

Role of All India Muslim Educational Conference in Preservation of Muslim Identity and Culture: An Analytical Study (1906-1947)

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Abstract:

In mid-19th Century AD, there were a small number of educational institutions, not enough to cater the need of the people. The Muslim majority provinces such as; Punjab, Sindh, NWFP (now Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) and Baluchistan remained backward in modern education due to mistrust of British rulers. On December 27, 1886, a three-day gathering of those people who supported the Muslim education, met at Aligarh to lay the foundation of Muhammadan Educational Conference. Later, it had to undergo certain changes of nomenclature and was finally known as the All India Muslim Educational Conference. It was founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and aimed to solve the problems of education among Indian Muslims and to encourage the teaching of modern sciences and literature among themselves. The Conference Proved to be a form of parliament where educational issues relating to Muslims were debated by their representatives. Article in hand throws light on the very role of the said Conference in promoting Muslim Education which ultimately helped in the preservation of Muslim identity and culture in the United India.

Key Words: The British, Sir Syed, Muslim Education, Conference, Identity, Culture

In mid-19th Century AD, there were a small number of educational institutions, not enough to cater the need of the people. The Muslim majority provinces such as; Punjab, Sindh, NWFP (now Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) and Baluchistan remained backward in modern education due to mistrust of British rulers. On December 27, 1886, a three-day gathering of those people who supported the Muslim education, met at Aligarh to lay the foundation of Muhammadan Educational Conference.

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Later, it had to undergo certain changes of nomenclature and was finally known as the All India Muslim Educational Conference. It was founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and aimed to solve the problems of education among Indian Muslims and to encourage the teaching of modern sciences and literature among themselves.

From December 1906 onward starts the new phase of All India Muslim Conference. the Conference lifted its traditional ban on political discussions. At the Amritsar meeting in 1908, during the high point of the Muslim League's campaign for separate electorates, it demanded adequate Muslim representation in educational bodies, including university senates and syndicates. Beyond this, there were further demands, the reservation of teaching and inspecting posts for Muslims in education departments, the proper management of Muslim endowments, an increase in the number of stipends and scholarships for Muslims, the uplift of various aided Muslim educational institutions by improving the grant-in-aid rules, and so on. In addition, the Conference raised the issue of the educational and cultural backwardness of Muslims in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, Malabar, and Rajputana. Finally, the Conference worked to protect Muslim interest as various educational schemes were put forward in the late forties. Throughout, it acted as a pressure group, aiming to promote Muslim educational interest in government.¹

Representation in Academic Bodies

The Constitutional Reforms of 1909, and the provisions for separate Muslim representation that came with them, created a considerable growth of communal feelings which manifested the efforts to improve the provisions for Muhammadan education. Because they were not only more advanced but were also the more numerous communities outside Punjab and Bengal, the interests of the Hindus tended to prevail in all matters, ranging from the preparation of courses of study to the appointment of paper setters or examiners and from fee concessions to the award of stipends and scholarships relating to secondary or higher education. In the senates of the major universities of India, very few Muslims were represented as fellows. Even in UP, where Muslims were more advanced in education as compared to other provinces, the Allahabad University Senate seldom contained more than ten Muslim fellows out of eighty-one. On the Syndicate of the Punjab University, in a province where Muslims formed more than 55 per cent of the total population, there was one Muslim to four Hindus and

¹Abdul Hameed, *Muslim Sepratism in India; A Brief Survey 1857-1947*, (Karachi: University Press, 1967), 78.

twelve Europeans,² who hears us in the universities of India. Very few Muslims represent us in the senates and syndicates of their provinces. There is no one representing Muslims in Calcutta and Madras Universities.

The first statement of the Muslim demand for improved representation on the governing bodies of universities came in the Simla Address of 1906. In 1908, the matter was taken up by the Conference when it asked the UP government to increase the number of Muslim fellows in the Allahabad University and urged the nomination of Muslims for the positions of four fellows which were made then vacant. In 1910 and 1912, similar requests were made to the government of UP. In 1914, it demanded an increase in Muslim representation in the senates and syndicates of all universities and in the provincial textbook committees.³ Table below shows that in 1916 there were 46 Muslims among 455 persons nominated to university senates:⁴

Table I**Muslim Representation in Senates**

University	Total Number	Muslims
Calcutta	100	06
Madras	101	04
Bombay	88	07
Punjab	85	17
Allahabad	81	12
Total	455	46

Source: *Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1916*, 25.

In 1917, the Conference asked government to amend the Indian Universities Act in order to accommodate the principle of communal representation. Political opportunity was provided by the support of Muslim and nationalist political organizations for separate representation in the Lucknow Pact of 1916 and by government's desire to reassess its University policy which had led to the appointment of a Commission to look into the matters of Calcutta University. The Conference submitted a memorial to the government of India which suggested that in Calcutta and other universities of India, adequate and effective representations of the Muslims should be secured in the Senate, the Syndicate and other committees of the University as well as the staff employed by the University. It also demanded that the election of Muhammadan fellows by the graduates and the educational officers should be effected by separate Muhammadan electorates and that the Indian University Act and Regulations may

²Anwar Ahmad Zubairi(ed), *Khutbat-i-Aliya*, (Aligarh: University Press, 1928), 132.

³Anwar Ahmad Marahravi, *Murraqa-i-Kanfarence*, (Aligarh: University Press, 1935), 135.

⁴*Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1916*, 25.

be modified accordingly. In addition, it asked for representation in the governing bodies of all colleges and schools.⁵

After hearing thirty-eight Muslim witnesses, whom asked for separate Muslim representation the Calcutta University Commission recommended;

- a. That at least three of the seven members of the Executive Council Calcutta University, should be the Muslims.
- b. That four seats on the academic council and at least one in every committee constituted for the appointment of university teachers, should be reserved for Muslims.
- c. That four each on the Board of the Muffasil Colleges, three on the Board of Student's Welfare should be reserved for Muslims. The Commission urged the establishment of a Muslim Advisory Board to advise the University on matters affecting the interests and convictions of Muslim Student's and.
- d. That the new Dhaka University, which was under consideration, should have a quota of fifty per cent Muslim members on the Court.⁶

In order to give effect to the recommendations of the Commission, the government of India drafted a bill for the reconstruction of the University of Calcutta. But it was mainly the question of finance which delayed the introduction of the bill in the Imperial Legislature. Meanwhile, due to the constitutional changes that had taken place in 1921, control of the Calcutta University was transferred from the government of India to the government of Bengal. In July 1921, the Bengal Legislative Council passed a resolution advocating an increase in the elective element of the Senates, however in 1923, the Bengal government proposed amendments in section 6 of the Calcutta University Act 1904, to accommodate the recommendations of the Calcutta University Commission about Muslim representation of not less than 130 members in the Senate.⁷

Table II

Muslim Representatives in Calcutta University Commission

Electoral College	Total Members	Muslims
Registered Graduates	18	06
Registered Graduates Law	12	04
Registered Graduates Medicine	10	02
Teaching staff of Affiliated Colleges	25	04
Governing bodies Registered Graduates	05	01
University teachers	10	01

⁵Anwar Ahmad Marahravi, *Murraqa-i-Kanfarence*, 188.

⁶ Ibid.,

⁷ *Bengal (General) Educational Prog.* April, 1920(IOR).

Bengal Legislative Council	10	04
Nominated by the Government	33	11

Source: *Bengal (General) Educational Prog. April, 1920*(IOR).

Although the proposed ratio of Muslim representation was not incorporated in the Bill, the need for Muslim representation in the Calcutta University Senate was realized. However, the Bill did not become law and the monumental report of the Calcutta Commission lay buried on the shelves, except for the establishment of Dhaka University which adopted the revised form of the constitution. As the scheme for Dhaka University was formulated, the Conference also emphasized the Muslim communal interest, demanding that Muslims should have half the seats on representative bodies and half the staff positions. In response to the Dhaka University Bill, the University of Calcutta had recommended the establishment of separate Advisory Boards for Hindus and Muslims in order to deal with the communal issue. The Muslim members of the Committee concerned have submitted notes of dissent. In spite of these modifications, the government was of the view that this standard should not be admitted as establishing the principle of communal representation in the University organization.⁸

Muslim representation in the University of the Punjab was a continuing issue for the Conference. Every year, explained Muhammad Din of Gujranwala in 1922, two fellows are elected for the last twenty years, only Hindus and no Muslim has ever been elected. Hindus prevailed in almost all the departments of the province. In 1925, Niaz Muhammad Khan of Lahore raised the same issue. The Punjab University, he said, was Hindu University; the leading Muslim Punjabi, Mian Muhammad Shafi, had been defeated in a University fellow's election by a Hindu of less merit. By the 1930's Muslims were describing the University as a sort of independent tract in the heart of the British territory an island of lawlessness in the ocean of law and order.⁹In 1932, the state of affairs in the Punjab University drew the attention of the Punjab government. Subsequently, at the initiative of Malik Feroz Khan Noon, the education minister, the legislative council appointed an enquiry committee under the chairmanship of Sir George Anderson, C.S, C.I.E: to enquire about the extent to which the present system of university education meets the actual needs of the province, the amount of teaching, the composition of powers of several authorities of the University income and expenditure of the University.¹⁰

⁸*Bombay Govt. Prog. March, 1920*(IOR).

⁹*Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1922*, 82.

¹⁰*Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1925*, 63.

The committee recommended that in view of the large preponderances of graduates of the Hindu Community, registered and unregistered, ten seats should be reserved for Muslims, five for the Sikhs and ten for the graduates of other communities for a period of twelve years or four triennial elections. It also pointed out that the constitution of the University was ill-adapted to its present purpose. The senate was too small to ensure the presence of all the varied interests which should be represented in the supreme organ of a great provincial university. The sufficiently close and real contact with the sanctioning body. In a note of dissent over the number of Muslim members, F.A. Rahman urged that half the senate and half the syndicate should be comprised of registered Muslim graduates. In 1933, expressing its apprehensions about the Committee's report the Conference warned the Punjab government that the report would only be acceptable to the Muslims if their rights in the educational and administrative departments were protected through adequate representation, according to the proportion of their population. It added that to build confidence the Vice-Chancellorships of Calcutta, Allahabad, Agra and Lukhnow Universities.

The Senate of the Punjab University did not favour any of the major recommendations of the enquiry committee. It however, accepted the principle of representation of various local bodies and of the legislative council on the future senate. The opinion of the University on these recommendations of the enquiry committee was sent to the government of the Punjab early in 1934, but failed to attract its attention.¹¹

Concerned about the slow progress of Muslim students at the higher and secondary level in 1926, the Conference extended its campaign to the executive and administrative bodies of Allahabad, Delhi, Lucknow, Punjab and Patna Universities as well as the provincial intermediate and Higher Education Boards.¹² The Conference members felt that the large proportion of Hindu paper-setters and examiners affected the results of examinations unfavourably from a Muslim point of view. For example, in 1921, there were just fourteen Muslim members in twenty-one Subject Board of Studies in the Punjab University. Some provincial governments had already noted these facts with concern. In 1920 Bombay had responded by making a quarter of its examiners Muslims. In 1923, the Bengal government Boards suggested the following ration of representation for Muslims in West Bengal:

- 2 out of 5 members on the Bengal legislative council.
- 1 out of 3 among ordinary fellows of the university.

¹¹Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1933, 53.

¹²Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1926, 62.

- 1 out of 10 headmasters of recognized schools in the Presidency.
- A ratio of almost 50 per cent was suggested for Eastern Bengal.
- 2 out of 4 on the legislative council.
- 1 among 3 ordinary fellows of Calcutta University.
- 1 among 2 members of the Dhaka University Court.
- 1 head of a recognized *Madrrasah*.
- 1 among the elected members of managing committees of recognized schools.

The question of representation in the textbook and curriculum committee was also a key issue because of the delicate nature of their functions. A common complaint with regard to Muslim education was the inclusion of certain textbooks for English, Philosophy, and History, which contained material repugnant to Islam or the Prophet of Islam. Secondly, ridiculous remarks against Muslim rulers like Emperor Aurangzeb and Alamgir were often made by some non-Muslims (especially Hindu) authors. To overcome such difficulties, the presence of sufficient Muslim educationalists on the textbook committees was necessary. Expressing its concern, the Conference desired a review of the composition of the textbook committees in every province and university. Resolutions were passed in 1909, 1910, 1914, and 1919, urging the central and provincial governments to take appropriate corrective measures.¹³ The UP government had already instituted reforms along these lines in its *Maktab* legislation of 1907 and 1913.

By 1932, the issue had been heavily communalized in the Punjab. The Conference passed an extensive resolution demanding the inclusion of Muslims in the Punjab textbook committee for various subjects. Among other things, it wanted to break the Hindu monopoly over the profitable textbook publishing business. Rai Sahib Munshi Gulab Singhs press had been getting contracts for publishing textbooks for the last twenty-five years. Similarly, the textbooks for the Punjab University were published by the Hindu publisher, owner of the *mufid-e-Aam* press.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, the government was warned about the way in which educational quality was being sacrificed to communal conflict the present system of choosing textbooks in lamentable. It resulted in communal rivalry and unhealthy competition between publishing firms. Publishers have parties and followings and adoption of textbooks is seldom decided on merit alone.

The Anjuman Himayat-i-Islam Lahore, endorsed this view, a book is prescribed not because it is the best book available on the subject, but because it

¹³Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1917, 58.

¹⁴The Daily Inqilab (Lahore), 3 March 1929, 7.

bears the name of a particular individual, or it has been published by a particular firm. In this situation, book publishing was a source of commercial profit, particularly when the course or the prescribed books were changed after a year or two. Except in colleges and high schools providing instruction up to matriculation classes, textbooks were prescribed by the government or the education departments. Ordinarily, a list of recognized textbooks was maintained in each province and was brought up-to-date annually. Either special books were selected yearly for different classes from this list, or schools were asked to make their own selections. Previously, the Conference had been criticizing the yearly changes in the syllabus and had urged that necessary modifications be made after a specific period.¹⁵ In addition, it desired that the headmasters should not be authorized to change text books every year at their own discretion. Preparation of a uniform syllabus was also urged for both public and aided schools.¹⁶

In 1934, a resolution was also passed by the Punjab legislative council expressing its concern over textbook affairs. Consequently, the same year the government of the Punjab appointed an enquiry committee to examine the existing system of prescribing and providing books for use in schools. As a result of its recommendations, the textbook committee was replaced by an advisory board for books. Prior to that, in 1929, the textbook committee had been abolished in UP and books for classes V to XII were prescribed by the Board of High and Intermediate Education while the Board of Vernacular Education dealt with textbooks for vernacular schools and the primary classes of Anglo-vernacular schools. However, in other provinces, the provincial textbook committees continued to function. Matters were not helped when Hindus carried off all the prizes for the best textbooks written each year, and Muslims felt that this was not because of an absence of good Muslim authors but because the selection committee was dominated by Hindus. In 1931, prizes of rupees 3250/- on the best works on vernacular literature were given to Hindus. The Conference desired that at least 45 per cent of the income from the textbooks be spent on the publication of literature and two-thirds be reserved for publishing Urdu books.

To protect Muslim interest in education, the Conference succeeded in drawing the attention of the provincial governments towards the necessity of increasing Muslim representation in academic bodies, including university senates and syndicates, whereupon the Calcutta, Dhaka, and Punjab University Education Boards and the committees for the courses of studies incorporated some Muslim members to address the genuine grievances of the Muslim community.

¹⁵Anwar Ahmad Marahravi, *Murraqa-i-Kanfarence*, 198.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*,

Undoubtedly, the Conference played an important role in drawing attention to the cause of Muslim identity within Indian society.

Oriental and Religious Education

The preservation of oriental and Islamic culture, including the investigation of the instruction imparted through *Maktabs* or *Madrasahs*, was an integral part of the Conference's objectives. Islamic culture was under threat because few students wanted to study Arabic and Persian which were the main vehicles through which it was conveyed, these languages offered a poor return in terms of livelihood in colonial India. The only instrument for their preservation was the private *Madrasahs* under the managements of ulema who were sharply divided over the question of reforming their curriculum.¹⁷ There were two courses open to the Conference:

1. To draw the attention of Muslim center of learning to the need to revive these disciplines by reforming them in the light of modern learning.
2. To request the provincial governments to provide facilities to teach them as elective or optional subjects at all stages of instruction.
3. The object of the Conference in the first option was the production of cultivated Muslims, well-versed in Arabic and possibly in Persian also, including the knowledge of Islamic subjects like Hadis and Tafsir, in order to become enlightened ministers of religion and to devote themselves to research in these languages. Similarly, it desired that oriental and Islamic instructions should be made to confirm the needs of today instead of those of a by-gone day. Apart from this they felt such education should equip the student with the qualifications to earn a livelihood. But there was no prospect to choose the former course of action without the sincere cooperation of the ulema who in spite of realizing the urgency of the situation, were divided over the nature and extent of the reforming process. Moreover, the matter was not helped by the division which had arisen between the *Madrasah* trained and the western educated sections of Muslim society. Detail Such as:

Preservation of Arabic and Persian Studies

The Conference concentrated its attention on government pressing it to provide teaching in oriental discipline. In 1880, it protested vigorously when it was proposed that Persian be removed from the Allahabad University

¹⁷Abdul Latif Azmi, *Maulana Shibli Ka Martba Urdoo Adab Mein*, (Lucknow: Asia International Press, 1985), 119.

curriculum.¹⁸ In 1889, it supported the reorganization of the Anglo-Persian unit of the Calcutta *Madrasah* and stressed the need to retain Persian as an elective subject in the Indian university curriculum. Syed Amir Ali, then president of the Conference, was of the opinion that unless the *Madrasah* was reorganized along the lines of the Aligarh Model, no concrete results would emerge. Since 1896, the Bengal Government had been considering the proposal to introduce English, already taught as an optional subject, as a compulsory subject in the college. The students getting education from *Madrasahs* usually failed to find suitable jobs in government services due to their ignorance of English.¹⁹

In 1908, the government of India decided to allocate four scholarships tenable in Europe, three for the study of Sanskrit, and one for Arabic. In 1913, in order to promote research at a higher level, the Conference approved the idea of asking the government to award the degree of Doctor of Literature in Persian as was being awarded in Arabic and Sanskrit. Aga Abdul Kasim Irani, a professor at MAO College, made a lengthy speech in Persian while moving the resolution. He argued that Arabic literature was itself indebted, to a considerable extent, to Persian, which had contributed a great deal towards the promotion of the former. Although Persia has contributed little or nothing to modern science, medieval Europe as well as Asia was indebted to Avicenna, the great Persian doctor, a renowned personality in philosophy and medicine.²⁰

But the proposal also met with opposition, when Maulvi Rahim Baksh, president of the executive council of Bahawalpur State questioned the importance of Persian as against Arabic. He urged that it was in the interest of the followers of Islam to educate themselves in Arabic literature as the time when Persian was the court language of the Mughals had gone and indeed, had been replaced by English. He suggested that in lieu of Persian, Arabic be placed in the curriculum. Persian instruction was losing ground. Muslim students in Bengal had already experienced the heavy strain of learning the various compulsory and optional languages placed in the courses of public instruction. Addressing the Conference in this context, J.H. Taylor, Assistant DPI, argued against the burden of various languages like English, Bengali, Arabic, Urdu, and Persian and stated that the study of Persian had been in vogue for the last thirty years. However, the proposal for granting a doctorate in Persian did not meet with the Government's approval.²¹

¹⁸Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1890, 138.

¹⁹Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1899, 118.

²⁰Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1930, 107.

²¹Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1916, 07.

In 1913, the Conference asked the Assam government to establish an Anglo-Persian department in the Sylhet Government *Madrasah* following the pattern of the Calcutta *Madrasah*. It also endorsed the resolutions of the provincial Muslim educational Conference of East Bengal and Assam regarding the withdrawal of Calcutta University's decision to exclude Arabic text from matriculation to B.A. courses. In 1914, the Conference also protested over the decision of Calcutta University to exclude M.A. Persian and Arabic education from its courses because the number of students were so small. There have been sessions, wrote the Calcutta University Commission in its report, when there has been no student in one or the other of these languages. Moreover, the courses prescribed for the M.A degree in Arabic and Persian were neither so varied nor so comprehensive as those recommended in Sanskrit and Pali.²²

In 1917, the Conference asked Calcutta University to review the Persian courses of Maulive Alim and Maulvi Fazil. It was therefore, urged that the same facilities or options should be provided to the candidates for the oriental examinations of Calcutta University as those given to their counterparts in the Punjab University. The very next year, the Conference protested against Calcutta University's initiative of including Arabic literature and syntax in its Persian courses. It advised the University to follow the example of Allahabad University which excluded Arabic texts in Persian and instead prepared books altogether in Persian. Thus in August 1919, the Bengal legislative council asked the Governor-General for suitable provisions for the teaching of Arabic and Persian in public institutions.

The Conference urged various local governments to provide facilities to teach Persian and Arabic in public institutions. Earlier, in 1912, the attention of the CP & Behar government had been drawn towards the necessity of making adequate arrangements to teach Arabic and Persian as a second language in government College Jabalpur. In 1918, the Bombay government was asked to arrange Arabic education at school and college level and award at least one scholarship of Rs. 25 for the completion of B.A to a student who passed his matriculation with Arabic as a subject. The request was repeated the next year. In addition, it was desired that Persian be retained in the curriculum of the Vernacular Training College, Sindh as it was necessary for the promotion of Sindhi too. In 1924, the appointment of Arabic teachers in government schools and professors in colleges was urged as well as the award of scholarships to encourage Arabic studies, and the provision of Arabic manuscripts for higher Arabic and Persian studies as had been done for Sanskrit studies. In view of the

²²Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1913, 129-30.

lack of any provision for Arabic studies, the Conference persistently asked the government of Bombay to place Arabic education at par with Sanskrit and to arrange for qualified teachers.²³

In its press note of 13 April 1915, the Bombay government stated its decision to give personal allowances to certain Sanskrit and Persian teachers of scholastic repute. Meanwhile, an Arabic section was established in the Ismail College Bombay with the help of a donation from Sir Muhammad Yusuf. Previously, Persian had also been taught at the College but post of professor of the subject was later abolished because of a shortage of students. It was desired that this position now be restored in order to encourage Persian studies. To overcome the deficiency of trained teachers, the UP government was asked to include Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit as elective subjects in training schools as well as normal and vernacular middle schools. In *Madrasahs*, the Conference urged the UP government to appoint teachers for special Islamia *Makhtabs* after they received training in the normal schools.²⁴

From 1926 onwards, the Conference urged the government of India to establish faculties of Oriental Studies in all Indian Universities. Moving the resolution, Dr. Mansuri argued that India could follow Berlin which was making advancement in oriental learning. Muhammad Amin Barrister (formerly Lala Saghir Chand) was of the view that Arabic studies were a prerequisite to understand Islamic history and culture. In 1927, at the instance of Maulana Abu Bakar Shith of the Muslim University Aligarh and Maulana Ziauddin of Madras, the Conference resolved to appoint a sub-committee for compiling a complete religious curriculum.²⁵ The committee comprised Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, Sadr Yar Yang, Maulana Abu Bakr, Dr. Zakir Husain, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Maulana Muhammad Saeed, Maulvi Yusuf Hasan, Maulana Najimul Hasan, and Maulana Abdul Hafeez. However, the proposal to form a committee was later dropped when it was pointed out that the matter was already under consideration by a similar committee in the Muslim University.²⁶

Meanwhile, Dr. Ziauddin suggested the institution of a Special fund to secure Oriental manuscripts and archives from private and public sources in order to place them in the Conference's central library for the benefit of researchers. Endorsing his views, Syed Sulaiman Nadvi (who himself was preoccupied with the task of collecting Alamgir's royal letters) urged that the letters of the Muslim

²³ Ibid.,

²⁴ Anwar Ahmad Marahravi, *Murraqa-i-Kanfarence*, 199.

²⁵ *Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1926*, 89.

²⁶ *Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1927*, 102.

rulers in India be collected.²⁷ The suggestion was not new for the Conference as collecting manuscripts was a part of its original objectives but except in the first four years, no concrete effort had been made in that direction. Similarly, no further progress was reported later. It was through the efforts of the Conference that the provincial governments of Bombay, UP, Punjab, Madras and Bengal provided facilities for Arabic and Persian studies in teaching institutions.

Improvement of *Maktab* and *Madrasah* Education

The Conference was no less concerned to persuade *Maktab*s and *Madrasah*s in Bengal, UP, Assam and Sindh of the need to revive oriental disciplines in the light of modern learning. Bengal was the first province to attract the attention of the Conference. In 1908, the Bengal government was alerted to the precarious condition of Persian *Maktab*s. Comparing the nature of *Maktab* education with that of tools and patshalas, Maulvi Abdul Karim, Inspector of schools, wrote that while Hindu patshalas turned out shopkeepers, *Muharrars*, *Muhajans*, and *Zamindars*, the *Maktab*s usually bred *Mullahs* who by giving *tawiz*, gathered around themselves a flock of disciples. Endorsing these views, Maulvi Kamaluddin, superintendent of the Chittagong *Madrasah* said that very few of those educated in *Madrasah*s became Qazis in the court or teachers in schools while most of them opened Mianji's *Maktab*s in villages or became so-called *waiiz* and preached ignorance. The question of Muhammadan education, secular as well as religious was also considered in the MEC unit of Assam. Later the representatives met the Chief Commissioner in Shillong. Expressing his views on making *Madrasah* education more effective, the DPI Assam proposed that nobody should enter a *Madrasah* course who has not been educated up to lower primary standard in the vernacular and the literary study of Urdu should be postponed to senior course. Earlier in 1913, a government *Madrasah* had been established in Sylhet to provide advanced studies in Arabic/Persian. Initially, attended by fifty-four students, the number reached 168 in 1916-17. As a result of the Assam MEC's demand it was raised to the status of a senior *Madrasah*.

Sindh successfully experienced the *Mulla* school scheme. The experiment of *Mulla* or Quran Schools was initiated in 1873 by Mr. Fulton, the education Inspector of Sindh. He proposed bringing the most advanced *Mullas* or religious teachers under the influence of the department of education to draw up a code according to the standards, embracing the subjects of Sindhi, Arithmetic, Persian, and Geography. The teaching of Sindhi was made compulsory. Thirty-two *Mulla* schools with 482 pupils were registered in 1874, and by 1898 the number had

²⁷Anwar Ahmad Marahravi, *Murraqa-i-Kanfarence*, 43.

risen to 989 with 29,402 pupils. Later, the government stopped grants for purely Quran schools and from 1902-7 grants were given only to secular teaching schools. There were 651 such schools with 19,168 pupils at this time. The *Mulla* school was a striking feature of Muhammadan education and met with extraordinary success. This resulted in a marked improvement and the *Mulla* school became a formidable rival to the ordinary primary school maintained by the local boards. According to the scheme the '*Mulla*' was made a payment or remuneration of Rs 6 (later raised to Rs 10) per student. In 1911, a committee under Sheikh Sadiq Ali, Minister of Khairpur State, comprising G.M. Bhurgri, Muhammad Kadir Shah, and Deputy Collector and prepared a set of religious readers to take the place of departmental ordinary readers in the *Mulla* schools of Sindh.²⁸

In UP according to the Meston Scheme of Special Muslim Education the *Maktab* committees for provincial and district level were proposed to look after the *Maktab*s. If a *Maktab* desired a grant-in-aid, it had to teach a definite secular curriculum prescribed by the Director of Public Instruction in consultation with the provisional *Maktab* committee. The curriculum was to include in Urdu, with some elementary geography and Persian in the higher classes.

The Conference made efforts to elicit the cooperation of ulema who had been patronizing these *Madrasahs* in a traditional way urging them and the *Madrasah* superintendents to organize Islamic *Madrasahs* by opening training schools for the *Imams* of mosques. Simultaneously, in order to save rural Muslims from ignorance, students of Arabic were asked to educate them by popularizing education on Sirat (biography of the Prophet). Apart from this, for the first time in 1937, the Conference established a Shoiba *Madrasah-i-Islamia* (Section of Islamic Learning) on the occasion of its Jubilee celebrations. Maulana Husain Ahmad Madni, Shaikh of Deoband School presided over the meeting and for the first time, ulema from different schools thought to attend the meeting. The earlier efforts by Mohsin-ul-Mulk and Viqar-ul-Mulk respectively to establish contact by setting up an Arabic Department and to increase the religious content of the Aligarh syllabus had failed to produce any tangible results.²⁹

During the celebrations the Conference expressed its concern over the degeneration of Arabic instruction in UP. In various resolutions, while the people and the government were both asked to work for the uplift of Arabic instruction, the government was urged to make arrangements for scholarships, grants for railway fares and other concessions for *Madrasah* students, (to which the students

²⁸Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1908, 72.

²⁹Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1933, 33.

of public and aided schools were entitled) plus the right of representation on local boards and provincial legislative assemblies as allowed to those who graduated from universities. A revision of the curriculum in Arabic *Madrasahs* were also desired. Syed Riyasat Ali Nadvi was asked to prepare a directory of Arabic *Madrasahs*. In addition, in order to keep their education at par with that of public and aided schools and colleges, the Muslim University was urged to consider holders of Arabic certificates eligible for English language examinations. An interchange between graduates of the Muslim University and those of registered Arabic *Madrasahs* was urged together with the provision of scholarships.

Because the Conference's efforts to reform *Madrasah* and *Maktab* education proved fruitful, especially in the 1920's there was a great increase in the number of *Maktab* and *Mulla* schools in this period. Until 1917, there had been 9675 such schools *Maktabs*, *Mulla* and Quran which had 310,444 pupils and on which the government was spending more than ten thousand rupees annually. Between 1917 and 1922 the number of such *Maktabs* rose from 3000 to 21,000 and their pupils increased from 9000 to 21,000.

Stimulating the Study of Islamic History and Culture

In the 1930's Western educated Muslims came increasingly to realize that they had neglected oriental and religious education. Lamenting the fact, Ghulam Saiyidain son of Khawaja Ghulam Saqlain, principal of the Training College Aligarh, criticized the Muslim's defeated and apologetic attitude towards their own civilization. He argued that he had come to forget that they were the custodians of a clear and creative message through which they could discover their own world. Pondering over the ideal of true education he emphasized the necessity of learning modern sciences but also urged his listeners to utilize them according to the will of the Almighty.³⁰

Criticizing Syed Ahmad Khan's ideal of seeking employment through education, Professor Bashiruddin Hashmi said that we are bareheaded and yet have not crowned the Kalimah which Syed Ahmad had promised with philosophy in the right hand and natural sciences in the left hand. This urgency led the Conference to stress the importance of Islamic studies as well as Islamic history and culture. Earlier in 1916, the Conference had regretted Allahabad University's decision to exclude Islamic history from its curriculum. In 1931, it asked the Muslim University to set an example by opening an Islamic studies department. In the same year the Shoba Islami Ulum-o-Fanun Department of Islamic Art and Sciences under Syed Sulaiman Nadvi urged the Muslim University Aligarh to

³⁰Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1935, 100.

introduce Islamic history at Master's level. At the same time, the Public Service Commission was asked to recognize Islamic history as an elective subject in competitive examinations as were the histories of England, Europe and India.³¹

The efforts of the Conference met with some positive results as in 1939, when Calcutta University approved a scheme to open a Department of Islamic Learning. The Conference paid tribute to Sir Azizul Haq, Speaker Bengal Assembly and the Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, who was then presiding over the *Shoba* of Islami Tammudun-o-Tarikh (Department of Islamic History and Culture). Other universities were asked to follow the example of the Calcutta University and to open the departments of Islamic history and culture. The government of Bengal was also congratulated on the inclusion of Islamic history, philosophy and culture in the syllabus of competitive examinations. The other provincial governments were asked to follow the example.³²

The introduction of Islamic history and culture during the 1930's as a discipline in various universities and public examinations was definitely the result of the pressure of the Conference. Additionally, the opening of separate departments in Calcutta and other universities not only stimulated the study of that subject but helped to consolidate the Muslim religious identity.

Achievements and Effects of the All-India Muslim Educational Conference

To achieve the objectives of the Conference two main plans were made, holding the session of MEC and setting up sub-committees.³³ Muslim Conference has to hold its annual session every year at any suitable place where Muslim community was willing to take the responsibility of making arrangements for it. At its annual meeting, members would announce any plan. They considered suitable for the advancement of Muslims education. After discussions, they examined their proposal and would be adopted or rejected unanimously. It was to promote the Conference aims in which setting up sub-committees as far as possible in every town and village where the Islamic societies already existed, if the members of societies agreed. They would expect from time to time to send written educational reports of meetings concerning the proposal of schools, *Maktabs*, industries and agricultural conditions.³⁴

We can say everything else, which concerns the Indian Muslims in the town, villages or city would be discussed and presented in the shape of resolutions which were passed by the annual Conference meetings. It would be expected to do all they could to act upon, what had been decided. The problem was that the

³¹Anwar Ahmad Marahravi, *Murraqa-i-Kanfarence*, 181.

³²*Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1939*, 24.

³³See Appendix No. IV.

³⁴*Muhammadan Educational Conference Report 1894*, (Agra: Asia Printing Press, 1895), 110-111.

Indian Muslims scattered all over India, usually quite unaware of the educational conditions of their brothers. There was no way in which people of various regions could meet and discuss with each other on national education and their economic development. It was feared that they should move in different direction because of Indian Muslim Community, which had till conservative and stationary. It was considered if the Muslims energies divided, no concert effect produced on Muslim Society. They had adopted different ways for their educational progress because they lived in different localities, unless all the energies of Muslims were united to make concerted efforts in one direction. To achieve this purpose Conferee played a vital role. Conference aimed at the Muslims interests would be best served if able and competent people were assembled at one place to discuss the Muslims problems. It would lead understanding and unity among the Muslims of different Provinces.³⁵

It was the Conference's achievement to win many Indian Muslims' hearts over to western education. The Muslims were proud of their century's old cultured and social traditions and found it had to admit that sound and useful learning existed in any language except Arabic and Persian. By providing a forum for discussion and debate, the MEC silenced many of the doubts and suspicious which prevailed regarding English education and brought many Muslims to accept its value and importance. The Aligarh College for whose social image and financial condition the Conference did much to strengthen. It became the most popular institution of this new education among the Muslims and students flocked to it from all parts of the Sub-Continent through the annual meetings of the MEC particularly upper India. It came to be overlaid with a network of societies, committees, all was working harmoniously of the views and shared outlook among the educated classes of Muslims in all provinces. The bounds of Islamic brotherhood were strengthened and the way paved for Muslim nationalism which asserted itself in the demand for Pakistan.³⁶

Another achievement of the MEC was its successful campaign for the establishment of a Muslim University. In the forum of the Muslim Conference the scheme of an academic improvement was approved by launching a successful fund-raising campaign all over India. It created enthusiasm among elite and ordinary Muslims alike to achieve this end. It achieved a general condenser to break the deadlock between the radical and the loyalist Muslims which had been an obstacle in the realization of the University from 1913 onwards.

³⁵Abdul Rashid Khan, *The All India Muslim Educational Conference*, 10.

³⁶Ibid, 15-16.

The Conference's achievement for women was notable. In the inception of the Conference, after five years most of its members would never have approved the idea, debate, commenced over the need for women's School education with the advent of the twentieth century. It not only moved firmly in this direction by setting up the first girls' primary school at Aligarh. But also, as a pressure group in asking government to arrange such education far and wide. It also devoted time for examining such a suitable modern education for women. Later on, the leading role which it undertook in pioneering education for women came to be matched by the leading role, it played, introducing them to the public life of the community. It developed the "All India Based Muslim Ladies Conference (AIMLC) in 1914. It was an organization which aimed to promote women's education and the reforms of laws relating to women and consisted of members of the educated elite and professional classes. In contrast, the Women's Indian Association (WIA) and the AIWC, were not founded until 1917, and 1927, respectively.³⁷

Muhammadan Educational Conference worked for fostering the forum of education, by preparing Muslims for successful careers in a colonial state dominated by western culture, nonetheless made them proud of their Islamic culture. In harmony with this achievement, it worked to preserve the Indo-Muslim cultural heritage including the Persian and Arabic based system of education. It also strove to incorporate Islamic history and culture in higher education and to exclude from the curriculum offensive and objectionable books condemning Islam and the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W).

It should be clear that it did not seek to produce religiously oriented men but those who would be basically loyal to Islam and the Muslim community. It was also a great achievement. It generated among Muslims sentiments of solidarity which steadily drew the community together throughout most of India. Amity and friendship were developed through poems and lectures on Islamic history. Islamic culture and education were used to resist the strong challenge of allegiance based on race language and geography. It should be clear that, because of its essentially modern stance, it was always regarded suspicious by most of the Ulema.³⁸ Although it succeeded in gathering both modernist elite and privileged class yet it had received traditional oriental education in one forum. It was not until 1937, that it began to bridge the gap between orthodox religious leaders who were mostly ignorant of modern sciences, technology and modern educated classes and lacked Islamic favor. It must admit that the achievement of the

³⁷Ibid, 140.

³⁸Agha Hussain Hamdani, *Destawazat, All India Muslim Educational Conference*, 370.

Conference had some limitations. It was dominated by Urdu speaking Muslims and operated by them throughout the United India.

Conclusion

All India Muslim Educational Conferences revolutionized the educational and economic life of the Indian Muslims, through educational and economic prosperity; the Muslims got self- confidence which enabled them to launch a new thrilling career of dignity and nationhood. In short we can summarize the MEC effects as under:

1. Remove the mistrust between the Indian Muslims and the British rulers.
2. Acquisition of Western knowledge.
3. Promotion of Arabic and Persian knowledge.
4. Economic Prosperity of the Indian Muslims.
5. Defense of the Urdu language.
6. Political awareness of the Muslims.
7. Promotion of “Two-Nation Theory.”
8. Establishment of the AIML.
9. Evolution of Muslim leadership.
10. Honorable social status of the Muslims.

It was the effects of the Conference that the British Ruler’s attitude towards the Muslims became friendly and cooperative. It also united the Muslims who had inclined towards the acquisition of western knowledge. After acquiring the Western knowledge, the Muslims were well-equipped to meet the political, social and economic change. It defended the Muslim cultural heritage. It not only inculcated a spirit of nationalism in the Muslims but also to educate them and brought prosperity and progress in their ranks. Knowledge of English language and modern sciences enabled the Muslims to get important government jobs. With the passage of time the number of Muslim government servant grew at amazing rate. So, employment brought economic prosperity to the Muslim community. They were able to participate in political and Social Movements with confidence. Conference did a great service to Muslims in preserving their cultural values, which included Urdu language. The “Hindi-Urdu” controversy had convinced Syed Ahmad Khan that the Hindus were not sincere towards the Muslims. He issued a magazine entitled “Tehzib-ul-Akhlaq” in order to promote Urdu language. Eminent Urdu writers like Shibli Nomani, Mohsin-ul-Mulk, Vaqar-ul-Mulk, Altaf Hussain Hali, Muhammad Hussain Azad etc. contributed articles for this magazine. These articles, which were written in simple language promoted Urdu immensely.

One of its most effects was that it created political awareness among the Muslims. It held its annual meetings in various cities throughout the country. Political and religious leaders like Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, Maulvi Nazir Ahmad and Nawab Vaqar-ul-Mulk etc. took active part in these meetings. They discussed educational, social and political problems of the Muslims. It served as a Political mouth-piece of Indian Muslims. Its contribution to the ultimate partition of India, although not greatly evident on the surface of affairs, was not much less greater than that of most famous child “The All India Muslims League.” It was the standard bearer of the values and interests of the Muslims. The Muslim became aware of their political rights. They successfully faced all political problems of the Indian National Congress and the British. It was responsible for establishing the “Two-Nation Theory” in Sub-Continent, declared that the Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations with their own distinct religion and culture. We can say it created political and social awareness among the Muslims. Evolution of the Muslims leadership matched the Wits and Skills of their adversaries, effectively defended the political and social rights of the Muslims, as they became prosperous economically, they got respectable position in the Hindus dominated society. They occupied high government posts and started weeding powers. Many of those people took part in Pakistan Movement, so Pakistan emerged on the map of the world on August 14, 1947, which was the interpretation of the dream of Millions of Muslims on the forum of the Conference, after the passage of history, starting from the event of Lahore Resolution on March 23, 1940 to Independence Day of Pakistan.