

MORE THAN CONCRETE BLOCKS: THE ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY OF SIR SYED

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Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, one of the architects of modern India was born on October 17, 1817 in Delhi .He began to prepare the road map for the formation of a Muslim University by starting various schools. He instituted Scientific Society in 1863 to instill a scientific temperament into the Muslims and to make the Western knowledge available to Indians in their own language. In 1875, Sir Syed founded the Madarsatul Uloom in Aligarh and patterned the MAO College after Oxford and Cambridge Universities after he went on a trip to London. His objective was to build a college in line with the British education system but without compromising its Islamic values.

Let us discover and glorify our great founder as a Campus Planner and Master Architect.

The Aligarh Muslim University is one of the few universities in the world that is a heritage site. The University has more than 60 heritage sites on its campus.AMU has some interesting architecture, an extraordinary building heritage created by Sir Syed. The legacy of historically significant architecture is one of the most tangible and meaningful attributes defining the character and culture of AMU.

In 1872, the British Principal of Roorkee College turned down an invitation to be architect for the college at Aligarh. From then, the planning of the buildings and the supervision of their construction was the special interest of Sir Syed himself. The Public Works Department reviewed plans for most of the buildings; those constructed on the Government land and the college employed a full-time man to supervise the unknown. But it was Sir Syed who conceived the architectural designs, laid out the trees and gardens, and handled all financial matters such as selection and purchase of building materials. He also decided which buildings were to be built when. Sir Syed had a clear idea of basic layout: a self-contained quadrangle with classrooms, living accommodations, dining room, library and mosque.

The blueprint for the modern educational system had been developed by Sir Syed in London. The existence of the MAO College Fund Committee was formally announced on 26 December 1870, with Sir Syed as its Life Secretary. This NGO was registered under Societies Registration Act of 1866. Sir Syed and his co-worker, Saiyid Mahmud had convinced that three colleges had to be located as a single campus, consisting the nucleus of a University patterned after **“the system of Oxford and Cambridge, combining institution with residence”**.

SIR SYED HALL (SOUTH)

The premises of Sir Syed Hall is engraved on the hearts of Muslims in India. In Sir Syed Hall (South) complex, many heritage buildings are there such as Strachey Hall, Mushtaq Manzil, Asman Manzil, Nizam Museum and Lytton Library. Besides these buildings the famous Victoria Gate (1883) is situated in the Southern direction of the Hall and Jama Masjid is in the North-West direction. Historically AMU is a residential University. Sir Syed Hall is the oldest Hall of the University. In its character it differs from other halls of residence. In 1983, due to administrative reasons, Sir Syed Hall was bifurcated into two halls and one portion was named Sir Syed Hall (South). There are 107 penta-seated rooms in the hall consisting of 6 hostels. This hall is an example of harmonious corporate living in the University where students with their distinct language and culture live together. Some historically important buildings are in the premises of Sir Syed Hall (North) i.e. Strachey Hall, Victoria Gate etc.

Maulana Altaf Husain Hali observed, **“as long as this building stands, the Muslims will be able to claim that even in their last days they accomplished something that others were not capable of at the height of their power”**.

Sir Syed informed that the Hall was being built with the help of subscription realized at the rate of Rs. 500 each, and the donors' names would appear on tablets set on the walls of the Hall.

- The major repair and renovation, including complete replacement of roof and air-conditioning, was completed because of the generous donation of Rs.1.00 crores by M/S Allana Group of Companies, Mumbai, out of the total expenditure of Rs.1.83 crores, under the guidance of Lt.Gen.Zameeruddin Shah, Vice-Chancellor and Brig.Syed Ahmad Ali, Pro-Vice-Chancellor on 25 September, 2016.

- **Western Gate:** A gate was built to the west of Strachey Hall in 1890 and it was named after Syed Mohammad Hasan Bahadur.
- **Eastern Gate:** In 1891, another gate was built to eastern side of Strachey Hall and was named after Lawrence (Collector of Aligarh).
- **Aasman Manzil-** Nawab Mohd Azhar uddin Khan Bahadur Sir Aasman Jah (C.S.I.) Hyderabad came to Aligarh on 24th July 1888. For the commemoration of his visit, a building named Aasman Manzil was erected to the west of Strachey Hall.
- **Barkaat Ali Khan Lecture Room:** It is situated on the west of Strachey Hall and was completed in 1902.
- **Victoria Gate:** Victoria Gate was a part of the main building and served as the main entrance of the college at that time. The foundation stone for the gate was laid in 1884. Theodore Beck was the principal of MAO College at that time. His parents became very close to the people here and while going back to England, his father promised to send back a clock for the College. Even though he passed away, his wife fulfilled his promise and donated the clock in 1891. The clock space can be seen on the tower of Victoria Gate at Sir Syed Hall. The gate was named after Queen Victoria of England in 1914. The same structure now serves as Sir Syed Hall. The emblem of MAO College at the entrance since 1920 is presently used as the logo of AMU. In a meeting of the syndicate, the elite body of ten local trustees decided to place a clock tower on Victoria Gate. The plan of the tower was prepared by the then superintendent of the College building Mr. Mohammad Abdul Rauf. Three rooms were also constructed in the upper portion of the building by Justice Hameer-Ullah-Khan in the memory of his father Samih-Ullah-Khan and came to be known as Samih Manzil. He paid an amount of Rs. 2000 for the construction. In 1921, the clock tower was fixed on Samih Manzil. On 17 October 1984 on Sir Syed Day, Mr. Sayed Hamid, the Vice Chancellor of AMU at that time, installed a different clock on the clock tower. Mrinal Chatterjee a new entrant in University said, "I had heard a lot about Victoria Gate and after finishing my classes on the first day of my college, I went to see it. I was enthralled by its beauty". The gate is an amalgamation of both Neo-Classical English and Mughal Architecture. It further represents Indo-Sarcenic architecture. Arches, ornamental parapet, cupola, chattris and Arabic inscription in the marble of the front wall adorn the Victoria Gate. The structural elements include decorative features like cornices. The other structural features are bands, minarets, window detailing and gateways. The gate has a series of Lancet arches inspired

from 12th century gothic architecture. The structure has hexagonal and floral patterned jaali, which gives a beautiful effect of light and shadow.

SIR SYED HALL (NORTH)

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was one of those early pioneers who recognized the critical role of residential life in modern education. He always recognized the relevance of residential facilities for the empowerment of the poor and backward Muslim Community. His dream was to establish a campus with hostel facilities. In view of the above, Kacchi Barack was constructed in 1882 to provide residential facilities to the students of MAO College. The Kacchi Barack is presently Sir Syed Hall (North). In the beginning, 12 rooms were built in 1880 and were called Pakki Barack. Thereafter more students enrolled. As a result, Kacchi Barack was constructed to the north of Pakki Barack. Thus MAO College had two square shaped adjacent campus. The southern portion was named after Sir Syed and the northern area was named after Syed Mahmood. Presently these portions are respectively called as Sir Syed Hall (South) and Sir Syed Hall (North).

Sir Syed Hall (North) along with South is the Heart of the University. To begin with, it had initially served as the campus of MAO College. All the Departments such as Faculty of Law, Commerce, Social Science and Arts etc. operated from this premises. Sir Syed Hall (North) has the privilege of being the first Hostel of the Historian (Mohammad Habib), Geographer (S.M.Shafi) and other prominent personalities. Up to 1984, it was the Common Hall and called Sir Syed Court and Syed Mahmood Court. Thereafter it bifurcated into two parts, Sir Syed Hall (North) and Sir Syed Hall (South). The first Provost of Sir Syed Hall (North) was Prof. Nazmul Hasan. Some historically important buildings are in the premises of Sir Syed Hall (North) i.e. Strachey Hall, Library (Reading Room) and Common Room with a Billiard Room etc.

- **Bab-e-Ishaque:** The main entrance Bab-e-Ishaque was erected in the North East of Sir Syed Hall (North). It is the main entrance and was named after Nawab Mohammad Ishaq Khan, Secretary of Trustees.
- **Lecture Theatre:** In 1887, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan established a Lecture theatre named after Mohammad Hamidullah Khan. Presently one of its rooms is used as Billiard Room.
- **Lecture Theatre:** In 1892, another lecture theatre was built with the donation of Nawab Mohsinul Mulk Maulvi Syed Mehdi Ali Khan.
- **Library:** A Library was also constructed adjacent to lecture theatre. It was called Mehdi Manzil. Presently one of the portions of Mehdi Manzil is used as Table Tennis Room and Carrom Room.

- **Museum:** A Museum was constructed adjacent to the Aasman Manzil named as Nizam Museum. This was built with the donation collected from Hyderabad. In 1908, this museum was destroyed by a flash of lightning. Presently some portion of Nizam Museum is used as Reading Room for the students.
- **Mushtaq Manzil:** It was completed in 1910 on the west of Strachey Hall.
- **Aadam Ji Peer Ji Building:** It was constructed in the Mahmood court which is presently functioning as Provost Office of Sir Syed Hall (North).

Sir Syed Masjid: Sir Syed Masjid is located in the heart of Aligarh Muslim University campus. Standing against the university's cricket ground, it poses a striking view for the onlookers. It is located inside Sir Syed Hall. The tomb of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan is also enclosed within the walls of the mosque. The design of the mosque resembles the huge Mughal Badshahi Mosque of Lahore. Earlier, a set of ten marble slabs on which verses of the Holy Quran 'Sura-al-Fajr', were carved, came to the Aligarh market for sale. Sir Syed immediately decided to purchase it for Rs. 102/- for the College Mosque. The inscription dates back to the times of Mughal Emperor Shahjahan and was carved by Yaqoot Raqam, the famous Persian calligraphist who had been associated with the inscription of the Taj Mahal. It adorns the main entrance of the Mosque.

In 1912, the structure of the Mosque had been completed. It was however to be decorated with carvings, inscriptions and other embellishments, and the floor had to be paved. Nawab Mohd. Ishaq Khan pursued the matter with great vigour. Haji Mohd Ahmad Saeed Khan of Bhikampur donated a sum of Rs. 8,200 in 1914 for paving the floor with white and black stone chips. Stone carvers were called from Delhi and Ajmer who worked round the clock to complete their assignment before the end of the year. The cistern was completed and the articles of decoration like chandeliers and hanging lamps were purchased. The Ulema inspected the structure and approved it in January 1915. The Mosque was formally declared open on 1 February 1915. In March 1915, it was decided to fix a wooden door at the Mosque. Mumtaz-ud-Daula Sir Fayyaz Ali Khan donated Rs. 500 for it. The Mosque was designed by the Architecture Department of the Thompson Engineering College, Roorkee on the pattern of Shahi Masjid, Delhi.

SIR SYED HOUSE (OFFICE OF SIR SYED ACADEMY)

The Academy has the singular privilege of operating from a house consecrated through long years of residence by the great man from whom the academy gets not only its name but its very raison d'être. Sir Syed House was originally a military mess. In 1876, it was bought by Syed Mahmood, the first Indian judge of the Allahabad High Court for the residence of his father Jawad ud Daula Arif Jung Sir Syed Ahmad. The bungalow, known as Sir Syed House, lay in a dilapidated condition till it was fully renovated and restored to its original grandeur in the early 1970s. It was decided to convert the building into a memorial for the founder and house in it the Academy named after him. The Academy was inaugurated on 22nd October, 1974. The Founder Director of the Academy, Late Professor Khaliq Ahmad Nizami put the effort on a sound footing with his extraordinary interest and knowledge of the Aligarh Movement. Since its inception, the Academy has been trying to create an awareness and understanding about the tremendous contributions that Sir Syed made for the advancement of the cause of educational, technological, social and cultural development. The Academy highlights the substantial effort of Sir Syed to promote unity and harmony among the various communities of this vast country and thus to champion the noble cause of nation building. Akbar Ali Khan, Governor of UP, inaugurated Sir Syed Academy on 22nd October, 1974. Prof. A.M. Khusro (VC AMU), Nawab Chattari (Chancellor AMU) and Prof. K.A. Nizami, Founding Director of Sir Syed Academy were also present on the occasion.

A successful architect leaves behind an impressive body of built work, but a really successful architect also leaves behind a thriving practice that can carry on the organisation's vision when the founder passes from the scene. So by all means Sir Syed was LOOKING FORWARD, BUT GIVING BACK.

MAULANA AZAD LIBRARY

is the Central Library of the University with over 100 sister libraries (college/seminar libraries). It is a world famous repository of rare manuscripts and books in Urdu, Persian and Arabic languages. One of the most prized part of the Library is its Manuscripts Division which possess about 16000 rare and invaluable manuscripts including several royal decrees of Mughal emperors namely Babur, Akbar, Shahjahan, Aurangzeb, Shah Alam etc. and also the translation of Sanskrit works in Persian, such as Bhagwad Geeta, Mahabharat and Leelawati. The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's sword and the coins of Mughal period are also preserved in this Division.

CULTURAL EDUCATION CENTRE

formerly known as General Education centre is a prime institution of AMU, functioning as the cultural hub of students activities since the early 50's. Prof. Moonis Raza, who was also the Coordinator of GEC (1962-64) communicated the concept and idea of General Education Centre building to Joseph Stein, the famous architect (architect of 'India International Centre' and the 'India Habitat Centre', New Delhi) to design the building in a unique style.. The vision behind the unique designing was reinforcement of classroom impressions through surroundings illustrating that culture is within the scope of one's immediate day-to-day surroundings and society. Pride Possession of this building is the entrance head plaque (Mural) of this building was crafted by legendary artist, Late M.F Husain with his own hands in 1967. This is the only mural of M.F Husain ever. Other legendry artists like A.K Gujral and Sadiqain have also gifted their master pieces to the CEC art gallery.

KENNEDY HALL AUDITORIUM

named after the charismatic leader and 35th President of United States of America, John F Kennedy, is a multipurpose structure used for organizing University functions, cultural events, theatre activities, running films shows, as well as holding National/International Conferences and lectures of eminent personalities, etc. This auditorium with a seating capacity of approximately 1359 persons is also the largest auditorium in any Central University in India.

MUSA DAKRI MUSEUM

Sir Syed preserved the antiquities and other archaeological objects like sculptures, carved stone pieces, door-jambs and concrete panels at Scientific Society Institute presently known as Dawakhana Ajmal Khan Tibbiya College. The Sir Syed Collections in the museum consist of all his findings. The sculptures preserved in the collection date from 1st century A.D. to 11th century A.D.

MOINUDDIN AHMAD ART GALLERY

The history of Moinuddin Ahmad Art Gallery begins in the year 1928 when Prof. Moinuddin Ahmad got this Gallery constructed at AMU Campus. His vision was to disseminate the art of painting at Aligarh. It was his wish that his mission should be carried out in future by the committed and dedicated guardians of the Aligarh Muslim University. Today after more than 50 years, the vision and the mission of Moinuddin Ahmad has been accomplished by the visionaries Lt Gen (Retd) Zameer Uddin Shah, the present Vice Chancellor of AMU and the Pro-Vice Chancellor Brig (Retd) S. Ahmad Ali who executed the mission of Moinuddin Ahmad by getting the building renovated. On the eve of Sir Syed Day, the 17th of October 2013, the gallery was inaugurated by Dr. Aziz Quraishi, Hon'ble Governor of Utrakhand in the presence of the Vice Chancellor and the Pro-Vice Chancellor.

**And the practice continues with the latest magnificent addition as the BAB E SYED
and New Management Complex that we all know about.**

People come to AMU because it is an education hub. AMU's architectural monuments and monumental edifices are not so well known. Hardly any tourists come here primarily to take architectural tours comparable to Agra's Mughal monuments.

A key takeaway in visiting AMU can be that it's not necessarily the height or style of the buildings that sets a city or region apart. What most matters is how the university puts together, manages and presents to the world — its many physical and emotional facets. We have to play a major role in ensuring that tourists see, understand and appreciate the University's architectural heritage.

ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY

"We must aim to revitalize this heritage." The buildings and monuments are a clear reflection of the social and cultural context of the particular period.

Public awareness can be through a new app featuring an interactive map of historic buildings of AMU and a strong social media presence can be built with followers.

AMU should compile research studies of each building and lobby government to demand that they are restored.

It breaks my heart to acknowledge that there is little positive sentiment towards the bygone era, But allow me to argue that Aligarians should take pride in the ingenuity of the architectural intellect and capability of the founder and appreciate his creations.

"This is our heritage and we should preserve it."

NOTHING IS MORE DISGRACEFUL FOR US TO THROW INTO OBLIVION OUR HISTORICAL HERITAGE AND THE WORKS OF OUR GREAT FOUNDER.

The mighty buildings could yet have a future.
