

Muhammadan Educational Conference And Achievement Of Mohshin Ul Mulk

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Abstract

Sir Syed's vision to bring together fragmented Muslim efforts for education led to the foundation of Muhammadan Educational Conference. This vision was passionately taken forward by Mohsin-ul-Mulk. He was a man of pragmatic approach and took initiatives to keep the spirit of the conference alive during difficult times. Sir Syed and Mohsin-ul Mulk may have been in disagreement on certain issues, but most of the times they found a meeting ground in their common passion for the betterment of Muslim community. Mohsin-ul Mulk's untiring efforts not only kept the conference active but also extended its scope to make it an all India phenomenon.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan concentrated his efforts on promoting Western Education among the Muslims of India. To meet their immediate needs, he succeeded in founding the Aligarh College. At the same time, he desired to set up an organisation on the pattern of the European Oriental Educational Conference, with the purpose of launching a widespread movement among the Muslims to arouse in them a love for education. The season which might have prompted him to give immediate consideration to this project was the inadequate response of the Muslims to the College. In 1886 only 20 students joined the College classes. Sir Syed realised that the College

alone would not be able to achieve the purpose of arousing interest in education among the Muslims unless their scattered and disjointed efforts were brought together on a single platform.

A meeting of Muslims from different parts of India was held at Aligarh from 27th December to 29th December 1886. The participants in the meeting unanimously agreed to set up an organisation, the Muhammadan Educational Congress with the following objectives-

1. To try to spread Western literature and Sciences among the Muslims and encourage them to attain the highest standards of education.
2. To inquire into the state of religious instruction imparted in English schools founded by the Muslims and ensure that adequate arrangements were made in this regard.
3. To inquire into this state of those Muslims who received education on a traditional pattern from the Ulama and find suitable means for enabling them to continue their studies and maintain that system.
4. To examine the *makatib* and explore the cause of their decline and find means to reorganise to create awareness among the Muslims for acquiring general education.
5. To make an investigation to why those institutions were decaying where the Quranic instruction and memorising facilities were available and suggest means to maintain and consolidate such centres.

The structure of the Conference differed slightly from the original scheme of Sir Syed, who initially desired to confine it to the North-West Provinces, Oudh, Punjab and the Central Provinces on the plea that the people of these provinces shared cultural similarities which would help in bringing them together in a short time according to M.S. Jain the Educational Conference was set up to counter the Indian National Congress. Some Muslims proposed that Sir Syed organise it on the model of the Congress, he brushed aside this suggestion remarking that the priority of the Muslims was education rather than politics.

Mohsin-ul Mulk's joined the Conference during its annual meeting of 1891 held in Allahabad. His delay in joining the Conference might have been his active involvement in the administrative and political affairs of the state of Hyderabad subsequent upon the death of Sir Salar Jung and the resignation of Salar Jung II that did not allow him to join the Conference formally.

His active association with the Conference started on his return from Hyderabad in 1893. He paid immediate attention to improving the working of the Conference and promoting it as a national body among the Muslims. He was elected the president of the 1893 and 1895 meetings of the Conference held in Aligarh and Shahjahanpur respectively. In his presidential addresses, Mohsin-ul Mulk endeavoured to dispel doubts regarding the program and working of the Conference.

He argued further that the Conference emphasised the learning of English only because most of the literature about *ulum-i-aqli* were available in the English language including the works of France and German writers. Mohsin-ul Mulk defended the Conference against the criticism that it was a useless body which had failed to do any good for the Muslims contending that, ‘seven years in the history of any movement was not enough to judge its achievements and evaluate its impact on society.

Mohsin-ul Mulk was fully conscious that the achievements of the Conference were too inconsequential to make any loud claims as most of its meetings did not yield any positive results and did little to such its lofty ideals. During its first ten years that is 1886-1895, the Conference passed 60 resolutions. These included the setting up of scholarship funds to meet the educational expenditure of the poor students, asking the provincial governments to allow the Muslims to provide religious education to their children in Government institutions at their own expense, asking the University of Allahabad to exclude the Cox’s History of the establishment of the British Rule in India from its syllabus as it contained prejudicial views about the Muslims and Collecting of data on the education of the Muslims to feedback to the Conference. The Conference adopted the resolutions to set up local committees at town and city level or work in association with the existing Islamic associations where local committees could not be set up. But these resolutions in spite of its importance could not be implemented. This severely affected the working of the Conference and prevented it achieving tangible results.

Moreover, in its first ten years, the conference confined its activities only to the North-Western Provinces, and Punjab. And out of the 8th meetings held in North-Western Provinces, five went to Aligarh alone. The interest of the people also gradually declined. The annual meeting of 1895 was attended by 547 delegates compared to 955 who attended the 1890 conference.

The financial condition of the college deteriorated after the embezzlement of the college funds in 1895. This situation demanded that immediate steps be taken to restore the confidence of the people. One of the effective means of achieving this was through the annual meetings of the Conference. But this was only possible if its proceeding were made lively and exciting. Discerning this need Mohsin-ul Mulk wrote a detailed letter to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan on 10th October 1896 wherein he lamented the decline of the Conference. During its annual meetings, few resolutions were moved, and most of those remained undisguised because scarcity of time which was wasted on reciting poems and eulogies. To rectify the mistake and improve the situation, he suggested 6 points;

1. The 9th resolution desired to set up a local committee at the city or town level to promote the aims of the Conference, the speeches made in that connection should be published and sent to all Islamic organisations and Muslims interested in the welfare of the Muslims with the request to put this solution into practice instantly.
2. An advertisement should be published in newspapers informing people if they wanted to move a resolution in the Conference, they should send them by the end of November every year. This helps the participants of the meeting to form their opinion on the proposed resolution.
3. It should be made known through newspapers that whosoever wished to recite poems in the Conference should submit the same to the Secretary of the Conference by 20 December every year, so that they could be presented before a scrutiny committee which would decide whether their recitation was appropriate or not for Conference.
4. The proposal which Beck presented in the 1891 annual meeting of the Conference regarding the proceedings of the Conference and which was published in the newspaper, should either be published verbalism or as a summary as that proposal was beneficial for making the Conference a useful body.
5. The condition that a subscription is changed for every visitor should be waived, and free tickets should be distributed primarily to those Muslims and Non-Muslims who could not afford to pay the admission free. So they might feel free to participate in the annual meetings.

6. The proposal of Beck regarding the collection of statistics on the education of the Muslims is implemented immediately. As a means of encouragement, 2 or 3 prizes are announced for those people whose reports excelled in accuracy and authenticity.

A special meeting of the conference was convened at Aligarh to find means to fulfil the objectives of the Conference. Mohsin-ul Mulk presents before the participants his point of view regarding the working of the Conference. He warned that the Conference was doomed to failure unless it was reactivated. He emphasised the need to set up local committees at city or town level which would not only help to collect the data on the state of the Muslims education but would also help to spread the cause of knowledge among the masses.

Mohsin-ul Mulk also discussed in detail the proposals of Beck in 7th meeting of the conference and suggested a thorough survey in a different part of the country to learn why the Muslims were not receiving a proper education.

Mohsin-ul Mulk also proposed to divide the Conference into several sections on the pattern of the European Conferences starting that this division would evoke a real sense of participation among the people in the deliberations of the Conference.

Mohsin-ul Mulk warned that Conference had reached a stage where it should either be closed or a new spirit infused into it. He made two suggestions-

1. An effort should be made to enliven the proceedings of the Conference and remove the complaints of the people. He also suggested that the recitation of poems and eulogies be limited, more time be allocated for presenting the resolution.
2. Several men should be selected to spread the message of the Conference to the far-flung areas of the country. They should brief about movies of the Conference and remove misunderstandings spread by its critics.

He emphasised the need to strengthen the bonds of friendship with contemporary Islamic Associations to promote the aims of the Conference on a broader scale.

Sir Syed agreed to form an independent section to undertake a cense regarding Muslim's education. Mohsin-ul Mulk suggest the division of the Conference into sections, the meeting

agreed setting up 4th section- a) statistics, b) scholars, c) women education, d) general education. Every article was to work independently, having a permanent secretary within 3 to 5 members.

The committee also accepted the proposal of Mohsin-ul Mulk to set up a central standing committee of the Conference. He was elected its joint Secretary. Following were its objectives.

- I. To promote the interests of the Conference and find ways to enhance its membership and persuade the people to participate in its meetings.
- II. To draw the attention of the members of the Conference to its practical aspects and see whether its resolutions were successfully implemented or not.
- III. To set up local standing committees in every city and a big town to popularise the conference all over the country.
- IV. To guide the local committee in drafting rules and regulations.
- V. To persuade the Islamic Associations which establish links with the local standing committees and assist these committees in their efforts to popularise the Conference
- VI. To establish contacts with people of those areas where no Islamic Association existed.
- VII. To review the reports of its members.
- VIII. To send a report of its proceedings to the secretary of the Conference along with a summary of the circumstances of local committee.
- IX. To send a copy of the report of its annual meeting to the local committees and members of the Conference, the central standing committee and local committee.

Mohsin-ul Mulk toured Bombay, Poona, Delhi, Muzzaffarnagar, Shahjahanpur, Bareilly, Muradabad and Rampur. He addressed public gatherings in which he explained in detail the aims of the Conference. At some places, he faced bitter opposition from the ‘ulama who seemed appalled at his efforts to revive the campaign for the promotion of western education among the Muslims. Apart from the resistance of the ‘ulama, Mohsin-ul Mulk found an encouraging response among the Muslims.

Mohsin-ul Mulk told Sir Syed that instead of mourning the condition of the Muslims, an effort should be made to use the existing resources. There were several Muslims who were ready to help the Conference wholeheartedly by they lacked proper guidance.

The efforts of Mohsin-ul Mulk paid dividends, and the 1896 annual meeting of the Conference turned out to be a real seal success. In this meeting the Conference adopted 7th resolutions. This essential resolution was the ratification of the division of the select committee regarding the setting up of the central standing committee at Aligarh and the local committees at city or town level and creating four sections in the conference and employs a clerk for the committee. The meeting asked every local committee to arrange a sum of Rs 10/- per month to sponsor poor students to continue his studies at college level.

In spite of momentum, the Conference failed to hold its annual meeting in 1897, because of Sir Syed's recalcitrant attitude during his last days. This deprived him of the support of his friends including Mohsin-ul Mulk who even left Aligarh in disgust. Non-holding of the annual meeting virtually amounted to the closure of the Conference. Within two weeks after Sir Syed's death, Mohsin-ul Mulk called a meeting of the Conference on 13th April 1899 at Aligarh. He contacted the Muslims of Punjab. The Anjuman Islamia Punjab readily accepted this proposal and assured Mohsin-ul Mulk of its full support in his efforts to revive the Conference. For this the meeting of the Conference was held in Lahore in 1890, which was attended by 1000 delegates. The success at Lahore encouraged him to extend the influence of the Conference beyond the boundaries of the North-western Provinces and Punjab. This policy not only defeated the very purpose of launching the educational movement among the Muslims but also caused an impression among the Muslims that the Conference was concerned only with the welfare of the people of North India. During his Secretaryship, altogether 9th meetings were held out of which only one was held at Aligarh; the rest went to Lahore, Calcutta, Rampur, Madras, Delhi, Bombay, Lucknow and Dacca.

During these meetings, he understands their problems and demonstrates his concern local needs and aspirations. In its annual meeting of at Calcutta, several resolutions adapted dealing with the individual needs of Bengali Muslims. It asked the govt. To introduce reforms in the Anglo-Persian department of the Calcutta *Madarsa*; i) to effect changes in the curriculum of the schools in Bengal which was unsuitable for the Muslim youth, ii) to revise the curriculum of

primary education in Bengal, iii) to give scholarships from the Mohsin fund to those students who wished to study at Aligarh Collage.

In its annual meeting of 1901 held in Madras, Conference adopted several resolutions aiming to improve their educational condition.

A first step to improve the condition of the Muslims of Madras, a fund for the welfare of the Muslims of south India was opened; this was to collect subscriptions for five years. The fund aimed to sponsor students for higher education and make an effort to set up schools and colleges for educating the children of the Muslims. Out of its 22 resolutions, eight dealt exclusively with promoting the education among the Muslims of Eastern Bengal and improving their condition.

During Mohsin-ul Mulk's time, the Conference adopted resolutions to promote technical education among the Muslims. This was a marked departure for sir Syed's policy. He had opposed the spread of professional knowledge among the Muslims and thwarted any attempt to adopt resolutions in its favour on the platform of the Conference. The Conference also decided to send students to Europe every year to receive higher education at the Conference's expense. Draw the attention of the Muslims to the desirability of their receiving an education in law and medicine where their number was falling.

The conference also draws the attention of the Government to the teaching of Urdu and Arabic. Mohsin-ul Mulk himself moved a resolution in favour of Urdu in the 1899 meeting of the conference demanding that the government maintain its status quo in the North-Western Provinces. In 1904 meeting, it required that Persian should not be excluded from the course of the University.

The administrative structure of the Conference was invigorated. The local standing committees were asked to send regular reports to the central standing committee. During Mohsin-ul Mulk's secretaryship, three more sections were added to the conference that is a section for social reform, Urdu and miscellaneous matters. Khwaja Ghulam Saqlain was appointed secretary to the first section. He undertook tours and addressed public meetings, wherein he urged the giving up social evils and superstitious behaviour. In 1903, he started publishing a journal entitled '*asr-i-jadid*' to streamline the process of reforming society. The Urdu section was entrusted to Shibli Naumani. It successfully worked for two years and

published several books which included: i) biography of Shaikh Abdul Haqq Dehalwi; and ii) a translation of '*tabqat-al-itibba*' by Allama Ibn-i-Abl Adkya Khwarajl. After him Maulawi Habibur Rahman Sherwani was appointed.

Following decisions were taken to stimulate the activities of the Conference.

1. A central office was to be established with a library. This kept government reports and book which provided information about education to its readers. This office has two-fold duties—a) to supply information regarding technical and higher education imparted in foreign countries; b) to do correspondence with other educational institution in India.
2. An agent was to be appointed who would report on the state of secular and religious among the Muslims and to render help in establishing an institution where it was necessary.
3. The work of the agent would be looked after by the central office which would do correspondence with him and the schools started by him and to arrange for the inspiration of these schools

The greatest of Mohsin-ul Mulk's achievements was to widen the scope of the Conference to every part of India. He also decided to take the message of Aligarh to Muslims of Sind who were educationally very backwards. The Aligarh Movement was meant not only for the Muslims of Northern India but also built its image on a national level among the Muslims.

Referencing

- I. "Muhammadan Educational Congress", *Akhbar-i-'am*, 19 November 1890, *UPNNP* (1890)
- II. *AIG*, 4 May, 1886.
- III. See the proceedings of the 1st meeting of Muhammadan Educational Congress, held from 27 December to 29 December 1886, quoted in *PSTC*, pp. 1-2.
- IV. Iftikhar Ahmad, *Muhammadan College History*, pp.280-83.
- V. See Sir Syed's article in the *AIG*, 4 May 1886.
- VI. See Jain, *The Aligarh Movement*, pp.87-89.
- VII. Report of the Annual Meeting of the Conference for the year 1889, (Aligarh, 1890), p.69.
- VIII. Resolution no. 6, adopted in the third annual meeting of the Conference, *PSTC*, p. 4.
- IX. Resolution no. 4 of the fourth annual meeting of the Conference, *Ibid*, p. 31.

- X. For a detailed discussion on this issue, see Mohsin ul-Mulk (Ed.), *Khulasa' Karwai Yazdah Sala 1886-1896*, Muhammadan Anglo-oriental Conference, (Urdu), Agra, 1897, pp.16-31.
- XI. The annual meetings for the year 1886, 1889, 1891, 1893 and 1894 were held in Aligarh.
- XII. For the full text of Mohsin ul-Mulk's letter, see *Khat Nawab Mohsin ul-Mulk Maulawi Saiyid Mahdi Ali Khan Bahadur Darbab Muhammadan Anglo-oriental Educational Conference, Ma'Naqal resolution no. 9 Ilja s Daum Conference*, held in Lucknow), Agra.
- XIII. For details of his tours, see Mohsin ul-Mulk's Report, submitted to the Secretary of Central Standing Committee, Haji Isma'il Khan on 22 December 1896, reproduced in the *AIG*, 2 January 1897.
- XIV. This resolution was moved by Sir Syed and seconded by Mohsin ul-Mulk, see *PSTC*, p.62. Zakaria has however wrongly attributed it to Beck and Morison, see *Op. Cit.*, p.193.
- XV. *AIG*, 28 August 1894, also see Mohsin ul-Mulk's speech delivered on 3 January 1903 at Delhi, quoted in *MSL*, pp.484-85.
- XVI. See resolution no. 3, 10, 11 and 15, *PSTC*, pp.73-75.
- XVII. See resolution no. 5, *Ibid*, p. 84.
- XVIII. See resolution no. 8, *Ibid*, p. 85.
- XIX. See resolution No. 2,3,4,5,6,12, *Ibid*, pp.114-16.
- XX. See resolution no. 18,2,13,13 and 4 in the annual meetings of the conference for the year 1899, 1900, 1901, 1903 and 1904 respectively.
- XXI. See resolution 16, and I adopted in the 1899 and 1900 meetings of the Conference, *Ibid*, pp.76 and 79.
- XXII. See resolution no. 10 adopted in the 1903 meeting of the Conference, *Ibid*, pp.97-98.
- XXIII. See resolution no. 10 adopted in the 1901 meeting of the Conference, *Ibid*, p. 85.
- XXIV. The speech of Mohsin ul-Mulk delivered in connection with this resolution will be discussed in the next chapter.
- XXV. See Report of the Conference for the year 1904, p.119.
- XXVI. Rasley Conference Muta'alliqa Tamaddun Va Mu'asharat, Aligarh N.D. p. 5. Also see *MLS*, p.500; also see Mohsin ul-Mulk's speech delivered on 30 December 1903 endorsing resolution no. 9, *MLS*, p.499-500.
- XXVII. Mustaq Husain, *Baqiyat-i-Shibli*, Lahore 1965, pp.53-55.
- XXVIII. See resolution no. First and two adopted in the 1904 meeting of the Conference, *Ibid*, pp.95-96