In the development of Islam in the sub-continent in the nineteenth century, the impact of the interaction between modernist Muslims and Christian administrators and missionaries can be vividly seen in the writings of many Evangelical Christians about Islam and the responses of the Muslims. This paper attempts to study the nature of the interaction of Christian administrators and missionaries with the Muslim modernists in the sub-continent in the latter half of the nineteenth century by analyzing the writings of the chief exponents of the two groups i. e. William Muir (1819-1905) and Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898). Its purpose is to examine how both groups viewed each other and how each responded to the other's assessment. A related problem is to discover what the sources of these perceptions or misperceptions were, and to what extent the interaction comprised a new source to inform and change those perceptions. As such, this examination of the interaction contributes an important but neglected account in the historical record of Muslim-Christian relations in the subcontinent and attempts at dialogue between the two communities to be seen in a broader historical context.

### *Presuppositions evident in the interaction*

In examining the writings of the orientalist, evangelicals, and missionaries or of the Muslim scholars who responded to them, it is evident that each approached the interaction with his

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own particular biases that shaped his conclusions. While for the most part not acknowledging such bias, the authors examined in this paper appealed rather to an ideal of objective research, and judged the opinions of those who disagreed with them by that standard. William Muir, Thomas Hughes and Edward Sell found previous Christian scholarship and secular orientalist scholarship equally lacking in objectivity, they rested their own claim to objectivity on their access to original sources in the Arabic and other Muslim languages unavailable to previous scholars, coupled with their use of the tools of Western critical methodologies, or on their presence in a Muslim context where contact and interaction with believing Muslims was frequent and extensive. Yet they openly professed their belief that Christianity provided the only valid religious experience and that all systems of faith that opposed it were false and doomed to fail. The Evangelicals refused to accept Muhammad as the Prophet of God with a message superseding that of Christ, and thus rejected the accounts of the miracles of the Prophet because they considered miracles to be the divine authentication of a messenger of God. As a result, they viewed the body of Hadith literature as highly suspect because of its numerous narrations glorifying the Prophet.

In their portrayal of the Orient and the Oriental, the missionaries were at times influenced by some of the same cultural prejudices which affected many other Europeans. They at times displayed the same sense of cultural superiority and painted a very negative picture of the "Heathen." However, in this latter practice, the missionaries were once again operating from a distinct set of objectives than those of the colonialists seeking political or economic control. Because the Evangelicals and missionaries wanted to demonstrate the need for

missionaries in India, gain access to the East India Company's territory, recruit more volunteers, secure increased following and also suppress 'certain dreadful practices, ' there was considerable pressure on them to select and highlight the more negative aspects of India's religious and social system. But in these descriptions, too, one must be wary of generalizations that include all missionary organizations and missionaries as a homogenous group. While most did not question the role the West was destined to play in bringing the benefits of modernity to the world, there were those throughout this period who criticized the imperialist system from their Christian standpoint. Missionaries were to be found on all points of the spectrum, from uncritical advocates of collaboration between imperialism and mission to those who argued for careful separation.

#### *Evangelicals in the 1850's*

The Western Europeans first became involved in the sub-continent in a more continuous manner with the arrival of the Portuguese at the end of the 15th century. While Roman Catholic missions gained a prominent presence during the Mughal period (1526-1720), the Protestants had a very limited role prior to the nineteenth century. The Dutch and Danish mission organizations had been involved in small attempts at evangelism in the eighteenth century, the latter establishing a colony at Serampur, near Calcutta, that was later to provide assistance in the initial English missionary advance.

The East India Company had made limited provision for chaplains to accompany its employees to take care of their spiritual well-being in the eighteenth century, and as long as the Company was involved only in trading, its relation with an occasional missionary were cordial. However, once "it came to assume a political role the Company's attitude as also of its

servants in India, towards the missions gradually changed from encouragement to indifference and eventually to hostility. When in 1793, he sought to introduce a bill in the British parliament with the help of fellow Evangelical, William Wilberforce, to allow greater freedom for missionary activity in India, the bill was opposed and ultimately rejected by those in England and in India who feared that such efforts might endanger the peace and security of the Company's possessions in India. The Evangelicals later came to exercise greater influence in the British Parliament, resulting in a reversal of the 1793 decision through the passing of a bill in 1813 that opened the way for missionaries to freely work in British territories in India.<sup>1</sup>

***The missionaries and the Revolt of 1857***

The Revolt of 1857 had a considerable impact on the relationship between the Christian missionaries and the Muslim community in India. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, in his analysis of the causes of the rebellion, saw the people's perception of the government's involvement in missionary activity as "chief among the secondary causes of the rebellion," the primary cause being the non-involvement of the indigenous people in the Legislative Council of India. ' The people misapprehended the actions of the government and were convinced that it intended to force the Christian religion and foreign customs on Muslims and Hindus alike. They felt that this was not being done openly, but by indirect steps such as the removal of the study of Arabic and Sanskrit, and by reducing the people to poverty. The material assistance and Christian education given to the orphans after the drought of 1837 were also seen as a part of the campaign to convert Muslims to Christianity. With regard to the ongoing religious controversy, Sayyid Ahmad had this to say:

In the early days of British rule in Hindustan, there used to be less talk than at present on the subject of religion. Discussion on this point has been increasing day by day and has now reached its climax. I do not say that Government has interfered in these matters; but it has been the general opinion that all that was done was according to the instructions and hints of Government, and was by no means displeasing to it. It has been commonly believed that Government appointed missionaries and maintained them at its own cost. It has been supposed that Government, and the officials of Government throughout the country were in the habit of giving large sums of money to these missionaries with the intention of covering their expenses, enabling them to distribute books, and in every way aiding them.<sup>2</sup>

The common perception clearly implicated the government and its officials in activities which the people felt threatened their religion. He argued that it was 'wrong and impolitic on the part of a government to interfere in any way with the faith of its subjects.' He did not insist that this was the intention of the government, but the people had misunderstood its actions as such, and it had done nothing to alleviate their suspicion and ill-will. In addition to the government, Sayyid Ahmad faulted also the missionaries and their methods. They had introduced a new system of preaching; rather than holding to the traditional method of limiting religious discussion to a mosque or private home, they had taken to preaching in public places and printing and circulating controversial tracts. They had not confined themselves to explaining their own doctrines and books, but "attacked the followers and the holy places of other *creeds*: annoying, and insulting beyond expression the feelings of those

who listened to them.” In all this, the missionaries enjoyed the protection of the authorities. They also opened Christian schools which the people were encouraged to attend by officers in high governmental positions, one of which could likely have been Muir. The schools were tolerated because the people believed that such education would lead to a position in the civil service, but were nonetheless seen as instrumental in the erosion of their faith.

A final factor cited by Sayyid Ahmad Khan as contributing to the distrust was the letter circulated among government officials proposing that since India was now united under one law and connected by telegraph and railways, it was time that it be united under one religion, namely Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

William Muir disagreed with the view that the activities of the missionaries were the cause of the Revolt. As head of the Intelligence Department at Delhi, he was intimately involved in the circulation of information as the uprising grew and was eventually defeated.<sup>4</sup> In some of his letters he dealt with the same charge of government toleration of missionary activity circulating in Britain. He admitted that the threat of Christianization by the British was a “tale” circulated by the rebel leaders, but that it was at no point connected with any grievance against missionary institutions or government support for the same. He argued that Indian nationals “do most thoroughly distinguish between a public and a private act in favor of Christian unity” and that they would actually respect one who lived by his convictions in supporting religion. In another letter he again dismissed the allegations that missionary associations were to blame. He stated, “So far as my observations go, Missionary efforts have, in these quarters at least, attracted no hostile feeling, nor would any amount of

private support of Missionary Institutions be challenged as a grievance." He had not seen any special ill-feeling against the missionaries or their buildings in the destruction that followed, and counseled that if the uprising was successfully weathered, "[the government's] religious policy should still be that of strict neutrality, but its officers should be left free to use their private influence as hitherto in the support of Christianity."<sup>5</sup>

Muir continued to maintain this position with regard to official involvement with Christian missionary endeavors, reflecting the attitude of the Evangelicals in the Civil Service. He was a strong advocate of the post-1857 British position on a separation of the interests of the state and those of the church. He maintained, however, that this did not preclude the involvement of individuals within the civil service in the missionary endeavors of the Christian church in a personal capacity. At a speech at Moradabad in 1871, Muir stated his position with respect to freedom of religion from the standpoint of a committed Christian:

We value the Christian faith as our richest treasure; but, doing so, we can better appreciate the existence of the same attachment in the breasts of both Mahomedan and Hindu to their respective faiths. We believe the Old Testament and in the Holy Gospel, and we love and prize them as our Sacred Scripture; and so we know the Hindu loves his Shasters, and the Mahomedan his Koran. And, as we should not ourselves tolerate interference with our own belief, or with our own observances, neither will we permit interference in any shape, or in any degree, with the faith and observances of our subjects.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Scholarly Interaction*

The publication of Muir's *Life* in 1861 and the 1857 Revolt were the two events which sparked a widespread response from the concerned Muslims of India. The latter event shaped the community's political history while the former "molded mainly its religious history and added a new dimension to the Western Orientalists' approach to Islam.

Prior to the publication of the Prophet's biography, Muir had written a series of articles in the *Calcutta Review* on the Controversy between the missionaries and Muslim scholars.<sup>7</sup> He was a founder of the North India Christian Tract and Book Society, remained its President for 14 years and its Patron for many years after that, as well as writing and publishing a number of their first books and tracts. His first major work, however, was this four-volume biography of the Prophet, based on early Muslim sources.

Muir's friend, Pfander, had encouraged him to write a biography of the Prophet of Islam which would be suitable for perusal by Muslims in the local language, written from sources they themselves would acknowledge.<sup>8</sup> Aloys Sprenger (1813-1893), while in India to teach at the Delhi College, had gained access to a number of manuscripts containing copies of the works of early Muslim historians such as Ibn Hisham (d. 834), Ibn Sa'd (d. 845) the Katib of al-Waqidi, and al-Tabari (d. 923); and had published a biography of the Prophet in English in 1851. Muir utilized these same primary sources along with the works of Sprenger and Gustav Weil, though he apologized in advance for any deficiency in content that might be due to his lack of access to Western research, to his preoccupation with official business at Agra where he was stationed at the time, and later, to



the inaccessibility of certain documents because of the Revolt which was at its height.<sup>9</sup>

In assessing the colonialist approach to the history and culture of the Muslims of South Asia, Metcalf characterizes textually based, Islam as 'too little' to describe the complex and varied practices and loyalties of actual Muslims, "especially when Islam is made into the single most important causal variable for whatever Muslims do. Muir's *Life of Mahomet* could certainly be characterized as textual in its approach to Islam. He examines Islam through an investigation of the Qur'an and, more importantly for this study, the Hadith collections. From this he deduced how Islam was to be defined and interpreted, why Muslims behaved the way they do, and why Islam as a religion would always be inferior to Christianity. However, he did not utilize a comparison with the West in which non-European societies are seen as "backward, irrational, and medieval" because religion is the central force, and European societies are seen as "beyond religion in public life" and thus more progressive, as Metcalf describes the colonialist approach generally. For Muir, as an Evangelical, religion was still regarded the defining force in society it necessarily had to be, with the caveat that that religion must be Christianity to be truly beneficial.<sup>10</sup>

The fault with the majority of the previous attempts of Western scholars to write a biography was, in Muir's opinion, that they were full of inaccuracies because of a lack of access to original documents. The fault with similar attempts by Muslims was that they were full of inanities because Muslim authors believed unquestioningly the multitude of miracles of Muhammad contained in the traditions. He had in an earlier article called for a "sifting analysis of the traditions, according to

the probable dates of their being recorded; an account of the individuals who registered them; of the means they possessed for arriving at a true knowledge of the facts; and of the number through whom they successively descended." In a lengthy introduction to his work, he proceeded to give his critique of the traditional Muslim method of analyzing the genuineness of traditions and outlined his own approach. C. J. Lyall, in his obituary of Muir for the Royal Asiatic Society described this section thus:

The introductory chapter on the sources of the biography states, with a skill and clearness which have never been surpassed, the criteria which must be applied in utilizing, for an account of the Prophet's career, the information furnished by the Koran and the supplementary data of tradition. The author's intimate knowledge and experience of Oriental character enabled him to criticize and interpret these data with a unique authority; and the chapter will always be read with profit by those who approach the task of constructing a rational account of the origins of the Faith of Islam.<sup>11</sup>

He was also quick to add, however, that the work was 'marked with a polemic character which must necessarily render in some degrees antipathetic to those who profess the religion of Muhammad.'<sup>12</sup> This certainly was the reaction of Indian Muslim scholars such as Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who while appreciating Muir's scholarship, took strong exception to his biased and negative portrayal of the Prophet. He also challenged Muir's method of handling the body of traditions and made a thorough case in support of the traditional method practiced by Muslims throughout their history.

William Muir was quite explicit as to the polemical basis of his motivation for analyzing the *Hadith* and writing a biography of the Holy Prophet. He was convinced that a fresh sifting of the *Hadith* would help the missionaries by loosening the hold of the traditions on those Muslims who recognized the weakness of evidence based on hearsay or bias.<sup>13</sup> This was not to be merely an academic exercise, limited to the pursuit of literary phantoms, antiquarian research, or the acquisition of remote historical truths, rather it was to enable Christians to confront Islam with their own weapons, such as the writings of Ibn Ishaq (d 767), al-Waqidi (d 822), and al-Tabari, rather than inadequate Western scholarship. He seems to have had no doubt as to the outcome of the reexamination of the traditional sources. At the same time, Muir seemed to be making a conscious effort to break with traditional patterns of Western interpretations of Islam, while maintaining Western epistemological presuppositions which he labeled "historical deductions of modern research." Though he admired Pfander, Muir criticized his writings as those which 'have little reference to the historical deductions of modern research, and deal more with the deep principles of reason and of faith.' He joined scholars such as Weil and Sprenger in breaking new ground in Western research on Islam in their direct access to early Arabic sources, but saw it as no contradiction to retain his Evangelical bias rather than adopting the secular bias characteristic of later Orientalists.<sup>14</sup>

As part of his larger effort in pursuing a policy of reconciliation between the Muslims and the English, Sayyid Ahmad Khan had sought to accommodate the Christian presence and thought within the Islamic community through a number of writings, including an essay on the term used for Christians,

Nasara (c. 1858), a commentary on the Bible (1862, 1865), and a treatise on the permissibility of eating with Christians (1866).

Muir's biography of the Prophet, however, caused Sayyid Ahmad great distress regarding the portrayal of Islam and the character of the Prophet, and concern for the doubts the book might create in the minds of a new generation of young Muslims who were then studying in English. In a letter to Mehdi 'Ali Khan on August 20, 1869, he wrote:

These days I am in a bit of a turmoil. I have been reading the book William Muir wrote on the life of the Prophet. It has burned my heart and its injustices and prejudices have roasted my heart. I have resolved to write a biography of the Prophet just as I had earlier intended, even if I have to spend all my money and become like a beggar, begging for alms.<sup>15</sup>

He describes how in a visit to Aligarh in 1868, he and a friend found Sayyid Ahmad Khan in an agitated state of mind over Muir's work and determined to make a reply, against the advice of friends who considered it imprudent in light of Muir's position in government.<sup>16</sup> He subsequently went to Britain, accompanying one of his sons who was on his way to *study* there on a government scholarship. One of his major aims in making the trip was 'to gain access to Islamic and western source material in the libraries of London, in order to write a comprehensive reply to Muir's work.'<sup>17</sup> He responded primarily to Muir's first volume which dealt at length with an evaluation of the collection of the Hadith. He was able to publish his research as *A Series of Essays on the Life of Muhammad*. He later published a revised version in Urdu as *Al-Khutubat al-Ahmadiyyah a'la A'rab wa al Sirah al Muhammadiyyah* in 1887.

Interestingly, felt compelled to make use of European sources to gain a proper hearing, while Muir was similarly motivated to use early Arabic sources.

Sir Sayyid saw the importance of the Hadith for the biography of the Prophet and sought to refute Muir's negative assessment of the Holy Prophet by appealing to a different set of criteria of evaluation. But beyond mere biographical data, the traditions were also a source of the Sunnah or practice of the Prophet and thus a standard of conduct for Muslims applicable. He shared with Muir the opinion that the traditions had not been written down at the time of the Holy Prophet and his associates, but for the simple reasons that they were not needed and that the art of authorship was in its fancy.<sup>18</sup> He also agreed that many fictitious traditions had been fabricated, a number of which were mixed in with genuine ones in accepted collections of Hadith, but disagreed with Muir's opinion that they could not be separated. He felt that Islam was not affected in the least by the charge that fabricated traditions existed because Muslim scholars had not only been aware of them from the beginning but had written works "with the sole intention of discriminating false traditions from genuine ones," fashioned rules and tests for ascertaining their merits, genuineness, and authenticity, and condemned fabricators as sinners. He presented a phase-by-phase critique of Muir's *Life* as a "Supplement" to his essay "On the Mohammedan Traditions."<sup>19</sup> His overall assessment of Muir's work was as follows:

The entire character of his composition clearly indicates that, before having arrived at any conclusion by an unprejudiced and candid investigation, as well as by fair, just, and legitimate reasoning, his mind was prepossessed by the idea that all these traditions were nothing

else than mere fabrications or inventions of the narrators and other persons.<sup>20</sup>

He saw Muir as setting out to prove that fabrication was motivated by animus in his writings. He strongly disapproved of Muir's method of handling the material and his general dismissal of their authenticity.

In his analysis of the methodology of the *muhaddithin*, William Muir, besides trying to bring their character and integrity in question, criticized their reliance on a chain of narrators, or *isnad*, although he recognized the semblance of authenticity that it gave the traditions. The authority of a particular tradition was dependent on whether it could be traced back to one of the Companions of the Prophet, and whether each individual in that chain of transmitters was of unimpeachable character. If these two requirements were in place, the tradition had to be received, even if the content was improbable."These thorough lists of genuine personages, the juxtapositioning of improbable accounts, and the simplicity in presenting all traditions meeting the requirements for acceptability, demonstrated that these traditions had not been fabricated by the collectors themselves."<sup>21</sup> But Muir doubted that this method could adequately furnish authentic historical material regarding the life of Muhammad.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan was very critical of William Muir and other Western writers whose understanding of the rules for selecting authentic Traditions he considered woefully inadequate, leading to the grossest blunders when venturing to express an opinion upon the merits of Islam. He devoted one of his essays on the life of the Holy Prophet to explaining these rules and evaluating the relative merits of various collections of traditional material. He acknowledged that the current laws of

criticism were not established at the time that the theological literature was written. The writers, however, had their own rules of composition, and unless they were thoroughly understood, it would be impossible to form a correct opinion of the defects of any specific writer. He outlined four key principles related to the transmitter that determined reliability. Firstly, it was required that the narrator trace the names of successive narrators through which the tradition had been transmitted, back to the Holy Prophet if possible. Secondly, each narrator in the chain had to be 'truthful and trustworthy.' Thirdly, when the tradition was reduced to writing, it was compulsory to accompany it with the list of transmitters, its *isnad* along with any information regarding their general conduct. Finally, a personal evaluation of the credibility of the tradition could be appended by the collector to its content and transmission record.<sup>22</sup>

Sayyid Ahmad Khan's major criticism of European writers was that they did not devote themselves to the necessary research and were motivated rather by prejudice and enmity in their selection of traditions from which they composed their histories of Islam and its Prophet.

Christian writers, ignorant of the rules and regulations that have been so established by learned Muslim scholars for ascertaining the intrinsic value and genuineness of any Tradition, when they accidentally read any of our histories which, contain nothing but the worst of all Traditions vainly flatter themselves that they have become acquainted with all the *minutiae* of Islam, and begin to criticize and ridicule our religion.<sup>23</sup>

He based his frequent dismissal of Muir's conclusions on the fact that Muir had drawn his material from unreliable groups of writings, primarily Kitab al-Waqidi.

Happily, the biographers did not hold themselves bound by the strict canons of the *Sunnah*; they have preserved traditions sometimes resting on a single authority, or otherwise technically weak, and therefore rejected by the Collectors of the *Sunnah*; and they have thus rescued for us not a few facts and narratives of special interest, bearing internal marks of authenticity. This was a point Muir repeatedly emphasized, disagreeing with Sprenger who held the official collections of Hadith to contain more truth than the biographies.<sup>24</sup> While agreeing that the biographers tended to include *every* kind of tradition pertinent to their discussion without abiding by the stringent tests of the *muhaddithin*, Muir found no reason, however, to doubt that their record was relatively accurate. Apart from the effort to glorify the Prophet, "they sought honestly to give a true picture of the Prophet; . . . while they admit some legendary tales excluded from the *Sunna*, their works are to a very great extent composed of precisely the same material; and . . . are moreover less under the influence of theological bias than were the collectors of the *Sunna*."<sup>25</sup>

Sayyid Ahmad was categorical in his rejection of the traditions related by al-Waqidi and Ibn Sa'd, as well as of those transmitted by other historians which did not follow the rules of the *muhaddithin*. He referred to traditions from al-Wâqidi as the weakest and most inauthentic traditions and no more entitled to credit than is public gossip. He asserted that they contained nothing but puerile absurdities, rejected even by the Muslims themselves. He saw Muir's extensive use of al-Waqidi as going against his own preconception that most traditions were fabrications, and accused Muir of poor scholarship for not investigating and discriminating genuine traditions from fabrications. By this method Sayyid Ahmad effectively



eliminated much of the evidence presented by Muir to support his analysis of the Holy Prophet's life and character.

In addition to appealing to the essential honesty of the early converts as previously noted, Sayyid Ahmad Khan countered Muir's allegations of bias with a reference to Christian history. He acknowledged that within Islam, false and spurious traditions did arise in spite of precautions, just as they had in Judaism and Christianity. However, the difference, as he saw it, was that such "pious frauds" were not made into dogma as in Christian history. To illustrate, he cited Muir's own account of the rise of spurious books in Christianity's second century when Origen and other church leaders deemed it permissible to use their opponents' tactics in disputing with heathen philosophers, as found in Muir's Urdu history of the Christian Church.<sup>26</sup>

The discussion regarding authentic sources for both Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Sir William Muir was not merely a historical abstraction. Muir was concerned to find genuine material from which to construct a biography of the Holy Prophet and to show that by their own sources, Muslims would have to reject the prophethood of Muhammad. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, disturbed by the portrayal of the Prophet and the conclusions put forward by Muir, attacked his work at the foundation by criticizing both his sources and his methodology in handling those sources.

In regards to sources, Muir preferred the writings of the biographers and historians since their collections were based on the criteria of content and would include all relevant material, even if its *isnad* was weak. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, on the other hand, tended to reject the compilations of historians and biographers in favor of those of the *muhaddithin*. He held strongly to the requirement of a sound *isnad* if a tradition was to

be considered genuine. The Muslim scholars had developed the science of *ilm al-rijal* to evaluate the reliability of individual transmitters in the chain, and thus collections of tradition lacking that chain were deemed as unreliable sources. It was by this standard along with the evaluation of the content that he later rejected most of the Hadith as lacking any authority.

The two also disagreed as to methodology in handling the traditional material. In his conclusion to the guidelines for authenticity, Muir reiterated his rejection of the authority of the *isnad* for the historian or biographer of the Prophet. Each tradition must stand or fall by its own merits as a whole and the validity of the component parts. The historical content of the Qur'an remained the final standard for accuracy. For events where tradition provided the only evidence, careful discrimination was needed between "the fitful and scattered gleams of truth, which mingle with its fictitious illumination."<sup>27</sup> Sayyid Ahmad, in contrast, appealed to the traditional standard of evaluating the authenticity of a tradition through an analysis of its *isnad*. The analysis of its content was for him, only a secondary consideration, at least at the time of this controversy.

Another major difference that can be discerned between the two writers in their approach to the Hadith is the motive each ascribed to the *muhaddithin*. Sayyid Ahmad tended to see the recording of traditions primarily as a function of religion in that the collectors were consciously aware of how those traditions could shape Islam, while biographers and historians were equally aware that theirs was not a religious role, providing much better latitude in the selection of Hadith for their writings. Muir, on the other hand, postulated no such self-awareness on the part of the collectors of a need to preserve the religion of Islam from innovations, seeing the selection of material based on political

considerations. The differences between the collections of the *muhaddithin* and those of the biographers or historians were because of a more honest handling of the material by the latter, in his view, including material that others might consider derogatory to Islam and to the Prophet.

One area, in which there was a similarity in their conclusions, though not their presuppositions, was in their rejection of the records of the Holy Prophet's miracles. With regard to Sayyid Ahmad, this is more an argument from silence than an explicit statement. His reluctance to defend the stories of the miracles is significant in light of his later outright rejection of the supernatural and acceptance of the rational and natural as the environ of truth. His reluctance to explicitly reject them in this earlier work could indicate a transitional phase in his own experience, or more likely, merely the apologetic nature of the work in which the rejection of miracles could not necessarily enhance his cause. Muir's rejection of the Holy Prophet's miracles was on a completely different basis. He regarded miracles as proof of a divine mission and began with the presumption that the origin of the Prophet's mission was not from God. Therefore, any traditional accounts containing supernatural elements had to be rejected for him.

Both were, in a number of areas, influenced by the constraints of their own religious beliefs in interpreting the traditional material. Muir could not acknowledge the prophethood of Muhammad without questioning the finality and ultimate revelation of God in Christ Jesus. For this reason, his principles in evaluating the Hadith would have to preclude any attribution of divine inspiration or miraculous powers to the Holy Prophet, who so clearly denied Christ's divinity. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, as a believing Muslim, could not countenance the

ascription of impious motives to the Holy Prophet Muhammad or to his early followers. Thus the Holy Prophet could not have acted contrary to the clear teachings of the Qur'an by compromising with the idolatry at Mecca, and his pious companions could not have deliberately perpetrated frauds glorifying the Prophet more than he deserved. Sayyid Ahmad Khan also felt compelled to defend the traditional method of evaluating the traditions by their chains of transmission in order to arrive at the traditional assessment of the character and mission of the Prophet.

### ***Conclusion***

Muir and Sayyid Ahmad Khan were influenced by their individual ideological frameworks both in the methodologies they chose to use and in the conclusions they reached. Muir applied Western critical methods to the biographical material found in the Hadith literature in his attempt to reconstruct a historically accurate life of the Holy Prophet. As an Evangelical Christian, he could not accept Prophet Muhammad as a prophet of God bringing a message that supplanted the Gospel and that denied the deity of Christ. Hence, he began with the premise that any accounts that ascribed miraculous powers to the Holy Prophet had to be spurious. The spread of Islam then could only be explained in purely human terms. Thus he sought to rationalize any supernatural elements found within the traditions. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, on the other hand, accepted the authority of the *Hadith* in matters of religious belief and practice. His education had been in the traditional Islamic studies, though heavily influenced by the Shah Wali Ullah's school of thought which rejected *taqlid* and tended to favor a revival of the practice of *ijtihad*. Though his own evaluation of the traditions was continuing to evolve, little of this was overtly evident in his

controversy with Muir, where he was more concerned with defending the traditional methodologies of evaluating the *Hadith* against Muir's criticism. In his later writings which were directed more to his fellow Muslims, he rejected supernaturalism, but on the basis of a comprehensive scientific outlook as opposed to Muir's selective rejection of miracles in non-Christian religions.

The strong language both writers used to attack the other's larger community of faith seems to indicate that the "controversy" for them was not confined to the realm of intellectual abstraction, but touched them at the core of their spirituality. Yet this fundamental influence on their respective positions was not overtly acknowledged by either, as each tried to present his arguments on what he assumed to be a universal standard of reason.

### *References*

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2. Syed Ahmed Khan. *The Causes of the Indian Revolt* with an Introduction by Francis Robinson. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 17.
3. Ibid., pp. 22-23.
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5. For details see, Sir William Muir, *Records of the Intelligence Department of the Government of the North-West Provinces of India during the Mutiny*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), Vol. 2, pp. 112, 130-131.
6. William Muir. *The Honourable James Thomson, Lieutenant-Governor, NWP, India, 1843-1853, A. D.* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1897), p. 89.
7. For details see William Muir. *The Mohammadan Controversy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896).
8. Carl Gottlieb Pfander (1805-1865). The Christian Missionary, whose main work *Mizan-al-Haqq* generated sharp controversy not only in India but also in many parts of the Islamic world.
9. Aloys Sprenger (1813-1893). A medical doctor and distinguished himself in Arabic. He edited number of works in Hadith and also wrote a biography of the Prophet, *Life of Muhammad* in 1951. For further details see Aslam Sayed, *Muslim Response*, pp. 28-29.
10. For further details see William Muir, *The Rise and Decline of Islam* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1883).
11. C. J. Lyall."Obituary ", pp. 877.
12. Ibid.

13. Muir, *Controversy*, pp. 18-19.
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16. Christian W. Troll. *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 113.
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19. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-241.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 205.
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25. *Ibid.*, pp. 122.
26. Sayyid Ahmad. *Essays*, pp. 194.
27. Muir, *Life*, p. lxxxvii.