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The Contribution of the Muhammadan Educational Conference to Muslim Educational Advancement in India

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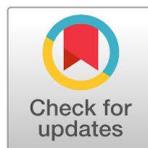
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***Abstract:** The Contribution of the Muhammadan Educational Conference to Muslim Educational Advancement in India examines the emergence, objectives, and impact of the All India Muhammadan Educational Conference in reshaping Muslim education during the colonial period. In the nineteenth century, Indian Muslims faced educational and socio-economic decline, particularly after the replacement of Persian by English as the official language under British rule. Traditional Islamic education, centered on maktabas and madrasahs, emphasized religious instruction but lacked engagement with modern sciences and Western knowledge systems. Under the visionary leadership of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the Conference was established in 1886 at Aligarh as part of the broader Aligarh Movement to promote modern scientific education among Muslims while preserving Islamic values. The Conference served as an annual deliberative platform that assessed the educational condition of Muslims across regions, encouraged the establishment of schools and colleges, and advocated the integration of European sciences with oriental learning. The study concludes that the Muhammadan Educational Conference acted as a catalyst for educational awakening among Indian Muslims, bridging the gap between traditional religious education and modern Western learning, and significantly contributing to Muslim educational advancement in India.*

***Keywords:** Muhammadan Educational Conference; Sir Syed Ahmad Khan; Aligarh Movement; Muslim Education; Colonial India; Modern Education; Maktab and Madrasah; Educational Reform; Aligarh Muslim University; Muslim Social Reform.*

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INTRODUCTION

Philosophical Foundations of Islamic Education

Islamic education is based on religion, particularly studying *Quran* and *Hadith*. 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*. 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). 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.

Colonial Educational Policies and Their Impact

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.

Muslim Response to Western Education

There was a change in the attitude of Muslims in the matter of education during the nineteenth century. 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 Muslim) 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'. The 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.

Formation of the All India Muhammadan Educational Conference

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. 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.

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 maktabas 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 form Bihar whose language manners and customs are much akin to those provinces 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.

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.

Proceedings and Functions of the Annual Sessions

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 delegates

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 where 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

Sessions of the Muhammadan Educational Conference (1886–1898)

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.
- ❖ Second Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Lucknow, December, 1887, the conference was presided over by Moulvi Syed Imtiaz Khan.
- ❖ 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 Din
- ❖ Tenth Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Shahjehanpur, in December, 1895, which presides by Mohsin-ul-Mulk.
- ❖ Eleventh Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Meerut, in December, 1896, which presides by Nawab Imad-ul-Mulk
- ❖ Twelfth Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Lahore, in December 1898, which presides by Fateh Ali Khan

Role of Muslim Educational Associations in Madras Presidency

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**). 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 colleges 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.

Conclusion

The Muhammadan Educational Conference played a transformative role in the educational history of Indian Muslims. At a time when the community was educationally and economically marginalized, the Conference provided organized leadership, direction, and a constructive program for reform. Inspired by the progressive vision of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, it sought to harmonize Islamic religious traditions with modern Western education, thereby preparing Muslims to participate effectively in public life under colonial rule.

The Conference not only spread awareness about the importance of English education and scientific learning but also emphasized the preservation of Quranic instruction and oriental scholarship. Its annual sessions created a network of intellectuals and reformers who systematically examined the educational status of Muslims and proposed practical measures for improvement. The impact of its deliberations was visible in the expansion of Muslim educational institutions across India, including the eventual transformation of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College into Aligarh Muslim University. Moreover, the Conference inspired regional movements and associations in both North and South India, fostering unity and collective action for educational upliftment. It influenced government policies regarding Muslim education and encouraged the establishment of minority educational institutions in the post-independence period.

In essence, the Muhammadan Educational Conference served as a pioneering educational organization that laid the foundation for modern Muslim educational advancement in India. Its legacy continues to be reflected in the growth of minority institutions and the ongoing pursuit of balanced religious and modern education within the Muslim community.

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