



Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)

Volume 9, Issue 2, Fall 2019

pISSN: 2075-0943, eISSN: 2520-0313

Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc>

Issue DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.92>

Homepage: <https://www.umt.edu.pk/jitc/home.aspx>

Journal QR Code:



Article:

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Author(s):

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Published:

Fall 2019

Article DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.92.09>

QR Code:



Zohaib Ahmad

To cite this article:

Ahmad, Zohaib. "Marginalization and reform of religion: A comparative study of Moses Mendelssohn and Syed Ahmad Khan." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 9, no. 2 (2019): 172–193.

[Crossref](#)

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Publisher Information:

Department of Islamic Thought and Civilization,
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Marginalization and Reform of Religion: A Comparative Study of Moses Mendelssohn and Syed Ahmad Khan

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Abstract

The term marginalization is often used for a community or group which is pushed to the edges of the society through certain social, political, and/or religious restrictions. The history of German Jews and Muslims of the Indian subcontinent stands witness that, to varying degrees over time, they were bound to live on the edges of their respective societies. This discrimination was not just because of their different social, cultural, and political status but religion was also a major factor behind it. In such conditions, Moses Mendelssohn and Syed Ahmad Khan worked for the betterment of their respective Jewish and Muslim communities. Although the work of both scholars is a recurring theme of discussion in the academic world, still there is no study available in which their efforts have been compared. By presenting a feature by feature comparison of the works of both scholars, the current paper first figures out their methodology and then explores their motive behind using pure reason to interpret sacred scriptures. It is also argued that there are fewer differences and more commonalities in their works. Their primary aim was to equip their people with modern education, since they thought that through educational reform they would be able to improve the social, political, and economic conditions of their people. Although they achieved noteworthy success, their efforts changed the religious direction of their people. Especially after the reform of Mendelssohn, a significant number of Jews distanced themselves from their ancestral religion.

Keywords: reform, Judaism, marginalization, Syed Ahmad Khan, Moses Mendelssohn

The Situation of German Jews

The history of Jews mostly consists of sorrows. Prior to the creation of Israel, they used to spend their life in diaspora, having neither a single language nor a common homeland. However, they successfully maintained themselves as a separate community. They arrived in Germany with the Romans and were

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established there around 321 CE. The mutual relations between Jews and Christians were cordial until the crusades (1095-1291 CE). It has been reported that during the crusades a number of synagogues were destroyed and more than 2000 Jews were killed.¹ After the crusades, the marginalization and demonization of Jews became a permanent aspect of German history. For example, in 1510 CE, many Jews were burnt in cities such as Berlin, Breslau, and Sternberg.² The Protestant reform movement of the sixteenth century also proved destructive for German Jewry. Some scholars contend that through his work *The Jews and Their Lies*, Martin Luther (1483-1546 CE), the key figure of the Protestant movement, advocated violence against Jews.³ He started his sevenfold program in which he preached the destruction of synagogues and the seizing of Jewish religious writings.⁴ German Jewry was forced to live in ghettos, banned from entering certain cities and bound to wear a certain type of clothes.⁵ Even the death of Luther did not change this situation.⁶ The later Lutherans also worked against Jews. As a result, Jews were banned from the entire country in 1573 CE.⁷ The famous Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677 CE) expressed sorrowfully that it “is not that they persecute us with their hatred and scorn, but that they thus plant hatred and scorn in our souls.”⁸ Hence, it is clear that the condition of German Jewry was appalling at that time and in some cases they were even deprived of their basic rights.

This situation encouraged the conversion of Jews to Christianity. Although the converts were few in number, every conversion was taken as the victory of

¹Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Yosef Gorny, and Judit Bokser Liwerant, *Jews and Jewish Education in Germany Today* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 19.

²Ibid., 16.

³Michael A. Mullett, *Martin Luther* (London: Routledge, 2004), 246.

⁴Eric W. Gritsch, *Martin Luther's Anti-Semitism: Against His Better Judgment* (Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), ix.

⁵Cecil Roth, *The Jewish Contribution To Civilization* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1940), 23.

⁶For example, on November 10, 1938, the very day of Luther's birthday, many Synagogues were burned down by the Lutherans.; See, Michael L. Brown, *Authentic Fire: A Response to John MacArthur's Strange Fire* (Lake Mary: Creation House, 2015), 105.

⁷Paul Johnson, *A History Of The Jews* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988), 242.

⁸Adele Bildersee, *Jewish Post-Biblical History through Great Personalities from Jochanan ben Zakkai through Moses Mendelssohn* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 2003), 259.

Christianity over Judaism. In general, male Jewish converts were more in number.⁹ It has been pointed out that usually males converted to Christianity in search of a better economic future. Abraham Addleson, a Jewish historian, reports that Jews converted to Christianity “for the sake of their personal gain or interest, and who made it their business to abuse their former religion.”¹⁰ Elisheva Carlebach, a Jewish scholar, adds that the conversion of Jews was a business and Christians sponsored it.¹¹ Thus, majority of Jewish scholars view these conversions as fruits of economic pressure. Furthermore, they maintain that Christians were alluring the German Jewry at that time in order to convert them to Christianity.

The Jewish community of Germany suffered at the hands of gentiles¹² but there were also some peaceful moments. For example, in 1236 CE, Frederick II (1194-1250 CE) entitled many Jews as “serfs of the chamber”. Through this status, they earned some privileges due to imposition of high taxes. Moreover, they also earned some benefits by serving as bankers and due to it they were allowed to travel anywhere and anytime they wanted.¹³ At some places, they were circumscribed to work in agriculture, public offices, and universities. They were also required to find a non-Jewish partner on whose name they could conduct their businesses.¹⁴ Regional authorities of certain areas such as Frankfurt and Cologne allowed them to live as a community in ghettos; however, in some places it was forbidden for them.¹⁵

Lack of knowledge of modern sciences and the principles of enlightenment was also another serious challenge for the Jews of Germany. With the exception of a few who joined medical schools, most of them did not try to acquire modern knowledge. Advocates of Reform Judaism failed to convince them to learn modern sciences.¹⁶ Jews were not ready to learn the German language because rabbinical

⁹Marion A Kaplan, *Jewish Daily Life in Germany 1618–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 90.

¹⁰Abraham Addleson, *The Epic of a People: The Story of the Jews* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1946), 215.

¹¹Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts From Judaism in Germany, 1500–1750* (London: Yale University, 2001), 110.

¹²In this study, the term gentile is used to describe the non-Jewish nations residing in Germany.

¹³Addleson, *The Epic of a People: the Story of the Jews*, 94.

¹⁴Roth, *The Jewish Contribution to Civilization*, 39.

¹⁵Thomas A. Brady and Chickering Roger, *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Boston: Brill Publication, 2006), 4.

¹⁶Johnson, *A History of The Jews*, 299.

authorities were not in favor of it. If some Jew was found reading a German book, they would banish her/him from the city.¹⁷ Furthermore, they also denied to teach Hebrew to gentiles. They would refer to a rabbi who claimed that “it is forbidden to teach the Law to any Gentile.”¹⁸ However, during the 18th century, the cultural, social, and economic condition of German Jewry changed and they began to enjoy a much better life.

2. Moses Mendelssohn and the Mission of Reform Judaism

Born to a poor Jewish family in September 1729 CE, Moses Mendelssohn was the son of a schoolteacher, Mendel. Mendelssohn was a self-taught person who spent most of his time reading books. Once Mendel saw his son stooping over his bench with a book in his hands. He asked him: “[d]o you wish to become a humpback?” The boy replied: “I would rather be a humpback in the body than in mind.”¹⁹ Both father and son were right in their prediction. Mendelssohn became a humpback; however, this hump was only in his body and not in his mind.

He was inspired by the works of a famous Jewish philosopher, Moses Maimonides (1135-1204 CE). When he was just thirteen, he had already gone through the Hebrew version of his *Moreh Ncbuchim (Guide of the Perplexed)*. The study of Maimonides’ philosophical genius allowed him to dig deep into the problems of his fellow Jews. He would proudly say that “I owe it to Maimon.”²⁰ His thirst for knowledge took him to Berlin where he learned modern science and philosophy. Although Yiddish was his mother tongue; much like his fellow Jews he spoke a mixture of Yiddish and German.²¹ Later, he learned German, Latin, French, and English. His zeal for learning introduced him to the literary societies of Berlin and scholars such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781 CE) became his friends. Thus, digging deep into the Jewish philosophy and learning from both Jews and Christians, he slowly built his career. Unlike his fellow Jews, he learned

¹⁷Emanuel Schreiber, *Reformed Judaism and Its Pioneers: A Contribution to Its History* (Carolina: BiblioBazaar, 2012), 14.

¹⁸Brady and Roger, *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, 3-7.

¹⁹Abram S. Isaacs, *A Story of The Early Days of Moses Mendelssohn* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1910), 10.

²⁰Moses Samules, *Memoirs of Moses Mendelsohn: The Jewish Philosopher, Including the Celebrated Correspondence on the Christian Religion with J. C. Lavater, Minister of Zurich* (London: Jewish Publication Society, 1845), 5.

²¹Hermann Walter, *Moses Mendelssohn, Critic and Philosopher* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 30.

the non-Jewish languages which helped him to earn respect in the literary circles of Germany.

He was a keen observer. The poor condition of German Jewry, their lack of elegance in manners, and their old fashioned dresses soon became the focus of his attention.²² He started thinking about how to fill the wide gap between the German Jewry and the modern world. Although he wanted to modernize the Jews of Germany, he was also worried about the impact of French culture on Germany. Consequently, he criticized Frederick the Great (1712-1786 CE) for writing in French rather than in German. His criticism encouraged the Attorney General to think of it as a religious dispute; an attack from a Jew on Christianity. It is unknown whether the king read his work or not; however, his efforts earned him the title of *Schlutzjiide* and entry into the group of “Protected Jews”.²³

3. Efforts to Remove Marginalization

He realized that due to their unwillingness to learn the German language and modern education, Jews failed to assimilate into the German culture. Rabbinical authorities were apprehensive that Jewish interest in German culture could turn them away from their religion. However, Mendelssohn noticed the existing penetration of new traditions into Judaism. He sadly wrote, “I will not deny that I have noticed in my religion human additions, abuses, and excrescences which, alas, only obscure its splendor.”²⁴ Therefore, he considered learning the German language and modern education as their panacea.

4. Role of Literary Works

He started working with Lessing and they jointly produced a book about the works of Alexander Pope (1688-1744), a prominent English poet. This book was written in the German language. It was an extraordinary achievement for a Jew because, at that time, it was forbidden for the Jewry to even read German literature. His efforts proved beneficial for his academic career and he became the staff member of a German journal, *Bibliothek der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften*. This was an important position which allowed him to publish his several articles and book reviews in this journal.²⁵ Later, he translated Plato’s (428-348 BCE)

²²Kaplan, *Jewish Daily Life in Germany 1618–1945*, 127.

²³Gustav Karpeles, *Jewish Literature and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1911), 303.

²⁴Schreiber, *Reformed Judaism and Its Pioneers: A Contribution to Its History*, 11.

²⁵Reinier Munk, *Moses Mendelssohn's Metaphysics and Aesthetics* (New York: Springer, 2011), 302.

Phaedon into the German language along with some additional proofs about the immortality of soul, which was a burning issue at that time. This work earned him remarkable fame and its three editions were sold in just two years. Throughout Europe, bookstores failed to fulfill the high demand for this bestseller of its day.²⁶

Afterwards, he translated the *Pentateuch* into German language and also wrote a commentary on it. This work proved fruitful in the formation of *Haskalah* or the German Enlightenment Movement. While translating the book, he preferred Hebrew alphabets over the Latin script. This proved to be helpful for those Jewish students who wanted to learn the German language. At that time, Jews mainly used Yiddish and Hebrew languages. Rabbinical authorities condemned this work, perhaps fearing that this sort of work could reduce interest in traditional Jewish studies. Rabbis doubted his work and thought that he betrayed Judaism.²⁷ On the other hand, he posited this translation as “the first step towards culture, from which my nation, class, is being kept at such a great distance.”²⁸ Thus, it can be argued that through his translation of the *Torah*, he attempted to make German Jews aware of their own tradition, familiarized them with German culture, attracted them towards the Hebrew language, restricted their use of Yiddish Bibles, and taught them the German language.

To earn civil rights for his fellow Jews, he wrote *Jerusalem, oder iiber religiose nacht und Judenthum (Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism)*. In this work, he demanded the separation of church and state. *Jerusalem* received a variety of responses. It inspired some scholars to recognize Mendelssohn as an orthodox Jew; whereas it induced others to identify him as an atheist.²⁹ The later response advocated the rabbinical assumptions to consider him a heretic; whereas the former helped him in his mission of promoting Reform Judaism. The most prominent feature of this work is that it was never fully rejected by the rabbinical courts and always remained in the camp.

5. Jewish Enlightenment Movement

Slowly, the circle of his readership increased and he became a hope for the German Jewry. His fame helped him to influence political matters. For example, the Dresden City Council once tried to expel more than one hundred Jewish

²⁶Miriam Leonard, *Socrates and the Jews: Hellenism and Hebraism from Moses Mendelssohn to Sigmund Freud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 21.

²⁷Dov Peretz Elkins, *Shepherd of Jerusalem* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2005), 27.

²⁸Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 15.

²⁹Walter, *Moses Mendelssohn, Critic and Philosopher*, 166.

families from the city but he sent a letter to them that turned the decision otherwise.³⁰ German Enlightenment Movement slowly emerged and Mendelssohn became a key figure in it. It is noteworthy to mention here that the *Haskalah* did not fully flourish during his time³¹; however, he was considered the first Jew who significantly strived to neutralize the extreme views regarding Spinoza. Along with the Jewish tradition, he provided due attention to reason. Therefore, it can be said that it was actually the philosophy of Maimonides and Spinoza that was behind the German *Haskalah*.³² During 1770 CE, membership of this movement significantly increased. It spread from Berlin to other parts of the country. Ultimately, the efforts of Mendelssohn proved worthwhile as he established a platform for the German Jewry to struggle for its civil rights.

6. Free Jewish School

After his translation of the Bible, *maskilim* (a member of the *Haskalah*) worked to build a new Jewish identity in Germany. Mendelssohn intended to educate the young Jewish generation so it could respond to the challenges of the modern age. He built the first Free Jewish School in Berlin. The primary aim of this institution was to educate Jewish students; however, poor Christian students were also provided with the opportunity to attend the classes. Along with religious education, he also focused on the Hebrew language and secular subjects such as Mathematics and Physics. Soon, several new schools were built in other parts of the country and Jews began taking interest in modern education.

Although the *Haskalah* successfully produced a new Jewish socioeconomic elite which earned many of its civil rights, there was also a downside of this movement. Scholars have pointed out that the rise of secular education caused a decline in interest shown in the traditional Jewish studies. Consequently, almost all *Yeshivas* of Germany were closed by 1830 CE.³³ The second issue that the German Jewry faced after the reform of Mendelssohn was a significant increase in the conversion of Jews to Christianity. In fact, his own children relinquished

³⁰H. Graetz and B. Lowy, *History of the Jews: From the Chmielnicki Persecution of the Jews in Poland (1648 C.E.) to the Period of Emancipation in Cent* (New York: Cosimo, Incorporated, 2009), 344.

³¹Steven M. Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community Enlightenment, Family, And Crisis, 1770-1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 37.

³²Daniel B. Schwartz, *The First Modern Jew: Spinoza and the History of an Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 36.

³³Steven M. Lowenstein, "Joseph Ben-David's Hungary and Mendelssohn's Berlin," *Jewish History* 11, no. 1 (1997): 127.

Judaism and preferred Christianity.³⁴ It seems that the rabbis were right in their thinking that secular education and the influence of German culture would result in the disintegration of Jewish societies. Secular education helped them economically but distanced them from their ancestral religion. Therefore, it is concluded here that economic prosperity did not stop Jewish conversion to other religions but resulted otherwise. However, economic prosperity could not have been the sole reason behind this phenomenon. For example, some scholars have pointed out that it was the impact of early romanticism which encouraged many individuals (including Dorothea Mendelssohn, the daughter of Moses Mendelssohn) to convert to Christianity.³⁵

7. The Situation of Indian Muslims

Unlike Jews, Muslims of India were not a marginalized community. Before British colonization, they ruled the Indian subcontinent. The caste system in Hinduism forbade the indigenous people to leave the Indian lands.³⁶ Hence, the doors of India opened to the Arab traders. Writing about the relationship between Arabs and Indians, Qazi Javeed, a Pakistani historian, pointed out that Arab traders have visited India since the age of Mahabharata (400 BCE).³⁷ Consequently, with these traders, Islam penetrated into India during the times of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW).³⁸ However, Muslim rule began with the conquest of Sind by Muhammad bin Qasim in 712 CE. Although Muslims ruled the Indian subcontinent for about 800 years, they were unable to get rid of their internal conflicts. Likewise Muslims, British also came to India as traders and established their colonies in the era of King Jahangir (1569-1627 CE).³⁹ The internal conflicts of Muslim rulers helped them to conquer this land and incorporate it into the British Empire.

³⁴Chaim Schloss, *2000 Years of Jewish History: From the Destruction of the Second Bais Hamikdash Until the Twentieth Century* (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2002), 217.

³⁵For details, see Susanne Hillman, "The Conversions of Dorothea Mendelssohn: Conviction or Convenience?," *German Studies Review* 29, no. 1 (2006).

³⁶Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *Barrē 'Azīm Pāk-o Hind kī Millat-i Islāmiyyah* (Karachi: The University of Karachi, 1983), 2.

³⁷Qazi Javeed, *Hindī Muslim Tehzīb* [Indian Muslim Civilization, Urdu] (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1983), 12.

³⁸Muhammad Ishaq Bhatti, *Brrēsaghār main Musalmānōñ kē Awwalīn Nuqūsh* [Earlier Presence of Muslims in Sub-Continent, Urdu] (Lahore: Maktabah Salfīyah, 1990), 48.

³⁹Yousuf Hussain, *Tarīkh Dastūr-i Hind* [History of Indian Constitution, Urdu] (Delhi: National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language, 1944), 4.

After the War for Independence fought in 1857 CE, the British government practically took the charge as the Muslims lost their political control after the war.⁴⁰ The British became the rulers and both Muslims and Hindus became their subjects. Since Muslims were the previous rulers, the British considered them dangerous for their rule. They assumed that it were only Muslims who initiated the 1857 war. Consequently, they started working against them. Ellenborough (1790-1871 CE), Governor General of India, purposefully announced that the British must suppress the indigenous Muslims. George Campbell (1824-1892 CE), Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, also held Muslims responsible for this war. Immediately after his accusation, an English newspaper *The Times* propagated that it would be all right for the British rulers and Christianity to crush Indian Muslims.⁴¹ Such intimations made Muslims think that the new government was not only against them politically but it also wanted to suppress them religiously.

Although Muslims suffered more than the Hindus in the British era, certain situations were equally disturbing for both communities. For example, it was a part of the British policy to keep Indians away from valuable posts. Therefore, not a single Indian was appointed in parliament, home government and the Indian government. However, British rulers continued to claim that their policies were fair.⁴² This situation made the survival of poor Muslims quite difficult. They started taking loans from Hindu moneylenders. However, they failed to repay the loans which allowed the Hindu moneylenders to seize their properties.⁴³ Consequently, hostility between both communities emerged. It has also been noted by some scholars that the British purposefully created hostility between Hindus and Muslims.⁴⁴ They designed policies which turned these communities against each other. For example, they appointed Hindu tax collectors to head the Muslim communities. It helped them to flame enmity between Hindus and Muslims.

⁴⁰Sheikh Muhammad Ikram, *Moj-i Kosar* (Lahore: Idarah Thaqāfat-i Islāmiyyah, 1979), 73.

⁴¹Rafiq Zakaria, *Hindustānī Sīyāsāt main Mūsalmānoḥ kā 'Urūj* (New Delhi: Urdu Development Bureau, 1985), 19-26.

⁴²Tara Chand, *Tārīkh Tahṛīk-i Āzād-i Hind* vol. 1 (New Delhi: National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language, 1998), 368.

⁴³Qureshi, *Barrē 'Āzīm pāk-o Hind kī Millat-i islāmiyyah*, 306.

⁴⁴Shashi Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India* (Delhi: Aleph Book Co., 2016), 92.

Bengal, the most fertile land during the Mughal era, turned almost barren due to the policies of the British East India Company.⁴⁵ William Hickey (1749-1830), an English lawyer, stated that “Kolkata is full of miserable and starving people and no one is here to help them. Daily more than fifty people are dying out of hunger but there are no signs of any help from the government.”⁴⁶ In his work *The Indian Musalmans*, a British historian W.W. Hunter (1840-1900 CE) pointed out that in Bengal, only ninety-two Muslims were appointed on two thousand one hundred and eleven posts. He showed that the government divided the posts in such a way that Hindus constituted half and Muslims constituted only one fourth of British officers. He added that though the British had good reasons for what they did but their actions brought ruin upon the Muslims of Bengal.⁴⁷ Furthermore, British rulers implemented forty-three percent tax on silk exports; whereas, the East India Company was not required to pay a single penny. Consequently, the majority of low level workers were forced to leave their occupations while remaining were brutally injured by the British soldiers. British plundered the cities (such as Delhi, Agra, Patna and Shahjahanpur) famous for their rich culture and heritage. Most of the valuables including books, paintings, and calligraphies were smuggled to the London Museum. It is also reported by some scholars that the officers of the East India Company even tried to destroy *Tāj Mahal* of Agra in order to smuggle its building material.⁴⁸ Such incidents confirmed Indian suspicions that the British occupied their lands to loot their valuables.

Muslims were equally responsible for their loss. They did not learn from their mistakes but only after a long time. Many of them became robbers and started drinking alcohol.⁴⁹ Religious authorities forbade them to learn the English language and to acquire modern scientific education. Those who were against this ruling of religious authorities were regarded as heretics and *kāfīrs* (unbelievers).⁵⁰ The *‘ulama* feared that the knowledge of the English language would prove destructive for the Muslim community. They would embrace western culture and would ultimately convert to Christianity. It was a situation similar to the one faced once by the German Jewry. Rabbinical authorities banned the use of the German language and forbade the Jews to learn modern sciences. Similarly, Muslims of

⁴⁵Abdullah Yousuf, *Angrēzī ‘Ahd main Hindustān kē Tamaddun kī Tārīkh* (Ilahābād: Hindustān Academy, 1936), 7-10.

⁴⁶Ibid., 9.

⁴⁷William Wilson Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans* (London: Trubner and Company, 1876), 165.

⁴⁸Zakaria, *Hindustānī Sīyāsat main Mūsalmānoṅ kā ‘Urūj*, 23.

⁴⁹Ibid., 25.

⁵⁰Ibid., 42.

India turned their back towards modern knowledge which not only became a solid reason for their not being hired in the government sector but also enraged the British officials.

The British rulers started claiming the defeat of the Indian Muslims as the death of Islam. They gave their rule a religious character by saying that “if we are unable to conquer this land for Jesus then our efforts are meaningless.”⁵¹ The presence of Christian missionaries proved to be another barrier in the progress of the Muslims of India. Most of the schools were under the influence of the missions. Muslims did not want their children to learn under the influence of Christian teachers. It is noteworthy to mention here that in the beginning, some of the Muslim students tried to learn English. However, failure in securing a job disappointed them.⁵² Therefore, most of them did not give due attention to learning the English language.

8. Syed Ahmad Khan and the Rise of the Aligarh Movement

Born in Delhi on 17 October 1817 CE into a renowned family, Syed Ahmed Khan earned unparalleled fame for his educational services for the Muslims of Indian subcontinent. He was the disciple of Shah Ghulam Ali (1743-1824), a master of the Naqshbandi⁵³ tradition. Khan was so proud of his tutelage that he would say that “I am the one who went to school and learned divine mysteries from the master of the masters.”⁵⁴ An Indian historian Khaliq Ahmad Nizami (1925-1997) writes that Khan’s mother Aziz un Nisa Begum greatly influenced his upbringing. She was “the most powerful single factor in shaping the character of Syed Ahmed Khan.”⁵⁵ Meer Muhammad Muttaqi, his father, was a pious soul and mostly avoided worldly affairs.

During his early days Khan did not show much interest in studies. He was mostly interested in merrymaking and partying. He would attend the festivals of both Hindus and Muslims enthusiastically. However, after the death of his elder brother, he began to take his studies seriously. The war of 1857 CE resulted in the victory and total supremacy of the British over Indians. The British rulers acquired total control of the governmental affairs. The political situation of the country

⁵¹Qureshi, *Barrē ‘Azīm pāk-o Hind kī Millat-i īslāmiyyah*, 293-94.

⁵²Ibid., 291.

⁵³Naqshbandi is a major spiritual order of Sufism.

⁵⁴Altāf Ḥusain Ḥālī, *Hayāt-i Jāvēd* (New Delhi: National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language, 1999), 54.

⁵⁵Khaliq Ahmed Nizami, *Builders of Modern India: Sayed Ahmad Khan* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 2002), 20.

changed the viewpoint of Khan. He began to pay attention to the condition of his fellow Muslims. A man who was interested in history and medicine found himself at the threshold of an entirely new life.

9. Efforts to Remove Marginalization

He observed the situation of the Muslim community and soon realized that instead of the royal court, he should try to find a job with the British government.⁵⁶ He also encouraged other Muslims to follow his path; however, his efforts were not appreciated by his fellow Muslims. He did not participate in the War of Independence because he was certain that Indians would not be able to win it. However, it did not mean that he had abandoned his people. During the bloodshed, he tried to save as many lives as he could. In this respect, he worked not only for the betterment of Muslims and Hindus but also for the British.⁵⁷

Bridging the wide gap between Christians and Muslims, he published several books and pamphlets and also adopted many practical methods. He observed that being Christians, British rulers were unbearable for Muslims. This was the reason why religious scholars were against the English language and literature. The negative attitude of Muslims towards modern education created many economic difficulties for them. A similar situation was once observed by Mendelssohn and faced by German Jewry. He also concluded that the rabbinical authorities were not in favor of the German language because they assumed that the knowledge of modern sciences and German language could reduce the interest of Jews in religious studies. On the other hand, in India, most of the Hindus did not hesitate to learn the English language and modern education. Consequently, they were able to secure valuable posts in government institutions. This situation made Khan to strive for the social, educational, economic, and political upbringing of his people. It is clear from his writings that similar to Mendelssohn, he preferred to interpret religious literature with the help of pure reason in order to develop the interest of Indian Muslims in modern education.

10. Impact of Literary Works

In 1847, he planned to write the history of the monuments of Delhi. He thought that this work would help him economically but it did not. On the other hand, when Mr. Roberts, who was the magistrate of Shahjahan Abad, introduced this book in

⁵⁶Hālī, *Hayāt-i Jāvēd*, 60.

⁵⁷Ibid., 78.

the Royal Asiatic Society of London⁵⁸ its appreciation by the literary community of London made Khan popular in England. It is noteworthy to mention here that in the beginning he mainly wrote on subjects such as history, medicine, and religion but the War of Independence encouraged him to write on social and political issues as well. In his book *Asbāb Baghāwat-i Hind (Causes of Indian Revolt)*, he analyzed the major reasons behind the War of 1857 CE. He argued that issues such as non-existence of Indians in the Legislative Council, misconceptions of government about native Indians, certain British laws that were against the nature of Indians, and the poor management of army caused this revolt.⁵⁹ He did not write this work for the common people; instead, he intended to send it to the British parliament sitting in Westminster, England.⁶⁰ Later on, Colonel Graham who was his biographer, translated the booklet into English and presented it to the British officials and that fulfilled Khan's objective.⁶¹ Thus, this work can be seen as an attempt to reduce the hostility between Indians and British rulers.

Khan was worried about the condition of Muslims because many anonymous writings appeared accusing Muslims as responsible for the war. In Delhi, a number of Muslims were hanged. Alṭāf Ḥusain Ḥālī (1837-1914 CE), an Indian poet and biographer of Khan, writes sorrowfully about the situation that "now the season of dire extremity to which I allude is that which befell the Muslims in 1857-58. There was no atrocity committed then of which the blame was not imputed to Muslims."⁶² To cope with the situation, Khan published a booklet titled *Loyal Muslims of India*. Through this work, he tried to highlight the efforts of those Muslims who worked according to the plans of the British. Collection of the data for this book was a tough task; however, he achieved his target.⁶³ Although he was able to publish just two hundred and seventy-three pages, this work was considered important at that time because the newspapers were publishing anything in favor of Muslims.⁶⁴ He tried to assure the government that Muslims of India were loyal to them. Talking from a historical perspective, he also reminded the British that the Holy Prophet

⁵⁸Colonel. G. F. I. Graham, *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmed Khan* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1923), 5.

⁵⁹Syed Ahmad Khan, *Asbāb Baghāwat-e Hind [Causes of Indian Rebellion]* (Agra: Maktabah Mufid-e 'Aām, 1903), 15.

⁶⁰Ḥālī, *Hayāt-i Jāwēd*, 96.

⁶¹Graham, *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmed Khan*, 33.

⁶²Ḥālī, *Hayāt-i Jāwēd*, 103.

⁶³Graham, *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmed Khan*, 59.

⁶⁴Ibid., 62.

(SAW) accorded equal rights of citizenship to the Christians of Arabia.⁶⁵ Therefore, they should also do the same to the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent.

In December 1870 CE, he started issuing *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, a journal through which he not only tried to engage Muslims with modern education but also strove to train them ethically. However, his mission failed and his writings turned the religious authorities against him.⁶⁶ He set to write down a commentary of the Holy Qur'ān which is regarded as his most controversial work. It was an attempt to establish a modern brand of *ʿIlm al-Kalām* (Islamic scholasticism). During his address of 1884 CE in Lahore, he said that Muslims had to “either refute doctrines of modern sciences or undermine their foundations; or show that they are in conformity with Islam.”⁶⁷ He tried to point out the harmony between nature/work of God and the Holy Qur'ān/word of God. It was an attempt to harmonize religion with science. He was working to establish two main arguments through this commentary which are given below.

1. Trying to prove that there is harmony between the laws of nature and the Holy Qur'ān.
2. There is no contradiction between reason and the teachings of the Holy Qur'ān.

His work was not appreciated by most religious scholars. Commentaries were published and *fatwas* (legal ruling) were issued against his work.⁶⁸ Even his biographer Altāf Ḥusain Ḥālī refers to several controversial issues in his works.⁶⁹ Thus, similar to Mendelssohn, Khan also faced severe criticism after publication of his commentary.

11. Scientific Society and School of Ghazipur

These circumstances did not change Khan's thinking, however. He kept motivating his fellow Muslims towards acquiring scientific education. In this respect, he intended to translate and publish European works.⁷⁰ He was of the view that it would be relatively easy for Indians to learn modern sciences in vernaculars.

⁶⁵Syed Ahmad Khan, *Loyal Mahomedans of India*, vol. 3 (Meerut: J. A. Gibbons Mofussilite Press, 1861), 7-10.

⁶⁶Ḥālī, *Hayāt-i Jāvēd*, 165.

⁶⁷Dietrich Reetz, "Enlightenment and Islam: Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Plea to Indian Muslims For Reason," *The Indian Historical Review* XIV(1990): 210.

⁶⁸For example, Abdulhaq Haqqani published an entire commentary to refute Khan's arguments. See, Abdulhaq, *Tafsīr Faṭḥ-ul Mannān* (Lahore: Al-Faisal, 2009).

⁶⁹Ḥālī, *Hayāt-i Jāvēd*, 531-33.

⁷⁰Graham, *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmed Khan*, 79.

Therefore, in 1863, he laid the foundations of the Scientific Society of Ghazipur. He also built a school in the same year where five languages including English, Urdu, Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit were taught.⁷¹

12. Aligarh College

During his visit to England, he considered establishing an institute of higher learning in the Indian subcontinent. Hence, he took early retirement from his job and organized a committee for this purpose. The very first difficulty he faced was the collection of funds for the institute. It was a tough and challenging task as neither Khan nor the committee members could help economically. The majority of Muslims was also against this idea apprehending that this institute would produce nothing but Christians. Therefore, fundraising was a serious issue for him. However, after eight years of continuous struggle, the college was finally inaugurated in 1878 CE. Similar to the Free Jewish School of Germany where Christian students were also allowed to study, the gates of Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental School were also opened for Hindu students. The courses taught at the college incorporated both religious and secular subjects. This institute helped the Indian Muslims in learning modern education. Consequently, the share of Muslim employees in the Indian government increased significantly.⁷² Later on, this college became a full-fledged university which is still catering thousands of students every year.

13. Similarities between the Works of both Scholars

Major similarities between the works of both scholars are as follows,

TABLE 1. Adaptation of Culture and Language

Mendelssohn in Germany	Syed Ahmed in the Subcontinent
1. Mendelssohn was certain that German Jews would not achieve emancipation until they were assimilated into the German culture by studying the German language.	1. Khan also pointed out that the revival of Muslims was bound to the education of the English language.
2. Mendelssohn started writing books in German to familiarize his fellows with it.	2. Khan also had his work translated into English to make Muslims aware of it.

⁷¹Hālī, *Hayāt-i Jāvēd*, 124.

⁷²For details, see *ibid.*, 368.

3. Mendelssohn used his religious writings to educate as well as modernize German Jewry.
3. Similarly, Khan also interpreted religious scriptures / literature to modernize the increasingly marginalized Muslims of the subcontinent.

It is clear from the above mentioned factors that focus on cultural assimilation is a major point of agreement in the works of both scholars. To achieve this assimilation, they tried to develop the interest of their people in learning the language of their masters. In this respect, they used religious literature as a device which assured their fellow countrymen that by learning the new language they were not revolting against their own religious values.

TABLE 2. Adaptation of Modern Education

Mendelssohn in Germany	Syed Ahmed in the Subcontinent
1. Mendelssohn established the Free Jewish school in Germany.	1. Khan started the School of Ghazipur and Aligarh College.
2. <i>Haskalah</i> introduced Jewish community to modern scientific education.	2. The Scientific Society established by Khan also aimed to introduce Indians to the modern scientific education. However, the Scientific Society was quite different from <i>Haskalah</i> in its educational approach.
3. German Rabbis were against Mendelssohn's ideas.	3. <i>Ulama</i> of India also went against Khan's policies regarding modern education.
4. Mendelssohn translated the <i>Pentateuch</i> into German to introduce Jews to modern culture and secular education.	4. Similarly, Khan also interpreted the Holy Qur'an to motivate Muslims of the subcontinent to acquire modern scientific education.

The above mentioned similarities indicate that the supremacy of gentiles over Jews and of British over Muslims was not only because of their political dominance but education was also a major factor behind it. Therefore, the advocacy of modern education by both scholars is an important point that increased the success rate of their reforms.

TABLE 3. Other Similarities

Mendelssohn in Germany	Syed Ahmed in the Subcontinent
1. Mendelssohn discovered his interest in philosophy and metaphysics but when he saw the condition of his fellow Jews, he started working for their civil rights.	1. Khan was interested in medicine, history, and religion. However, after the War of 1857, the poor condition of Indian Muslims motivated him to write on social and political issues.
2. Mendelssohn preferred the use of pure reason to establish his arguments.	2. Similarly, Khan was also a staunch supporter of the use of pure reason.
3. Mendelssohn tried to harmonize the Christian and Jewish communities of Germany.	3. Khan was also a firm supporter of Hindu-Muslim unity until the eruption of the Hindi-Urdu controversy.

The following points manifest the differences between these scholars.

TABLE 4. Differences in the Works of both Scholars

Mendelssohn in Germany	Syed Ahmed in the Subcontinent
1. Mendelssohn advocated the separation of church and state through his <i>Jerusalem</i> .	1. Khan was not in favor of the separation of religion and politics.
2. After the reform of Mendelssohn, neither rabbis nor <i>maskilim</i> were influential enough to stop the conversion of Jews to Christianity among the German Jewry.	3. In India, <i>'ulama's</i> interference was a major obstacle for Christian missions.
4. German Enlightenment Movement was a major factor which caused the decline of traditional Jewish studies.	2. On the contrary, <i>madāris</i> flourished in the tough conditions of India and the <i>'ulama</i> responded to the drawbacks of modernity eagerly.

The above mentioned differences propose that perhaps the German rabbis were not prepared to cope with the challenges of the modern age. Therefore, they failed to handle the enlightenment process in Germany. On the other hand, *'ulama* struggled against Christian missions and their criticism of Khan's work kept Indian

Muslims engaged with religious studies. However, their efforts created more difficulties for Khan's mission.

14. Conclusion

Through a feature by feature comparison of the works of Moses Mendelssohn in Germany and Syed Ahmad Khan in the Indian subcontinent, the current article seeks to establish that both scholars started their reform missions because they wanted to convince their people that the pain and suffering they were experiencing was not a part of God's plan for them. On the other hand, they perceived that their respective religions encouraged them to study the universe discovering its hidden treasures. This study shows that at that time the Jewish community of Germany and the Muslims of India were living in quite appalling conditions. Through certain social, political, economic, and religious restrictions, they were pushed to the edges of their respective societies.

Mendelssohn observed the hatred of Jews for the German culture. He found that the rabbis stopped the Jews from learning the German language and acquiring modern education. Therefore, he translated the *Pentateuch* into the German language, established the Free Jewish School of Berlin and worked for the civil emancipation of Jews. Additionally, he also maintained a good relationship with Christian scholars who helped him in his mission. He successfully encouraged his fellow Jews to indulge in secular studies; however, the interest in traditional studies rapidly decreased after the emergence of the *Haskalah* movement. Thus, his reforms helped a marginalized community to earn its civil rights but distanced it from its ancestral religion.

Syed Ahmed Khan stands out among the reformers of modern India. He started his educational mission when educated Indian Muslims were small in number. At that time, the *'ulama* thought that English language and modern education would prove disastrous for the Muslim community from the religious point of view. They were afraid of secular studies that they may take Muslims away from their religion. Khan thought otherwise and therefore he authored a number of religious, political and social texts, established educational institutions, and fought for the rights of the Muslims. Similar to Mendelssohn, most of his religious work was considered controversial by the religious authorities. However, his efforts proved economically, socially, and politically beneficial for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent.

Although there are more similarities and less differences in the works of both scholars, there is no proof available which points out Khan's interaction with any of the works of Mendelssohn. It was perhaps the demands of the time and situation

which encouraged both scholars to interpret religious texts with the help of pure reason to guide their people.

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