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## Socio-Political Contribution of Sir Agha Khan III for Indian Muslims: An Overview

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**Abstract:** Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, a renowned Muslim leader, was instrumental in the freedom movement in Pakistan and provided significant support for Muslims in India. He was ideally positioned to play a big role in the international affairs of his time because of his extensive understanding of several cultural traditions, and his long public career had numerous facets. This study examines the contributions of Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, Agha Khan III with particular attention to the social reforms and political achievements of his life. The article sheds light on his role in the Pakistan Movement as well as his social services for the boost up of Indian Muslims. This study is basically qualitative in nature and a descriptive method with a historical approach is applied.

### Introduction

The Agha Khan III, also known as Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, served as the spiritual head of Shia Muslims. He was born in 1885 in Karachi, Pakistan, to Agha Khan II and Nawab Aalia Shamsul-Muluk, the granddaughter of a Persian princess by the name of Fateh Ali Shah (at the time, British India). Sir Agha Khan III, was just 7 years old and 8 months at the time of his election as the Shia Ismaili Muslims' 48th hereditary Imam. Sir Agha Khan III was reared by his mother, as opposed to his father and paternal grandparents, and had a strong European education in addition to the theological and oriental education that his position as the religious head of the Ismailis thought was vital (Aziz, 2003). This blending of the two educational spheres produced a Muslim leader who was capable of performing both the social obligations that came with being a great and enlightened leader and the sacerdotal duties that were related to his spiritual status. Sir Agha Khan

also went to Cambridge and Eton universities. He authored a lot of novels. Two of these, "India in Transition" and "World Enough and Time," were particularly significant (Ahmed, 2021). He had four wives. He first wed his cousin Shahzadi Begum on November 2, 1896, in Poona, India. His second marriage, to ballerina Cleope Teresa Magliano, took place in 1898. On December 7, 1924, he married for the third time in France. He divorced his third wife in 1943 because she refused to convert to Islam. His final union took place with Yvonne on October 9, 1944, in Switzerland. She changed her name to Umm-e-Habiba after converting to Islam (Aziz, 2003).

He toured the world to get praise from his admirers. The German Emperor praised him for performing his civic duty. He sat on the Indian Legislative Council from 1902 to 1904. He requested a meeting with Viceroy Lord Rippon and advocated for a Muslim electorate to be separate. From 1906 through 1912, he served as the All India Muslim League's first elected

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president. He worked to create fair relationships between Muslims and Hindus (Khan, 2017). Following Sir Syed Khan, he was instrumental in advancing the Pakistan Movement as well as the causes of Aligarh Muslim University and the Muslim community on the Indo-Pak subcontinent. At all pivotal times of the Movement, he maintained constant contact with Jinnah. Sir Aga Khan became ill in 1954 while visiting Dhaka and battled poor health ever since. He passed away in Switzerland on July 11, 1957, and is buried in Aswan, Egypt (Ahmad, 2017). It would be impossible to fully describe the actions and accomplishments of such a wonderful individual in this short piece. However, an attempt is made to provide a summary of his social, political, and humanitarian contributions to the cause of Indian Muslims on this page.

### **Defining the word “Aga”**

The Turkish term *aga*, which means "older brother" in English, is derived from the Old Turkic word *aqa*. It is a Mongolian word *aqa* or *aka*'s equivalent. Additionally, the Latin word *agere* and the Greek verb *agein*, both meaning "to lead," is equivalent to the Hindi nouns *agwa* and *agoo* (leader). The name Aga Khan is never written as Agha. (Urdu only accepts "agha" and cannot accept "aga. Despite being a Mongol word, Khan, Greek *Agas* became Agha because Arabic lacks the "g" sound. Agamemnon, the protagonist of Homer's epic poem, is referred to as *Agas*, which means leader. Words like *agenda* and *agency* all derive from this root. In Athens, where "agora" meant to the plain where the leaders congregated to observe events, wrestlers' "war" was one of agony. The Ismaili faith was greatly influenced by Greek-Ptolemaic culture when it first appeared in Egypt (Ahmed, 2021).

### **His Political Contributions**

#### **Nomination as a member of the Imperial Legislative Council**

He was nominated to the Indian Imperial Legislative Council in 1902 at the young age of 25. In a letter asking him to join the Viceroy's Legislative Council, he expressed his thanks. In a later statement, he explained, "I was by far the youngest member; hence this was a great honour to a young man still in his 20s, as the Viceroy's

Legislative Council at the time was a tiny, select council of influential people, wielding genuine influence." The Aga Khan was offered nomination once again when his tenure ended in 1904, but he graciously rejected it. He acknowledged, however, that his extraordinary experience with the Legislative Council had a profound and enduring effect on his life and character. (Ahmad, 2017).

### **Aga Khan and Congress**

Despite the presence of stalwarts like K. Gokhale, a caste Hindu who transcended barriers of race and religion, and Feroze Shah Mehta, a prominent member of the Congress Party and a close family friend of the Aga Khan. He found the attitude of Congress towards Muslims to be unsettling. He did urge Mehta to use his position to inform Congress of the significance of gaining the trust of Muslims but to no avail. (Khan, 2017). The Aga Khan, like Syed Ahmad Khan before him, saw the situation in India as "prioritizing the minority Muslim community over Indian national identity," effectively as a reaction to the pressures nationalism and its colonial legacy placed on minority populations. He regarded Muslims as more than just a faith, but as a country with the right to be represented by their own leaders (Ahmad, 2017).

He was further convinced by the workings of the legislative council's 1892 reforms that the Muslims had little chance of receiving a fair deal either within the Congress Party or in coalition with it. Given his first-hand, terrifying exposure to and experience with Indian politics, the Aga Khan felt compelled to follow in the footsteps of Syed Ahmad Khan, who fought for Muslim unity and progress for his own reason (Khan III & Shah, 1954).

### **Role in Simla Deputation, 1906**

The Simla Deputation, led by Sir Aga Khan III, to the Viceroy Lord Minto on October 1, 1906, was crucial in establishing the political position of Muslims in British India. 35 prominent Muslim leaders made up this delegation. This was a representation of all the British Indian provinces, territories, and districts. In his memorandum, he articulated a separate electorate's demand under the new reforms. In his speech, Lord Minto offered a good response and pledged to address

the Muslim demands in light of the forthcoming reforms (Ahmad, [2017](#)).

### **Presidentship of All India Muslim League**

Aga Khan III was adamant that, in order for Muslims to effectively represent themselves as a separate electorate, they also needed a political organization. He quickly gained the ability to influence a number of Muslim leaders, including some of the individuals connected to the earlier Simla delegation. On December 30, 1906, they convened in Dhaka following the completion of the Muhammadan Educational Conference's annual session and made the decision to create a Muslim political party. The meeting which was presided over by Nawab Viqarul Mulk and attended by delegates from different parts of India led to the creation of AIML. This was the inevitable outcome of the events that began when representative institutions were introduced in India (Khan, [2017](#)).

Despite not being able to attend the convention in Dhaka, The Aga Khan was chosen as the Muslim League's first president, and Nawab Mohsenul Mulk and Nawab Viqarul Mulk served as the organization's joint secretaries. The All India Muslim League's inaugural conference took place in Aligarh on March 18 and 19, 1908. He contributed to the Muslim League 500 rupees, of which 50 rupees were paid into the League's account as the entrance and membership fees; it was reported during this meeting. He unanimously decided to be the first President during this conference. The AIML's second conference took place in Amritsar in December 1908. It was also revealed at this meeting that he had donated Rs. 1500 to the Muslim League fund. In reality, there were two types of party leaders. The Permanent President, whose term was limited to three years, came first. The second strategy comprised appointing a few of the country's well-known Muslim leaders as the meeting's moderator, although his position was temporary and honorary (Khan III & Shah, [1954](#)). HH Sir Aga Khan, the organization's permanent president, presided over the third AIML session, which took place in Delhi on January 29 and 30, 1910. He gave a prolonged presidential speech during which he examined the political landscape and advised Muslims on how to further their causes (Ahmad, [2017](#)). At the fourth AIML session, which took place in Nagpur

between December 28 and December 30, 1910, Sir Aga Khan was also present and served as chair. The presidential address was given by honorary President Syed Nabiullah. The fifth AIML session took place in Calcutta on March 3 and 4, 1912. Nawab Sir Salimullah of Dhaka served as the session's honorary president and gave the opening remarks. The assistance provided by him for the "cause of Muslims" was also greatly valued during this session. During this meeting, he was elected to serve a second term as President of AIML. HH the Aga Khan personally advocated the creation of the "Muslim National Fund" at every provincial level while he was the Party's President for political development. The Raja of Mahmudabad applauded HH Aga Khan's vision and endorsed this choice. The participation of HH the Aga Khan also served as a sobering reminder at earlier Muslim League sessions. Afterwards, in 1912, HH the Aga Khan resigned as the AIM's leader (Desk, [2013](#)).

### **Aga Khan and Quaid-e-Azam**

In 1912, Jinnah started promoting unity between Muslims and Hindus. On the directives of the Aga Khan, Syed Wazir Hasan, the AIML Secretary, invited him to the AIML Council meeting even though he had not joined the AIML before 1913. During this meeting, which was led by Aga Khan, the AIML accepted its new policy of "self-government fit to India" in response to a Quaid-i-Azam motion. It was ratified during the subsequent session, which was held in March 1913. In addition, Sir Ibrahim Rahimtullah, a commercial tycoon from Bombay, presided over the AIML's 7th session, which was held in Agra on December 30 and 31, 1913, with HH the Aga Khan in attendance. HH the Aga Khan maintained close ties with Jinnah despite quitting the AIML in 1912, particularly during his efforts to promote Hindu-Muslim unification from 1914 to 1916 (Ahmad, [2017](#)).

### **His Literary Services and Politics**

The Aga Khan did not stop being involved in Indian politics as a result of his departure from League politics. He actually had the perfect opportunity to reevaluate the situation and offer a solution for India at this development stage of British rule, especially with regard to the plight of

the Muslims, thanks to his withdrawal and subsequent resignation. His most important work on Indian politics, "India in Transition: A Study in Political Evolution" was released in 1918. Among the many thought-provoking publications he had already written were Muslim Education in India (1902), The True Education's Purpose (1904), A Charter of Muslim Rights (1906), Some Views on Indian Dissatisfaction (1907), Guidance to the Muslim League, and The Challenges of Minorities in India (1909) (Desk, [2013](#)).

### **Aga Khan and Khilafat Movement**

Due to the revolutions of the Khilafat Movement, which was founded by Indian Muslims to protect the Caliphate in the Ottoman Turkish Empire, The Aga Khan would just have to contend with religion head-on. The fate of the Turkish Empire disturbed the minds of the Muslims. With the assistance of the British and other European nations, the Balkan republics invaded the empire in 1912. The fact that the Turks supported Germany during World War I made matters worse; as a result, their empire came to an end after being defeated by the Allies. Turkey would be penalized, lose its significant territory, and lose the Khilafat, especially in light of its dominance over the Hejaz, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq, which contain the Muslim holy sites (Khan III & Shah, [1954](#)).

The Aga Khan, who was unable to aid the Khilafat Movement, generously sent money to cover Turkey's war loans of £2,000 in spite of his sympathies for Turkish sovereignty. Additionally, he spent Rs. 25,000 on bonds and Rs. 90,000 more on Turkish bonds. But 1924 also signalled the end of a stage in his public life. After retiring, he "devoted himself nearly entirely to his own private and personal life" (Ahmad, [2017](#)).

### **Role in Round Table Conferences**

Sir Aga Khan served as the All Parties Muslim Conference's president from 1928 to 1929. He also served as a delegate in the Round Table Conferences in London conducted between 1930 and 1933 to decide the fate of Muslims. Sir Aga Khan was nominated to speak on behalf of the Muslim delegation at the Round Table Conferences after Allama Iqbal kindly noted Aga Khan's help to Muslims. Iqbal praised him for his services (Khoja-Molji, [2011](#)).

The first two conferences in London also had Quaid-e-Azam in attendance. They advocated for Muslim rights collectively. Aside from their participation in RTCs in London, they had a tight relationship and spoke in secret. They often meet in private to discuss the future of Muslims. He discussed the future of Muslims with both parties in letters dated January 20, 1931, March 29, 1931, June 20, 1931, and a number of other dates. These discussions took place before both parties attended different RTC sessions. This demonstrated that the two leaders had a great level of trust for one another and worked together to develop a strategy for the Muslims in British India (Desk, [2013](#)).

### **Nomination in League of Nations**

When the League of Nations was formed in 1932; Aga Khan was chosen to represent India. He held this role until the start of World War II. He was selected to lead the League of Nations in July 1937 due to his reputation as a capable statesman (now the United Nations Organization). He was the only Asian in this significant position (Khoja-Molji, [2011](#)).

### **Contribution to Decisive Decade of the Pakistan Movement**

The Pakistan Movement benefited greatly from Sir Aga Khan's contributions. Jinnah and Sir Aga Khan often exchanged messages in an effort to develop the Pakistan Movement. The Muslim Conference and the All India Muslim League remained together, as shown by the 24th AIML session held in Bombay on November 11–12, 1936, even when the AIML was formed around the time the Pakistan Movement was to be started. He was the only person in India who could bring all the parties together on one platform (Khan III & Shah, [1954](#)). Throughout 1940–1947, Jinnah and Sir Aga Khan communicated often and discussed major political issues between May and August 1947. So, Sir Aga Khan made a significant contribution to the Pakistan Movement (Ahmad, [2017](#)).

### **His Contribution as Social Reformer**

Social reformer Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah was interested in reducing rural poverty and advancing women in society. When he became an

ambassador for contemporary education, he fervently backed the growth of both men and women in education in East Africa and India. He supported a fully multicultural education. He was an advocate for international and inter-ethnic peace. According to the words of the late Aga Khan, "for the relieve of mankind," several organizations for economic and social development were built in the Indian subcontinent under Sir Aga Khan III. These organizations eventually assisted in the development of several cooperative organizations (Desk, [2013](#)).

### **Services in Aligarh Movement**

One of Aga Khan's primary priorities at this time, aside from politics and political planning, was the advancement of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's educational project to transform Aligarh College into a full-fledged university and make it a centre of higher study for all Indian Muslims (Khan III & Shah, [1954](#)).

When Aga Khan III (then 16) first met Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, a significant Aligarh Movement participant, they talked about Muslims' educational situation and Nawab Sahib articulated the movement's goals. He visited Aligarh for the first time in 1896 when he met Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. The encounter turned out to be a remarkable illustration of mutual respect and trust, and the 80-year-old Sir Syed gave the 20-year-old Sir Aga Khan III a challenging role in recognition of his exceptional leadership abilities. In his welcome address, Sir Syed emphasized the Muslims' educational illiteracy and their lack of exposure to modern learning. Aga Khan III responded by making his address and assuming the significant task of transforming the college into a university (Khan III & Shah, [1954](#)). He did everything in his power to raise the money needed to create the institution, as he had promised. He contributed one lakh rupees to this worthwhile cause before travelling the length and breadth of India to raise money. In his lectures, he underlined the necessity for Muslims to understand their role in achieving this admirable national goal. Six billion Muslims, according to eminent Indian scholar Mawlana Shibli Numani, are unable to complete a task that Sir Aga Khan completed by him (Khoja-Molji, [2011](#)).

By highlighting the importance and potential of a modern university, Sir Aga Khan III was able to persuade his fellow Muslims. He did this by coining the phrase "Now or never". Muslims were aware that a guy with such high prestige had made an effort for his country. Professor Riaz Hussain expertly emphasized this, stating that we owe Sir Aga Khan for the extraordinary and ground-breaking services he provided, forsaking his opulent and royal existence to beg on the streets (Ahmad, [2017](#)). Sir Aga Khan made a similar claim, saying, "As a mendicant, I am now going out to beg for the children of Muslim India from house to house and from street to street". One day, he met one of his most fervent critics while travelling to Bombay for a fundraising effort. A cheque for Rs. 5000 was presented to him in exchange for his support of the Muslim university. According to Afzal Usmani's description in his article that Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan asked for something from the audience after taking off his hat. Put something in this mendicant's bowl. "Your Highness, now it is my turn to plead," the man stated while signing a second cheque for Rs. 15,000/-. Please pardon me for anything I may have uttered against you in the name of the most gracious God. I had no idea you were that good. Don't worry, the Aga Khan reassured. For the sake of Islam and Muslims, I will always forgive and forget (Khoja-Molji, [2011](#)).

He helped build a strong foundation for Aligarh University in 1911 by raising 3 million rupees for the Aligarh Muslim University. Many people believed that the creation of Aligarh University would have remained a dream without his efforts and dedication (Khan, [2017](#)). The necessary funds were eventually raised after eight to nine years of tireless work, and Aligarh University received its official charter in October 1920. On December 17, 1920, the university's inauguration ceremony was held. Dr Zia-ud-din Ahmed, Dr Wali Muhammad, and Dr Karim Haider were the first recipients of the "Aga Khan Scholarship Fund," which trustees of the Aligarh movement established for national and international higher education. Later on, Aligarh University, Uthmania University and the University of Lughnow each named one of these three people as vice chancellor. He was named vice chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University in 1921. Additionally, he supported university professors

who wrote works with Islamic perspectives on politics, economics, philosophy, ethics, and education. He also contributed a remarkable ten lakh rupees to the construction of the Research Institute of Science in Karachi because he was passionate about the growth of Muslims in science and contemporary education. Sir Agha Khan established Agha Khan Schools in several regions of the Indian subcontinent at the same time as the Aligarh movement, which helped to advance basic and secondary education (Aziz, 2003).

### **The Social Status of Women and Agha Khan's Views**

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In Muslim India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was a lot of debate in the public spotlight about the status of women. During this time, Indian Muslims struggled to maintain their cultural traditions and religious beliefs while still participating in the rapidly modernizing British colonial culture. The frequent discussion of women's difficulties and their role in Muslim community growth revealed the intense worries of Muslims in colonial India about a number of topics, including their rights under Islam, suffrage, legal status, and education (Ahmad, 2017). He saw that women had an equal potential to males, which affected the variety of roles that women may perform in society. He advocated for women's education as a basic right that may nurture inner fulfilment via intellectual growth, as well as improve their economic well-being. Because of his realization of the emancipator potential of education, he instituted certain modifications for his female followers that have had a tremendous impact on their educational, economic, and social growth (Khoja-Molji, 2011).

### **Reforms for Female Education**

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Agha Khan supported broad changes for Muslims, but when it came to the latter, he took a more active stance. His position as the Imam gave him the religious authority to establish a network of social service organizations for the benefit of his adherents, especially women (Aziz, 2003). The Agha Khan criticized social, religious, political, and cultural organizations and structures that kept women out of public life, denied them employment chances, or restricted their rights. He called for complete changes to every aspect of

women's experience because he recognized the interconnectivity of women's difficulties. Therefore, his attempts to promote female educational progression were not made in a vacuum; rather, they had an effect on and were influenced by his hard works to change the women status in the legal, political, and religious spheres (Khoja-Molji, 2011). Therefore, it is essential to consider Agha Khan's holistic approach to women's emancipation even as we concentrate on his changes in the area of education (Khan III & Shah, 1918).

For women to be able to control their own lives and find personal satisfaction, the Agha Khan placed a high value on education. He aimed to give women the resources they needed to improve both their personal lives and the well-being of their families. I'm attempting to steer the lives of our young women in radically different directions, he declared. So that kids are not financially dependent, I want to see them be able to support themselves through skills and professions (Malick, 1954). In contrast, the majority of other arguments for the value of women's education focused on how it would affect women's capacity to run their homes, educate their children, and adhere to the teachings of Islam; women were seen as the protectors of Islamic morality, and their education served to advance communal objectives (Khoja-Molji, 2011). It was thought that women who studied the theological sciences would be better able to contribute to their children's good upbringing and keep their husbands' households peaceful. He pushed for changes that would benefit Muslim women generally, but he remained committed to enhancing the conditions of his female followers. Along with focusing on removing cultural and societal barriers to women's education, he also implemented legal reforms that increased the likelihood that his female followers would be able to attend education (Khan III & Shah, 1954). He underlined that a girl should be given the opportunity to grow and pursue her education rather than being married off too soon (Adatia & King, 1969). He prohibited child weddings and established the minimum age at which Ismaili girls and boys could get married. In addition, he added to his advice by providing financial support for the advancement of female education (Khoja-Molji, 2011).

The Aga Khan also recognized the impossibility of enacting long-lasting change in women's lives without a community-level legitimizing environment that respected female education and contributions to society. Therefore, he started making changes to the way the Ismaili community was structured using his position as the Imam. He promoted women into positions of leadership and assigned them to important Ismaili social governing agencies. Women were urged to organize locally and take an active part in religious life. Begum Umm-e-Habiba, the wife of the Aga Khan, set a good example for Ismaili women and participated openly in many communal matters as a leader (Khoja-Molji, 2011). Thus, the Aga Khan constructed a perfect leadership framework for his society, one that encompassed both men and women. In this regard, he founded Diamond Jubilee Schools in Gilgit-Baltistan in 1946 using funds contributed by his followers. Gilgit-Baltistan is a remote and underdeveloped mountainous region. Regardless of caste or religion, these schools have had a tremendous impact on Gilgit-educational Baltistan's system (Khan, 2017).

His Highness the Aga Khan, continues to build on and strengthen his grandfather's reforms, which have significantly improved the lives of Ismaili Muslim women worldwide. Most Ismaili women nowadays are educated and actively involved in their religious community's public life (Khoja-Molji, 2011). Years after Sir Aga Khan's efforts to advance education, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) has remained true to this philosophy and acknowledges that educating women and girls is essential to establishing a civilized and stable society. In the distant Northern Regions of what is now Pakistan, Diamond Jubilee Schools for girls were created.

Over 1,600 teachers are employed by Aga Khan Education Service, Pakistan, which currently runs hundreds of Aga Khan Schools serving over 38,000 students across the country (Desk, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

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Conclusively, Sir Aga Khan spent his entire life working for the welfare and prosperity of Muslims around the world. He did not limit himself to only advancing Muslim education, however; rather, he played a significant political role, standing up for Muslims at various forums to promote the rights of Muslims in India. He was a leader with vision, and the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent greatly benefited from his efforts and achievements, particularly in the development and support of educational institutions. By fostering political consciousness among the Muslims of the subcontinent, he was also essential to the growth of the Pakistan Movement. He worked very hard to restore Muslim culture, restore Muslim society, and restore Muslim politics. His life's work became spreading education among Muslims because he realized that the primary reason for Muslims' political backwardness was due to their disregard for education. The biggest gift Sir Aga Khan gave to the Indian Muslims was the founding of Aligarh University. His Highness the Aga Khan was a fervent supporter of women's education and brought it to Muslims' notice as one of their most pressing needs. He even went so far as to argue that female education is more important than male education since a female must educate the entire family. We shall never forget the ardent supporter of Muslim political rights and school founder. We shall reiterate our commitment to making Pakistan a prosperous and thriving country in commemoration of a great Muslim leader.

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