

Notes

The Intellectual and Cultural Base of the all-India Muslim League – with Special Reference to all India Muslim Educational Conference

*Abdul Rashid Khan**

It is a known fact that an association or a party is recognized by its objectives and manifesto. However, behind the scene its key members are considered as the actual force, in this context the question of intellectual capability of the leadership becomes the point of high concern because it determines the whole sphere of activity. It seems clear that All India Muslim League took her genesis on the platform of All India Muslim Educational Conference. So a transitional as well as causal relationship form the core of the two bodies.

The major object of the Conference was to disseminate western learning among the Muslims after eliminating their suspicion and doubts against their alien rulers. Although the discussion over political issues was declared out of question, yet foundation of the Conference was considered by the critics of Syed Ahmad Khan as a political strategy to counter Indian National Congress. A renowned historian writes:

...in founding the educational Conference, Sir Syed was influenced, by the Indian National Congress – its programme and methods. Almost similar objects were at the back of the mind of the founder of the Conference. It was founded in order to provide a common platform for the Muslims of various provinces to come together. The object was to formulate a centre of public opinion for the entire Muhammadan ‘nation’ and then to spread those ideas among the community.¹

During the first twenty years, the Conference succeeded in providing a strong base by strengthening M.A.O. College, Aligarh, financially as well as educationally. The first generation of the graduates of Aligarh College, received western education and training in law and political studies in Britain. Whatever they observed there such as the

* Dr. Abdul Rashid Khan is Professor of History, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan.

¹ M. S. Jain, *The Aligarh Movement: Its Origin and Development 1858-1906*, Agra, 1965, pp.87-88.

political representative institutions comprising the parliament and the local governments, the nature of people's rights etc. led to the development of thinking and demand of liberal rule in Indo-Pak subcontinent. Sir Syed's advice (who never agreed with Badruddin Tyabji, Syed Amir Ali and others to strive politically for the benefits of the community) of refraining from politics was changing its dimension towards the growth of a political community after his death in 1898. In particular, Indian National Congress' attitude after the partition of Bengal was alarming for the Muslims and they began to think to create their own political forum. In this perspective, Conference's role between 1886 and 1906 focused on the pivotal educational issues, yet, ultimately awakened political instinct. The experience of the Conference as an educational forum remained successful in terms of somewhat acceptance of western learning by the community as well as providing 'a form of parliament where educational issues relating to the Muslims were debated by their representatives,' participating from different parts of the country.²

The political response was by then possible after seeking western tactics through education and the skill to confront the challenge amicably. The last twenty years (1886-1906) record of debates and discussions on the Muslim Educational Conference's forum provided a fertile ground particularly to those who wanted to jump into political arena. Muslim University Movement, actively started from 1898, created cultural-cum-political environment. 'Young' and the 'old' members of the community joined hands enthusiastically until 1912 when the question of affiliation separated them. Most of the issues discussed at the Conference forum were nothing but Muslim education. Defence of Urdu language, and other matters pertaining to cultural preservation in order to respond to Hindu dominance all had political leanings.³

Eventually Aligarh became the centre of Muslim cultural and political activities. Almost all community stalwarts acknowledged this fact. For instance, Syed Amir Ali who was in close touch with 'the forces governing the drift of Indian policies of the British Government' had suggested the foundation of a central organization in a place like Aligarh which focused on the intellectual life of the community.⁴ Resultantly,

² Abdul Rashid Khan, *The All India Muslim Educational Conference: Its Contribution to the Cultural Development of Indian Muslims 1886-1847* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.194.

³ Muhammad Amin Mahararvi, *Murraqa-i-Kanfarance*, Oligarch, 1935.

⁴ Abdul Hamid, *Muslim Separatism in India: A Brief Survey 1858-1947*, Lahore, 1967, pp.77-78.

the presidential addresses delivered during first five years of the 19th century set new dimension of the Conference. The addresses of Justice Syed Amir Ali (1899), Imadul Mulk, Syed Husain Bilgrami (1900), Sir Agha Khan (1902), Justice Badruddin Tyabji (1903) were much significant in terms of intellectual and political guidance of the community.⁵

In this context, it is not an exaggeration that an all India based organization, like the All India Muslim League, was the result of the Educational Conference. All India Muslim League was founded on 30 December 1906 after the annual session of the All-India Muslim Educational Conference was over and all the delegates attended the founding session of the League. In fact, the programme of the Educational Conference had been 'cut short by one day in order to provide a working day for Muslim League, since some of the leaders had refused to hold such important discussions in the evenings when they were tired after a day's work.'⁶ Obviously, the intellectual and cultural legacy shifted from education towards politics. Day after the concluding session of the Conference on 30 December 1906, Muslim leaders met under the chairmanship of Nawab Viqarul Mulk while Nawab Saleemullah Khan, Nawab of Dacca, was host to the meeting.⁷ Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk explained:

The purpose of which we have met today is nothing new. It arose from the day the Indian National Congress was founded, so much so that the late lamented Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, for whose sagacious and far sighted policy we will always remain indebted, was so moved by the growing strength of the Congress that he valiantly strove to convince that their betterment and security lay in abstaining from participation in the Congress. This advice was so sound that, though he is not among us today, yet the Muslim firmly hold to it, and as time passes we realize more and more that the Muslims should make the maximum efforts to protect their political rights.⁸

Soon after the formation of the League its first resolution of 30 December 1906 called for furtherance of its following objectives:

⁵ See Anwa'ar Ahmed Zuberi (ed.), *Khutbat-i-Aliya*, Vol. I-III, Aligarh 1928.

⁶ Syed Shariffuddin, Pirzada (ed.), *Foundations of Pakistan: All India Muslim League Documents: 1906-24*, Vol. I, Karachi, 1970. p.1.

⁷ MEC 1906.

⁸ Jamiluddin Ahmed, *Early Phase of Muslim Political Movement*, Lahore, 1967, p.80.

- (a) to promote among the Mussalmans of India feeling of loyalty to the British Government and to remove any misconceptions that may arise as to the intentions of government with regard to any of its measures;
- (b) to protect and advance the political rights and interests of Mussalmans of India and respectfully to represent their needs and aspirations to the government;
- (c) to prevent the rise among the Musalmans of India any feelings of hostility towards other communities without prejudice to the other objects of the League.⁹

This indicates the similarities of purpose of both organizations with the difference of education and politics. Major characteristics of those who joined both organizations represented western and eastern educated elite. There was a mixed intellect of the West and the East, however, with a single motive i.e. the political resurgence of the Indian Muslims.

Afterwards, Nawab Mohsinul-Mulk and Viqarul Mulk were elected provisional joint secretaries of the League. By a resolution sixty members committee, including members of the Simla Deputation, was appointed to draft the constitution and convene the first regular session of the League. Prominent leaders were Nawab of Dacca, Nawab Salimullah Khan, Syed Nawab Ali, Shah Din (later Justice) of Lahore, Mazharul Haq of Patna, Hakim Ajmal Khan of Dehli, Rafiuddin of Poona, Sahibzada Aftab Ahmad Khan of Aligarh, Syed Wazir Hasan of Lucknow, and others. Mohammad Ali Jauhar (later Maulana) was said to be mainly responsible for drafting the scheme and the rules and regulations of the organization and all resolutions passed by the League were published by him in a brochure called 'Green Book'.¹⁰

After adoption of the constitution of the League, the next session was held on 29-30 in December 1907 at Karachi. Members were to be elected from various provinces. When from Punjab two separate lists were presented, one from Mian Muhammad Shafi and the other from Mian Fazal-i-Husain, Sahibzada Aftab Ahmad Khan and Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah developed a compromise. In that meeting, Sir Agha Khan who had presided over the Conference's meeting of 1902 was elected as president and Major Syed Husain Bilgrami as secretary because of the regret of Nawab Mohsin-ul Mulk who continued as secretary of Aligarh College and the Conference. Later he died in

⁹ C. H. Philips, *The Evolution of India and Pakistan 1858-1947 Select Documents*, London, 1962, p.194.

¹⁰ Jamiluddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p.83.

October 1907. Haji Muhammad Musa, again a prominent member of the Aligarh school of thought, and Sir Syed Ahmad's closest ally was appointed as joint secretary. The third session of the League was held on 18 March 1908 at Aligarh in the house of Nawab Muzammil-ullah Khan, a renowned member and trustee of the College and the Conference. Shah Din of Lahore presided over the session. He had also presided the Conference in 1894 held at Aligarh. Bilgrami family of Deccan had close association with Aligarh; Syed Husain Bilgrami, better known as Imadul Mulk, presided the Conference session twice, one at Meerut in 1896 and the other in 1900 at Rampur.

On the entering of Muslim India into the political arena after the formation and agreed constitution of the League, Abdul Hamid has made these comments:

But the new platform was practically monopolized by those very persons who had persistently counseled total abstention from politics during the last quarter of a century. New policies involving a radical breach with the past are apt to lose their dynamism at the hands of established figures. It took the League quite some time to recover from this political anemia.¹¹

Comparing the Indian National Congress with the foundation of League, one can agree with Abdul Hamid's assertion that:

Congress came into existence nearly thirty years after the establishment of the earliest seats of western learning in the sub-continent(i.e. the Universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras) which had primarily benefited the Hindu youth, the Muslim League was founded about as many years after the establishment of the M.A.O. College which was meant to initiate Muslim generation into western thought.¹²

The record of twenty years of the Conference indicate its intellectual business of providing a solution of the Muslim sufferings. It paved way for the protection of political rights of the Muslims. In particular Aligarh University Movement, or the upgrading M.A.O. College into a Muslim University, had a long lasting political impact. Almost all sorts of Muslim elite addressed the sessions and meetings of the Conference including Sir Agha Khan, Justice Badruddin Tyabiji, Justice Syed Ameer Ali, Maulvi Rafiuddin, Maulvi Muhammad Habibur Rahman Khan, Sir Fazal-i-Husain, Shah Muhammad Suleman, Ghulaum Saqlain, Mian Muhammad Shafi, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Abdul Hamid

¹¹ Abdul Hamid, *op.cit.*, p.79.

¹² *Ibid.*

Hasan and many others who later became the founders of the League but provided all sorts of assistance to this newly born association.

What the Conference had earned and deposited during the first twenty years was cashed by the newly established All India Muslim League. So one can conclude that intellectual and cultural base of All India Muslim League was definitely provided by the Muslim Educational Conference. Both organizations worked together in the beginning and from the same headquarter and with almost the same leadership and spirit.