

Emperor Journal of Economics and Social Science Research

ISSN: 2581-8643

Mayas Publication®

www.mayas.info

Volume-VI

Issue- XI

November 2024

The Muhammadan Educational Conference- A Pioneer Educational Organisation in India

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Abstract

Education is the most powerful instrument of development in the modern time. The function of education is to mould the characteristics of individual in order provide self and social consciousness. Education helps in transmitting as well as transforming culture through developing socially responsible personalities. In this way, it contributes for the integration, sustenance and reproduction of them. Education acts as Integrative force in society by communicating value that unites different sections of society. The educational institutions can help the students to learn new skills and learn to interact with people of different social backgrounds. The ancient system of Muslim education, chiefly constituted Hadees, Muhammadan Law, Logic, Philosophy, Persian and Greek Medicine. Besides, there is no occasion on which Muhammadan may meet together to converse, on the subject of national education, and think over the means with which it may be advanced. In order to better the condition of the nation, it's necessary that Muslims should try to do away with these deficiencies. This paper aimed to bring out formation and achievements of The Muhammadan Educational Conference in India.

Islamic education is based on religion, particularly studying *Quran* and *Hadith*.¹ The term '*Ilm*' (knowledge in Arabic) can have a broader meaning, embracing knowledge in general in a framework where

the teacher, the student, the school, and the syllabus all comply with Islamic values and teachings. During the period of Abbasid Caliphates (A.D. 8th Century) it added with some other curriculum such as Geometry, Astronomy, Astrology, Alchemy, Logic, Islamic Law, Geography, Arithmetic, Literature, Philosophy, etc., This education was imparted through '*Maktabs*' and '*Madarasahs*'. The primary education was given in *Maktabs* while higher education was taught in *Madarasah*.⁴ During the Muslim rule Islamic education received a great patronage of state. The Muslim rulers were established *Maktabs*, *Madarasahs*, and libraries, adjacent to *Masjids* (mosques).⁵ In later years the religious education was accomplished by scientific learning. The religious based curriculum became prominent in teaching learning process. When the Sultanate rule was founded in India, the number of *Madarasahs* and *Maktabs* were established. They emerged as a religious learning centre. The Delhi Sultans and Mughal rulers adopted Urdu and Persian as official languages and they became the medium of instruction in educational Institutions of that period.

The colonial era saw huge differences of opinion among the colonialists themselves about education for Indians. This was divided into two schools - the orientalist, who believed that education should happen in Indian languages (of which they favoured classical or court languages like Sanskrit or Persian) or utilitarians like Thomas Babington Macaulay, who strongly believed that India had nothing to teach its own subjects and the best education for them should happen in English. Thomas Babington Macaulay introduced English education in India, especially through his famous minute of February 1835. He called an educational system that would create a class of anglicised Indians who would serve as cultural intermediaries between the British and the Indians.

William Bentinck Resolution of 7th March 1835 declared the cutting of financial roots for oriental learning paved the way for the emergence of English as the most powerful language in British India, but also for the development of vernacular languages which the missionaries and *Madarasahs* were popularizing along with English in their school while propagating the religion.⁶

There was a change in the attitude of Muslims in the matter of education during the nineteenth century.⁷ The Community which was lagging behind in the field of western education and employment need an educational system which will cater their religious and economic needs; and such educational system was given by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. In fact

he had a broader vision and had put forward the need of the hour to get equipped with the modern education to improve the social and economical conditions of Muslims of India. The British decision to replace the use of Persian in 1842 for government employment and as the language of Courts of Law caused deep anxiety among Muslims of the sub-continent. Sir Syed saw a need for Muslims to acquire proficiency in the English language and Western sciences if the community were to maintain its social and political clout, particularly in Northern India. He began to prepare foundation for the formation of a Muslim University by starting schools at Moradabad (1858) and Ghazipur (1863). A Muslim school was established at Aligarh in May 1875, and after his retirement in 1876, Sir Syed dedicated himself to make it a college.

In January 1877 the Viceroy Lord Lytton laid the foundation stone of the college, it became Aligarh Muslim University in 1920. He organized Muhammadan (later Muslim⁸) Educational conferences all over the country for spreading the message of the importance of modern education. The first conference was held in Aligarh in 1886.

During British rule, Persian Language was replaced by English. Persian had been the main medium of instruction and a traditional language of the Muslim community orthodox muslim community hated the new western education and did not sent their children to learn what they called 'heathen Education'.⁹The Muslim community as a whole was against the introduction of western education system. Meanwhile other community especially the Christian took advantages of all the facilities available.¹⁰

The drift from religious education to western education had its own historical backings. The Aligarh Movement started by Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, which proposed to review religious and traditional value from a rational point of view and attempted to adopt consciously scientific methodology for studying various disciplines. Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan intended to carry out religious reform by means of Education. He envisaged The Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College to constitute three section one English medium, second Urdu medium, and third for higher studies in Persian and Arabic. But it so happened, that he could succeed in opening only one section which taught all subjects through the medium of English.¹¹ The other two sections could not materialize. However he tried to achieve his objective by founding an organization namely Muhammadan Educational Congress later called All Indian Muhammadan Educational Conference.¹²

Aims and objectives of the Conference

- To spread among the Muslims European sciences and literature and promoting it to a very high level and endeavouring to educate Muslim to the highest of level in these disciplines, and to think out the plans towards this.
- To find out the condition of Indian instructions in the English schools established by the Muslims, for the Muslim education, and to promote such instructions in the best possible way.
- To find out the condition of makhtabs for the teaching of the letter of Quranic text to the children of the common people and learning the whole Quran by heart, in vogue among them, now on the wane, and to adopt the measure for the preservation of and strengthening of the same.
- Those receiving instruction in oriental disciplines and theology from the Ulema of our committee, and they having laid it down as their aim to find out their condition and to adopt all possible appropriate measures for the continuance of such instructions.

Thus The Muhammadan Educational Conference appears to highly desirable that there should be held an annual meeting of people from different districts who wish for the improvement of their nation and desirous that their co-religionist should be education and prosper.

People from the North Western Province, Oudh and Punjab and also people from Bihar whose language manners and customs are much akin to those province and oudh should be admitted as members of the congress.

The centre of Head Quarters of the congress must be fixed permanently in one place and Aligarh seems to be the best place for this purpose but the annual meeting will be held at different place for instance, at Aligarh, Lucknow, Lahore, Allahabad and Patna by turns. At the end of each meeting the place for next year will be decide upon, and the managers of the meeting nominated.¹³

Eligibility of the members

People taking interest in the improvement and education of Muslims shall without caste or creed is eligible to the membership of the congress. Members of every district shall have the privilege of coming to annual meeting of the congress and enjoying all the rights; they shall also have the right of bringing their friends with them.

Members of each district shall have to elect one or more members as delegates for their district and the later will be bound to attend the annual meeting of the congress. The functions of the meeting will be threefold, and they will be discharge separately.

The Proceeding of the delegates¹⁴

The delegates shall have to read before the meeting a statistical report of condition of Muslims in their districts in which the following points shall have to be mentioned in detail

1. A brief account of the muslim population of the district, its town and its figures according to census
2. Government school and Colleges
3. Mission school and Colleges.
4. Private school and colleges.
5. Primary school of the old Hindustani system called Maktab.
6. Places were Quran is taught.
7. Venerable Ulamas, teaching according to the ancient system.
8. Government School for females.
9. Mission school for females.
10. The state of the ancient system of education women.
11. Association (Anjumans) of the districts, if any
12. State arts and manufactures of Muslims of the district.
13. General condition of the Muslims of the district
- 14.

Muhammadan Educational Conferences

There were twelve Muhammadan Educational Conferences which was conducted by the effort of Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan.

- First Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Aligarh, in December, 1886, which was presided by Maulvi Muhammad Samiullah Khan.¹⁵
- Second Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Lucknow, December, 1887, the conference was presided over by Moulvi Syed Imtiaz Khan.¹⁶
- Third Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Lahore, December, 1888, which preside by Sirdar Mahmud Hayat Khan, District Judge of Gujarat.
- Fourth Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Aligarh, in December, 1889, which was preside by Khan Muhammad Barakat Ali

- Fifth Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Allahabad, in December, 1890, which presided by Sirdar Mahmud Hayat Khan.
- Sixth Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Aligarh, in December, 1891, which presides over by Nawab Haji Muhammad Ishaq Khan.
- Seventh Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Delhi, in December, 1892, which was presiding by Moulvi Hashmat Ullah.
- Eighth Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Aligarh, in December, 1893, which presided by Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk.
- Ninth Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Aligarh, in December, 1894, which was preside by Muhammad shah Din¹⁷
- Tenth Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Shahjehanpur, in December, 1895, which presides by Mohsin-ul-Mulk.¹⁸
- Eleventh Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Meerut, in December, 1896, which presides by Nawab Imad-ul-Mulk¹⁹
- Twelfth Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Lahore, in December 1898, which presides by Fateh Ali Khan ²⁰

The 15th Annual session of Muhammadan Educational conference was held in Madras in December 1901 at Cathedral Garden, Teynampet. The efforts of the executive members who attended this conference resulted in the formation Muhammadan Educational Association of Southern India **(MEASI)**.²¹ As a result, Muhammadan Educational Society of Vaniyambadi and Madarase-e-Mazharul Uloom Society of Ambur were started subsequently in the year 1903 and 1905.

During this period Muslims started realizing their poor educational accomplishments and this had resulted in taking efforts towards providing education to their community. They understood the importance of united actions for promoting education among Muslims. During the first half of the 20th century the Muslims started drifting towards the English education. The post independence period witnessed a great impetus towards modern education. The constitutional provisions of

India, those safeguard the religious and cultural practices of Muslims. According to the Indian Constitution, education is included in Union and a State Subject. It is therefore, that both the Centre and the States are responsible for its expansion and progress. Education being the catalytic agent of progress and promotion in the society, the Muslims had made sincere efforts towards the growth of education. The Muslims philanthropist and elites started community colleges²² to provide modern education to their brethren. The Indian government supported to the emergence of minority institutions and this had an impact in Tamil Nadu.

The Muhammadan Educational Conference was responsible for bringing about several changes in Muslim education not only in North India but also in South India. Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam ("The Association for the Service of Islam") was founded in 1890, by few community leaders on the initiative of the then Prince of Arcot, M. Munawar Khan Bahadur. The Muhammadan Literary Society of Madras and Salem Muhammadam Educational Association were established in 1896 in order to promote education among Muslims. In 1899 the Muslims of North Arcot established the Anjuman-i-Ahle-Islam with the objective of physical and intellectual advancement of its members. Although these associations functioned independently in different parts of the Presidency they had one common objective that the Muslims should be promoted in the field of education.

II. CONCLUSION

Though this organization wanted to spread European sciences and literature among Muslims managed English and to strengthen instruction in oriental disciplines and theology taught in religious seminaries and *Maktabas*. The conference was mainly deliberate body its message did have a considerable impact on the thinking and working of Muslim institution in the country. Even the Government of India took notice of the demands made by the conference. The Government issue a circular to the local-self Government of the districts in every province, stressing that the *Maktabas* run under jurisdiction be induced to teach Urdu and Quran that the other schools in area, wherever Urdu in vogue, should also introduce Urdu that Muslim teachers should be appointed wherever possible and that separated agency for inspecting muslim education should be established.

END NOTES

1. Recorded sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad
- 2 Primary Education centre for Islamic education
- 3 Higher study center for Islamic education
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- 5 Yogendra K.Sharma, *History and Problems of India*, New Delhi, 2001, p.84
- 6 M.K. Akbar Basha, *Muslim Education in Tamilnadu 1902-1935*, *Proceeding of Tamilnadu History Congress, Sixth Annual Session*, Vaniyambadi, 1999, p.269.
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- 8 G.O. No. Ms. 1931, Public dated (Elections) dated 12th September 1946.
- 9 Dr. Major Syed Shahabuddeen, *Ibid.*, p. 174.
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- 11 Hardy, P., *The Muslim of British India*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1972, p-131
- 12 Granville Austin, *Indian constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 53
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- 14 A. Asaraf Ali, Genesis of Islamiah College, *Proceeding of Tami Nadu History Congress, Sixth Annual Session*, Vaniyambadi, 1999, p. 134.
- 15 . The Aligarh Institute Gazette, 4 May 1886
- 16 The Pioneer, 29-30 December 1887.
- 17 A Lecture delivered by Muhammad Shah Din, President of Ninth Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Aligarh, December 1894 (Printed at the Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1895)
- 18 The Pioneer, 31 December 1895
- 19 The Aligarh Institute Gazette, 16 January 1897
- 20 Shan Muhammad, *The Aligarh Movement, Basic Documents : 1864-1898*, Meenakshi Prakashan, New Delhi, 1978, p-783
- 21 Dr. Major Syed Shahabuddeen, *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- 22 This institution especially started for particular community students.
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