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**ASAR-US-SANADEED: DOCUMENTING DELHI'S CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL LEGACY**

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**Article Received: 08 August 2025** \*Corresponding Author: **Dr. Aijaz Ahmad****Article Revised: 28 August 2025** Associate Professor in History Yasin Meo Degree College.**Published on: 18 September 2025** Email ID: [aijazahmadnuh@gmail.com](mailto:aijazahmadnuh@gmail.com).**ABSTRACT**

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), a pioneering Indian Muslim reformer, scholar, and jurist, made significant contributions to archaeology during the early 19th century, particularly through his documentation of Delhi's historical monuments. His most notable work, *Asar-us-Sanadeed*, first published in 1847 covering ancient buildings, forts, tombs, mosques, and other archaeological sites in Delhi and its environs. Sir Syed revised it in a more concise 1854 edition focused on factual accuracy. *Asar-us-Sanadeed* not only preserved records of monuments that have since vanished or deteriorated but also predated formal colonial archaeological efforts, such as those by Alexander Cunningham, positioning Sir Syed as one of India's first indigenous historical archaeologists. His approach blended empirical observation with a romanticized view of the past, reflecting his broader intellectual shift toward rationalism and scientific inquiry.

**INTRODUCTION**

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) is frequently characterized as a leader of Muslim nationalism and a social and educational reformer. He was born on 17 October 1817 into a prominent family with ties to the Mughal court in Delhi. He had enjoyed all the amenities and facilities available to him at home. Being a member of royal family, he was given the best education of the time but in those days when education was not one fixed menu, he had studied religious literature and philosophy, science, mathematics, Arabic, Farsi and Urdu literature. He also studied *Fiqh* and *Asul i-Fiqh*, Quran, Urdu and Arabic literature from the best scholars. His family's aristocratic background provided him with access to both traditional Islamic education and the evolving intellectual currents of his time.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan started his career in 1836 after his father Syed Mohammed Khan's

death by entering in the service as *Shirishtedar* of the Criminal Department in the office of Sadr Amin. In 1841 he was transferred for position of *Munsif* (judicial officer) for the East India Company from Fatehpur Sikri to Delhi, after death of his elder brother. From 1846 to 1854 he worked in the law courts of Delhi, where his experience, mind and character groomed.[1]

The historic atmosphere of Delhi, with its ruins and grand monuments, fascinated Syed Ahmad Khan and he began studying the city's architecture shortly after his arrival. This ultimately led him to carry out a painstaking personal survey of Delhi's monuments with the aid of Maulvi.

Imam Bakhsh Sahbaai (1806-57), head of the Persian department of Delhi College. He devoted most of his free time in archaeological works and finally published his famous book *Asar-us- Sanadeed* in 1847 and its revised edition in 1854. This work of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan made him the first historical archaeologist in India.

The life of Sir Syed Ahmad could be divided into two parts: 1- Prior to the revolt of 1857; 2- Aftermath of the revolt of 1857. In the first part of his life he was more devoted to the research and learning the archaeological sites of Delhi with the utmost vigour. In his second phase of life, he took broader step to ameliorate the position of Indian Muslims who were main target of British cruelties due to their participation in the revolt of 1857. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan mainly focused to educate the Muslims and taught them the value and ethics of modern philosophy and science. This paper is concerned with the first part of his life basically dealing with his archaeological works and his book *Asar-us-Sanadeed*.

During his service career he applied his educational skill of reading and writing. The buildings and ruins of Delhi and surrounding areas compelled him to do the work which was still undone. Accordingly, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan began to work on the archaeological survey of the long standing and ruined buildings in Delhi and surrounding areas. Perhaps it was his long cherished dream because he chose it to work in his very young age in his 20s. In his 20s, living in his family home in Delhi, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was a junior official in the East India Company, helping his brother publish an Urdu newspaper, and translating Farsi manuscripts. This printing press became more helpful in printing his famous book *Asar-us- Sanadeed*. [2]

### Sir Syed as a Historian and Archaeologist

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan occupies a high class historian and archaeologist. He was also a versatile researcher and prolific writer, who has left behind no less than 25 valuable works both in Urdu and Persian, on history, archaeology, politics, religion and philosophy. Sir Syed's historical debut was made in 1840 with the publication of *Jaam-i-Jam* (1840). This was an invaluable index to 5000 years of Indian history supplying the names of various rulers of India, their dates of birth and death, the names of their fathers and even their mothers. Sir Syed was also the first Muslim to use numismatics as a source of history. This extended essay was later expanded into a full book titled *Silsilatu'l Muluk* (1852) at the request of Edward Thomas who used it as a source for his *Chronicles of the Pathan Kings of Delhi*. His interest in history led him to the edition of important historical works of medieval India. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan edited and translated *Ain-i- Akbari* in 1855. The next work was the *Tarikh-i-Ferozshahi* that was critically edited and published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Sir Syed himself edited and printed at his own press the famous autobiography titled the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* in 1863-64.

Notwithstanding, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan is more famous as an archaeologist for his monumental work *Asar-us-Sanadeed* (Antiquities of Delhi). It is a remarkable and indeed encyclopedic account of the monuments, mosques, tombs, pleasure gardens, bridges and other places of historical interest in Delhi and its environs. *Asar-us-Sanadeed* represents a landmark in Urdu historiography, preserving Delhi's cultural and historical legacy through a blend of traditional and modern methods. The most important work in this book is the detailed descriptions of Red Fort, Jama Masjid, Qutb Minar, Humayun's Tomb, Jantar Mantar, etc. with measurements, historical accounts, and illustrations by using the primary sources like inscriptions and oral histories, and direct observation, reflecting a proto-scientific approach. He used measurements, sketches, and firsthand accounts, aligning with emerging archaeological and historical methodologies. *Asar-us-Sanadeed* is one of the earliest Urdu works to adopt a systematic, evidence-based approach to historical documentation, distinct from traditional Persian chronicles.

Syed Ahmad's historical and archeological publications are part of a general nineteenth-century shift from textual studies of antiquaries toward observation and evidence-based accounts and archeological surveys. Furthermore, his publications are an important source for colonial officials taking stock of their territory. As Mrinalini Rajagopalan notes, *Asar* "was

the first archive of Delhi's architectural heritage and despite the reluctance of colonial archaeologists to recognize it as such they depended on it greatly to create their own archival knowledge of Delhi's monuments." [3] Thus, we could see Syed Ahmad's approach to historical and archeological research that mirrors discussions in history of archeology.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was a pioneer in the field of working on Antiquities of Delhi. It was a pioneering attempt and involved considerable research and field work. He used to spend his holidays on it and often went outside the city accompanied by his friend Imam Bukhsh Sahbaai, to examine ruins of the old monuments and measured their rooms etc. His idea of writing a book on the physical structures at Delhi was not just describing them but measuring them with diligence and then relating them to the larger political and social fabric of the time appears a unique measure. Throughout the book Sir Syed describes various architectural remains of Delhi and its environs and provides historical context to those remains by references from historical sources regarding their social, cultural and political nature.

### **As a Pioneer of Archaeological Survey of India**

The learned society or intellectual renaissance developed in India and in colonial spaces during the second half of the eighteenth century. It led to the promotion of arts, sciences, and literature, along with the idea of preserving the cultural and scientific heritage of the past. The works of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in *Asar-us-Sanadeed* boosted archaeological interests to the British government and other high officials employed in India. Because of its eventual reception by European scholars, *Asar-us-Sanadeed* (1854) provides strong evidence for labelling Syed Ahmad a popularizer of science. Numerous European intellectuals read *Asar-us-Sanadeed*, most notably the French Orientalist Joseph Heliodore Garcin de Tassy. [4]

Before his work no major work was done on archaeology of Indian monuments and the British officials also didn't care the decaying heritage of the grand old city of Delhi. The interests and works of Sir Syed created a new field of study which since long neglected by the historians as well as the British government. In 1861, Alexander Cunningham, a British Army engineer, was appointed archaeological surveyor to the Government of India to investigate the antiquities of Upper India and his services continued from 1861 to 1865. Thus, the Archaeological Survey of India was founded in 1861. After 1865, he went back to England due to lack of funds to continue this work. In 1871, Richard Bourke (Lord Mayo, the Viceroy-1869-72) re-established the survey and Cunningham served as Director General of Archaeological Survey of India from 1871 to 1885.

Alexander Cunningham wrote, “the following lists of the Tomar dynasty of Dilli contain all the information which, up to this time, I have been able to collect. The list of Abul Fazl is given in the *Ain-i-Akbari*; and Syad Ahmad’s list is printed in his *Asar-us-Sanadeed*. The Bikaner manuscript, which I obtained in 1846 agrees exactly in the order of the names...” Alexander Cunningham supplanted the need for such a text *Asar-us-Sanadeed* by embarking upon a systematic process of locating and documenting all historic sites in India and publishing yearly reports.[5] Alexander Cunningham, in the survey’s 1862 report, cited Syed Ahmad over 40 times. Although he disagreed with Syed Ahmad on several points, primarily on the calculation of the dates of 59 buildings and rulers, it was an important source to work with.

Syed Ahmad’s publications were one of the sources that the colonial government referenced, as demonstrated by Cunningham’s discussions, but eventually downplayed the significance of his contributions. Of course, *Asar-us-Sanadeed* is an important publication and is well accounted for by historians of South Asia but deserves more attention in the discussion of the shift from antiquarianism to the formalized discipline of archeology by historians of science. Thus, the rise of British archeology also signifies the replacement of sources and expertise in localized settings.

On the high demand and requests of British intellectuals, the Magistrate and Collector of Old Delhi also known at that time as Shahjahanabad (Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan (1592-1666) founded a walled city, until the fall of the Mughal Empire in 1857), Sir Roberts started translating the book *Asar-us-Sanadeed* into English. It appears that the English translation was never completed, possibly because Roberts was transferred from Delhi before he had finished the work. After the completion of two centuries of his birth, his book *Asar-us-Sanadeed* gained much attention to the historians and archaeologists. His book gave a new field to the researchers to understand his spirit of such type of work which was done for the first time. With such an archaeological documentation *Asar-us-Sanadeed* remains a valuable resource for historians, archaeologists, and urban planners studying Delhi’s heritage.

### **Asar-us-Sanadeed**

*Asar-us-Sanadeed* an archaeological and monumental work is still present in two Editions of 1847 and 1854. This is Sir Syed’s pioneering work in documenting Delhi’s monuments, architecture, and cultural history. In this work Sir Syed gave an account of the detailed the

history, buildings, and monuments in and around Delhi with biographical notices of the *Ulema* and literary figures associated with them. It was a significant work for its time, providing a glimpse into the city's past and its architectural heritage. The scholars, such as Mrinalini Rajagopalan, C. M. Naim, Christian Troll, and David Lelyveld have extensively discussed the differences between the both versions of *Asar-us-Sanadeed*. However, a brief introduction of both Editions is still needed for discussion.

The first edition *Asar-us-Sanadeed: Imarat-i-Dihli ki Mustanad Tarikh* (Great Monuments: An Authentic History of the Buildings of Delhi), was the first major publication of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in 1847, a fairly comprehensive description of Delhi's architecture, and the first of its kind. *Asar-us-Sanadeed* (1947) includes a preface, four chapters, and more than a hundred sketches. The first chapter is a description of buildings outside the city of Delhi, featuring detailed descriptions of over 100 buildings, plans for each of them, and exact reproductions of their inscriptions. It is a sort of visual tour of Delhi. The second and third chapters are dedicated to the Red Fort and the surrounding area of Shahjahanabad. The last chapter consists of *Tazkira* (memoirs) of prominent individuals in Delhi, augmented by samples 69 of their writings. All in all, it was a detailed study of not only buildings but also of individuals. This was, as Nath writes, "a voluminous work covering a total of 600 pages. Nearly 130 sketches made, free hand, by the artists Mirza Shah Rukh Beg and Faiz Ali Khan and printed by woodcuts were used to illustrate the text." [6]

A friend of Sir Syed, Arthur A. Roberts, magistrate and collector of Shahjahanabad, took the book to England and presented it to the Royal Asiatic Society whereby the Society conferred membership on Sir Syed. Colonel Saxon, a member of the Royal Asiatic Society, then proposed that Roberts should produce an English translation of the text. Before an English translation could be made, however, Syed Ahmad Khan's prospective British patrons required him to re-write his study, adding more descriptions into its corpus and restructuring the text. The most noticeable change of all, however, was that which was eventually made to the language in which the text was written. The first edition's ornate, flowery Urdu, replete with Persian expressions. [7]

Accordingly, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan again worked on his project of *Asar-us-Sanadeed* and finally published in 1854 as an encyclopaedic text on Delhi's architectural history. In between worked another project by which Sir Syed gained more popularity among the scholars. Sir Syed was a member of the Archaeological Society of Delhi with the Resident,

Sir Thomas Metcalfe, as President. In that capacity, Sir Syed examined the composition and ingredients of the bricks composing the various structures of the Delhi monuments and wrote a learned paper titled “*On the bricks employed in different ages in India*” in Urdu. Sir Syed also presented two bricks to the Society’s museum in October, 1852. The article was translated into English and contains the important observation that the ages of monuments can be deduced from the changes in the strength and colour of their bricks. Certainly, Sir Syed’s natural curiosity led him to make such useful discoveries on his own.[8]

In the editing and reformatting of the new Edition of *Asar-us-Sanadeed*, Sir Syed was aided by Roberts as well as Edward Thomas, a Delhi sessions judge and a well-known numismatist. *Asar-us-Sanadeed* (1854) was written in Urdu but there were some English elements as well, with Sir Syed adding a chapter at the beginning, improving the dating reported in the second chapter, and removing the fourth chapter entirely. New Edition was written to be accessible to an elite European audience and circulated as such. The first chapter of this Edition of *Asar-us-Sanadeed* is a new addition altogether and contains a brief history of the first population of all India and particulars respecting the Capital or Seat of Empire, during the old and new reigns. This Edition contains a full account of that Fort, as well as of all the Fortresses erected ever since the city of Delhi was first populated. In this Edition, the dates of the buildings are regularly given. This second Edition contains another thing of great moment, viz. the Inscriptions found on the buildings are copied and inserted in the second Edition in their very original form. The new Edition is not only an improvement in point of expression; it contains additional material by way of a few more charts of buildings and transcripts of inscriptions. The new Edition indicates the transformation of Urdu into a language of straightforward vernacular prose, a process that began in the early nineteenth century and was heavily influenced by British interests.[9]

*Asar-us-Sanadeed* represents a groundbreaking effort in Urdu historical scholarship, blending empirical observation with cultural preservation, and serves as a critical lens to understand Delhi’s historical legacy and Sir Syed’s intellectual approach in the colonial context. While *Asar-us-Sanadeed* is his most direct contribution, Sir Syed’s broader efforts in education and social reform indirectly supported archaeological studies by promoting literacy and a broader understanding of history and culture.

Until the first half of the nineteenth century most of the archaeological remains of Delhi and surrounding areas were converted into debris and no effort from the British Government were

made to restore them. In these situations Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, a born historian and scholar, tried save these monuments in his book *Asar-us-Sanadeed*. Not only Sir Syed Ahmad Khan but decimation of archaeological remains of Delhi was also explained by many other scholars. When the Bishop of Calcutta visited Shahjahanabad in the last days of 1824, he went out to see Humayun's Tomb. He then wrote, "From the gate of Agra to Humayun's tomb is a very awful scene of desolation, ruins after ruins, tombs after tombs, fragments of brick-work, freestone, granite, and marble, scattered everywhere over a soil naturally rocky and barren, without cultivation, except in one or two small spots, and without a single tree. . . The ruins really extended as far as the eye could reach, and our track wound among them all the way".[10]

Unfortunately, in 1857, following the War of Independence and the formal colonization of India, a number of structures recorded in the *Asar-us-Sanadeed* were demolished, including significant portions of the Red Fort in Delhi. Luckily, in these situations the only source of information was *Asar-us-Sanadeed*. Moreover, by surveying Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu monuments alike, in an Indian language which was widely socially accessible, the text was revolutionary.

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Working on the Archaeological sites of Delhi and adjoining areas was a tough challenge for Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. This involved great deal of labour both physical and mental. The physical labour sometimes also entailed risk of life as it included being lifted up to great heights in improvised cane work trays suspended by ropes. These difficulties, however, could not deter him from accomplishing the task which he had set before him. With great patience he carried on his work and ultimately succeeded in completing it. As he was collecting information for that work, he was aided with measurements and inscriptions by his servants and Maulvi Imam Baksh, head of the Persian Department at Delhi College. Two draftsmen, Faiz Ali Khan and Mirza Shahrukh Beg, also worked with him. Syed Ahmad dedicated substantial time and resources to gathering information. He went so far as to "get in a basket and hang from above between two poles to read the inscriptions" and had his servants collect samples of bricks.[11]

Altaf Husain Hali writes: "Conducting research into the buildings, which lay outside the city, was no easy task. Scores of these buildings had fallen down and were lying in ruins. Most of the inscriptions were either illegible or incomplete and some were written in scripts, which no one knew how to read. The most important parts of some of the ancient buildings had been

demolished and from the existing remains, which were scattered over a wide area, the purpose for which the buildings had been erected could not easily be determined. If the name of the founder happened to be contained in the inscription, references had to be checked with the available histories before a complete description could be written. Some of the older buildings had been so vastly altered that it was impossible to discover how they had originally been planned. In this way, writing a detailed account of some 125 buildings, tracing and reproducing the inscriptions in their exact form and drawing up the plans of each broken down edifice posed many problems. Sir Syed found that some of the inscriptions on the Qutb Minar were too high to read. Therefore, in order to obtain an exact copy, he would sit in a basket, which had been suspended between two scaffolds parallel to the inscription. While he was carrying out this operation, his friend, Maulana Sahbaai, would grow quite pale from fear.”[12]

Sir Syed Ahmad's contribution to Archaeology in the form of *Asar-us-Sanadeed* is outstanding and lasting. The importance of this detailed and authentic work about the buildings of Delhi, which was once a city of great importance, becomes evident and outstanding when we keep in mind the times when it was written and also the difficulties and odds which the author had to face in writing and composing this work. Some details of his archaeological works are as follows.

### **Lath Ashoka, Minar-e-Zaria or Lath Ferozshahi**

The Ashokan Pillar in Delhi was a stoned pillar installed in Firozshah Kotla also called as *Minar- e-Zaria* or Lath Ferozshahi. During the time when Sultan Ferozshah Tughlaq was coming back to Delhi after building a fortress in Thatta in 1368, he saw a korand stone pillar in the village Nawhra, subdivision Salura, district Khizrabad, which is located about ninety kos from Delhi. At that time, it was thought that the pillar was the stick used by Bhim (Bhim was a Hindu mythological character from the Mahabharata, one of the sons of Pandu) to graze his cows. Ferozshah made the decision to uproot the pillar from its original location and had it moved to Delhi so that it would be remembered for a long time. A wagon of forty-two wheels was constructed to move the pillar, and two hundred men pulled these ropes in order to move the wagon. Thousands of men toiled to move the column to the edge of the river, which flowed beside Nawhra village, where many boats were tied together and the pillar was lifted onto them and then taken on the river to Ferozabad and finally brought to the Ferozshah fort where it was brought near the mosque and a three storey structure was built and on its

top the pillar was placed with the rock and limestone foundation. White and black marble were used at the top to create a beautiful turret, a copper finial plated with gold was placed on top, which gave the structure the name of *Minarah-e-Zarrin*. It is unfortunate that neither the towers nor the finial exist anymore, in fact, even the tip of the pillar has broken off. Many say the damage was caused by lightning or by bombs. The length of the pillar is thirty two feet, with eight yards sunk in the building and twenty-four yards rising above it.[13]

There are two inscriptions upon this pillar. The language of this inscription is Paali and Sanskrit and the letters are of a very old script, which predates the Devanagiri script. This inscription had not been understood prior to now, Ferozshah had gathered many pundits, but they too were unable to decipher the language, and now Mr. James Prinsep (He was a renowned numismatist and philologist, who became the secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. His most notable scholarly contribution was the groundbreaking translation of the Paali script as it appeared on the Ashokan pillars, which led to the discovery of Mauryan India) has read and translated the text.[14]

The first is in the name of this king. It is said that Raja Ashoka was enthroned in about 325 BC, and this pillar was built in the twenty-seventh regnal year or 298 BC. The proclamation includes teachings of the Buddha, commands to do no harm to others and not to practise laws of retaliation and corporal punishment upon criminals. The second inscription upon the pillar contains the name of Baldeo (Bisaldeo) Chauhan. He was initially the king of Sanbhar, where the Chauhans dynasty originates. By waging war against the rulers of Delhi, he conquered the land. Rai Pithaura, during his rule, which was 1163, had inscribed the story of his ancestors' victory upon the pillar. The letters of this inscription are in the Devanagiri script and it is in the Sanskrit language. The sentences of this edict are easily read. The text praises Baldeo, listing his attributes, and claiming that his rule brought peace to Hindustan.[15]

### **Qutb Minar**

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan describes the Qutb Minar that if one stands beneath the Minar and looks to the skies, hats and turbans have to be removed. When looking down from the top of the column, people on the ground seem very small, and seeing tiny men, small elephants and horses, is very odd. In the same way, those on the ground see the people on top as miniscule, and it seems as if they are angels descending from the heavens. Thus, this pillar is from a miraculous time.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan mentions that the lowest section of the Minar is decorated with alternating circular and square engaged columns, the second section is entirely comprised of spherical engaged columns, the third is entirely square engaged columns, with the highest two sections being completely round. The structure is made entirely of red stone, except the fourth level where white marble is also employed. There is inlay work and painting everywhere of such splendour that each carved vine is interwoven endlessly with many others, and even the smallest flowers and branches have been created by dozens of scattered hints of colour, all these elements creating a monument that is of great interest. It is often thought by Muslims that Sultan Shamsuddin Altamash constructed the column and this information is often seen in history books.[16]

Sir Syed says that it cannot be a minaret because the column's door is north-facing similar to Hindu temples, while the doors of minarets are always east facing. It is known that the pillar begun by Sultan Alauddin had an east-facing door and, as is common in Muslim construction, was located on a plinth. This is unlike the Hindus who do not use plinths, a feature also missing from this monument. The structure's first level also shows evidence of stones being placed at a later stage and there is evidence of the bell-and-chain motif of Hindu temples on the first floor. Additionally, the inscription on this pillar is similar to that of Qutbuddin Aibak and Muizzuddin's conquest on the converted temple-mosque. From these various facts, it can be argued that the first floor is Hindu in origin. There is nothing odd in the fact that epitaphs have been inscribed where idols once were. It has become legendary that stones bearing praises of the king, Rai Pathaura, were replaced with inscriptions of the names of kings and Quranic verses. This belief has helped in continuing the belief that Rai Pithaura, apart from the fort and temple, also built this pillar in 1143. This may be true because Rai Pithaura's daughter was a sun worshipper, and Hindus believe that the Jamna River is the daughter of the sun, which is why visiting the Jamna is considered an important obligation. From this point of view, the pillar was first constructed as a location from which the worship of the Jamna could occur. In 1191, when the Muslims conquered the temple, they added their own epigraphs upon the building, and named Fazl ibn Abul-Maali the caretaker, inscribing his name near the entrance. The monument was raised higher at the same time that Sultan Shamsuddin Altamash expanded the mosque by adding three additional arches to two sides, that is, in 1229. The expansion is documented in inscriptions on the wall. Since then, the column has been called a minaret, with inscriptions on every level.[17]

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan further says that today there are five sets of ruins of this structure, but there is also no doubt that, as is legendary, there were once seven storeys, and the column was also well-known as *Minarah-e-haft-manzari* (minaret of seven views). Now where there is a railing, there once were crenellations, like those on ramparts. On the fifth level, there were doors on all four sides, and on top of that, a *Chattri* was placed to form the seventh level. Firoz Shah built the seventh level in 1368. He writes that at the time of construction, he had the column's height raised from the existing level, and had the construction information inscribed upon a door on the fifth level. After this, the column was damaged again. In 1503, during the reign of Sikandar Bahlul, Fateh Khan also had some work done on the structure, and had the construction status inscribed above the entrance to the column. It is famous that in 1782, due to a severe dust storm and earthquake, the uppermost levels fell to the ground. Stones from the original construction also fell and, in some places, cracked. In 1829, Captain Smith, under the orders of the British Government, restored the entire column. He replaced the crenellations with stone railings, and a beautiful brass railing on the fifth level. The sixth level was replaced with a beautiful stone *Burj* with eight windows, and the seventh level was cut away to place a wooden *Burj* topped by a standard. Unfortunately, neither of these towers remained intact. The stone *Burj* was taken down from the column and placed on the ground below, and the wooden *Burj* no longer exists.[18]

Sir Syed says that until today, the inscriptions of this monument had not been read. I have read all of them with the aid of a telescope. The height of the first column is thirty two yards, some inches, the second, seventeen yards, some inches, the third, thirteen yards, and the fourth, eight and one quarter yards. The total length of the existing five levels is almost eighty yards, and that of the stone *Burj* constructed by the English, which then was lowered to the ground, is six yards. With all the missing elements, the complete structure would have been one hundred yards. This is the height the column was believed to have attained when it had seven complete levels. The circumference of the column on the ground is fifty yards, which then tapers at the top to a circumference of ten yards. The monument is completely empty on the inside, with only stairways circling anti-clockwise along the walls. The first level has 156 stairs, the second, seventy-eight stairs, the third, sixty-two stairs, the fourth, forty-one stairs, and the fifth also has forty-one stairs, so that the total number of stairs comes to 378 stairs. It seems as if there have always been this many stairs, since there was no way to reach the two uppermost levels.[19]

### Jahan Numa Mosque or Grand Mosque

The Jahan Numa mosque was constructed on a small hill by Emperor Shahabuddin Mohammad Shah Jahan, with a delicacy and beauty that is beyond description. The foundations of the mosque were laid on 10 Shawwal 1060 AH (1650), the twenty-fourth regnal year, under the supervision of *Wazir* Saadullah Khan and *Khan-i-samaan* Faazil Khan, and every day five thousand masons, labourers, diggers, and stonecutters worked on the site. Despite this, it took six years to complete the mosque and a total of one million rupees were spent. A highly skilled architect built this mosque, where every door, wall, arch, niche, and decoration is filled with careful detail. The entire structure is built of red stone with inlay work in white and black marble, and white marble in the interior. The building has three domes of great beauty. All the domes are made from white marble, with lines of black marble. The mosque measures ninety yards in length and twenty yards in width. The *Qibla* wall has seven niches, and on the outside, facing the courtyard are eleven arches. One arch is very high, flanked by five arches on each side. All the arches are inscribed using black marble for inlay; the central arch has a *Tughra*, “*Ya Haadi*” on it, and the remaining arches bear an epitaph with praises to Shah Jahan, the date of construction and the details of expenditure.[20]

In this mosque, there are extremely tall and stately minarets on both sides of the arcade, which have attached stairs to reach the top. The minarets are crowned by *Chattris* with twelve windows, which are superb. From the top of the minarets, the entire city can be seen. The view of the city resembles a bowl, and trees and homes animate the scene. The northern minaret has fallen due to lightning and, along with the flooring of the courtyard, both of red stone, has suffered damage in various sections. In 1817, the English, during the reign of Akbar Shah, restored the minaret and the flooring. Thanks to God’s blessings, the mosque is able to accommodate such a large number of worshippers that they resemble ants and many cannot hear the voice of the *Imam*. Hence, Prince Mirza Salim, son of King Moinuddin Mohammad Akbar Shah, had a magnificent raised platform of stone constructed in the middle of the central arch in 1829, so that a *Mukabbir* could stand upon it and deliver the call to prayer and other sections recited aloud so that they would resound in the ears of all present.[21]

All the floors in the mosque are white marble with black marble inlay demarcating individual prayer spaces. The *Mimbar* is made of white marble and is of such beauty that it cannot be

described adequately. In the northern section's verandah, there are housed some holy relics of the Prophet (PBUH). This area is known as the *Maqaam Dargah Asar-ul-Sharif* (shrine of sacred relics). The verandah is very beautiful and pleasant. The courtyard is 136 square yards in area, and in the centre is an exquisite marble ablution tank, fifteen yards long by twelve yards wide, and in its centre is a fountain, which operates every Friday, on *Eid*, and on other holidays. At the southern section of the pool, in 1766, Mohammad Tahseen Khan Muhli Badshah (royal eunuch) had a small stone railing constructed, proclaiming that he had dreamt of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) sitting in that location. On all four sides of the mosque's courtyards are built beautiful *Iwans* leading into verandahs, pleasant rooms, and buildings, and on all four corners are towers of great interest, which have provided liveliness and light in the mosque. In the southern and eastern courtyards are clocks to indicate prayer times. The mosque has three fine brass-plated doors on North-thirty nine steps, South-thirty three steps and East- thirty-five stairs.[22]

### Sir Syed's shift to Modern Education

Sir Syed also faced many discouraging remarks or rather suggestive opposition from his own friend Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869). Sir Syed Ahmad, according to the Urdu poet Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (1935-2020), wrote to the poet Mirza Ghalib and requested a *Taqriz* (a laudatory foreword) for for the new Edition of his book. There was a *Taqriz* in *Asar-us-Sanadeed* (1847) but not *Asar-us-Sanadeed* (1854), though Syed Ahmad clearly continued to value forewords of this sort. Ghalib did write a *Taqriz*, but in the end Syed Ahmad did not include it in the book.

The poem written as foreword includes Ghalib's views on issues like English rule in India and the production of knowledge. An excerpt of the poem is as follows:[23]

*Look at the Sahibs of England,*

*Look at the style and practice of these. (13)*

*See what Laws and Rules they have made for all to see, What none ever saw, they have produced. (14)*

*Science and skills grew at the hands of these skilled ones, Their efforts overtook the efforts of the forebears. (15)*

Mirza Ghalib essentially asks him in his poem such questions: "What worth is there in these ancient texts? Why are you engaged in worshipping the past and nourishing the dead? Come out of it and see the variety of amazing scientific inventions the savants of the West have

pioneered like the ship, the electric wire, the matchstick, steam-powered machines and even greater than these a code, a law and a system!”[24]

Ghalib advised him not to waste his time and talent on what was dead but look at the present, and study what were modern states like England had achieved. It is also worth mentioning that legendary Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib was one of the key motivators for Sir Syed Ahmad Khan to get a firsthand knowledge of what was happening in the modern world by undertaking a visit to London and introduce it to the people of his country, especially Muslims who were socially and educationally left behind.

In 1869, he visited London and Cambridge and come back in India in 1870 and began working on his next major project of establishing a modern college science and learning based on Cambridge and Oxford. In the educational sphere the greatest contribution of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was establishment of Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College Aligarh in 1875. Due to his command in the educational field, he played a pivotal role in the Muslim renaissance in India. Due his achievements and scholarship he was made a Knight Commander of the Star of India (KCSI) by the British Crown in 1888. Mohammadan Anglo Oriental College Aligarh was given the status of a university in 1920 and called as Aligarh Muslim University.

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2. In 1862, when Syed Ahmad was transferred to Ghazipur, he purchased his own private printing press which became very helpful in his translations and other scientific and

- historical works. His press became more helpful for establishing “The Scientific Society” in Ghazipur in 1864. By 1866, the society developed a series of public lectures, and even published a journal, The Aligarh Institute Gazette, to keep members informed.
3. Mrinalini Rajagopalan (2016). *Building Histories: The Archival and Affective Lives of Five Monuments in Modern Delhi, South Asia across the Disciplines*, London, p. 9.
  4. In a series of publications called *La langue et la littérature hindoustaniens* (The Language and the Literature of the Hindustanis), Garcin refers to “the lives of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Bacon and Newton and the Persian poet Firdausi, the Hindu Valmiki and author of Ramayan, (and) articles on the famous monuments of Delhi by Syed Ahmad.” (J. H. S. V. Garcin De Tassy, *La langue et la littérature Hindoustaniens en 1870 (The Language and Literature of Hindustanis in 1870)* (Paris: Revue Annuelle, 1871). Garcin’s reference to Syed Ahmad in the context of Socrates and Newton shows that he thought quite highly of his Indian colleague.
  5. Alexander Cunningham (1871). *Archeological Survey of India: Four Reports Made During the Years 1862-63-64-65*, Simla.
  6. R. Nath, and Ajay Nath (2010). *Monuments of Delhi: Architectural & Historical*, 2nd rev. enl. & updated Ed., Agra, p. v; C. M. Naim, “Syed Ahmad and His Two Books Called ‘Asar-Al-Sanadeed,’” *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 45, no. 3 (2011), p. 675.
  7. Christian W. Troll, “A Note on an Early Topographical Work of Sayyid Ahmad Khan: *Asar Al-Sanadeed*,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 2 (1972): pp. 135-146; C. M. Naim, “Syed Ahmad and His Two Books Called ‘Asar-Al-Sanadeed,’” *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 45, no. 3 (2011), pp. 669-708. The second volume was translated into French by orientalist Joseph Heliodore Sagesse Garcin de Tassy (1794-1878) and earned Syed Ahmad an honorary membership in the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain in 1865.
  8. Iqtidar H. Siddiqui, “*Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s Approach to History and History Writing*”, *Sir Syed Centenary Papers*, Karachi: 1998, p. 120.
  9. Christian W. Troll, “A Note on an Early Topographical Work of Sayyid Ahmad Khan: *Asar Al-Sanadeed*,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 2 (1972): pp. 135-146.
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  11. C. M. Naim, “Syed Ahmad and His Two Books Called ‘Asar-Al-Sanadeed,’” *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 45, no. 3 (2011), p. 675.

12. Altaf Husain Hali (1994). *Hayat-i-Javed*, tr. David J. Matthews, Delhi: Rupa & Co., p. 51.
13. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (2011). *Asar-us-Sanadeed*, Urdu Academy, Delhi, pp. 152-54.
14. *Ibid*, p. 151.
15. *Ibid*, p. 152.
16. *Ibid*, p. 166.
17. *Ibid*, pp. 166-68. (The description of Sir Syed about the first floor of the minaret seems not exactly accurate. Facing the structure to the north, missing plinth and bell and chain motif do not prove that it was Hindu temple. If we study the Hindu temple architecture and compare with the first floor of the minaret, we could notice the thousands of differences. Moreover, it was neither a mosque nor the tomb but a simple minaret constructed in the memory of Qutbuddin Bakhtiya Kaki, a Sufi saint of that time. If we believe the theory of Sir Syed we can only support that at the beginning Rai Pithora might have started the construction but it was totally unfinished until the Turkish conquest and Qutbuddin Aibak and Iltutmish had completed the construction rarely using the stones of some Hindu temples like many other structures in Delhi.)
18. *Ibid*, pp. 168-69.
19. *Ibid*, pp. 169-70.
20. *Ibid*, pp. 272-73.
21. *Ibid*, pp. 273-74.
22. *Ibid*, pp. 274-77.
23. Mirza Ghalib and Murtaza Husain Fazil Lakhnavii (1967). *Kulliyat-i Ghalib-i Farsi*. Translation by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi.
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