

Muslim Reluctance to Western Education in Madras Presidency - A Review

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Abstract

Education is an indispensable requirement for the social, economic, and political development of any community. But the divergent Muslim communities in the Madras Presidency had remained aloof from the modern Western system of education of the British Government. It is interesting to note that the Muslim religious inclination had a say in remaining aloof from the Western system of education which was considered a taboo to the community and had resulted in their backwardness in the social ladder. This paper is a review of Muslim educational conditions in the Madras Presidency and brings forth the slow phase of their educational attainments and its implications.

Keywords: British, Community, Education, Muslims, Muhammadans

1. Introduction

Muslims had their own educational system with their Maktabas and Madrassas to cater their needs of acquirement of knowledge, which is in general religious and did not meet the needs of the modern developments and necessities. The political condition during the British rule had not attracted the Muslims in the field of administrative services due to their backwardness in the field of modern education. We find that time and again the British government had reported about the educational status of the Muslims and put efforts in attracting them to the changing trends in the field of education. The reluctance of the Muslims in pursuing the English education made them unqualified for the public employment which in turn made the British administration indisposed to employ Muslims. The outcome of British support towards Muslim education had social and political consequences.

2. Muslim Attachment to Traditional Education

The Muslims have their own Madarassas attached to the

mosques. The course of study in the Muhammadan indigenous schools consists almost exclusively of instruction in religious works. First, the pupil is taught the rudiments of the Arabic language and he then begins the Quran. When this is finished, he receives instructions in Urdu in such books as Sirathul Islam, Sirathan Naiyat, and Zanajeer, all of which are of Islamic knowledge. Persian is also continued to be taught in advanced schools. No instructions are given in history, geography or arithmetic¹. Until the last quarter of the 19th century, the Muslims were working for the revival of indigenous education. The establishment of Madrasa-e-Kalam, by Nawab Mohammad Ali Walajah I, Madrasa-i-Azam at Madras by Nawab Ghose Khan Bahadur Walajah V, Al-Madrasat-al Ursia by Syed Mohammed Mapillai Labbai Alim Sahib, the Madrasa-e-Manbaul Anwar, Rivaz-al-Jinan-fi-Uloom-al-Adyan by Peer Mohamed at Pettai in Tinnelvely district, Madrasa-Baqiyat-al-Salihah at Vellore by Moulana Shah Abdul Wahab, etc. all were established to promote religious education². The Muslim madarassas which were indigenous schools were not brought under the supervision of the education department of the Madras Government.

3. Muslim Reluctance to Western Education

The educational condition of the Muslims had always turned ahead the attention of the British Government of India. In proportion to the other communities, the Muhammadans had not availed the educational advantages offered by the British Government in almost all parts of the country except the North West Provinces and Punjab. It was reported that "It is much to be regretted that so large and important a class, possessing classical literature replete with works of profound learning and great value, and counting among its members a specially devoted to the acquisition and diffusion of knowledge, should stand aloof from active co-operation with our educational system and should lose the advantages, both material and social, which others enjoy. His Excellency in Council believed that secondary and higher education conveyed with a vernacular and rendered more accessible, coupled with a more systematic encouragement and recognition of Arabic and Persian literature, would be not only acceptable to the Muhammadan community but would enlist the sympathies of the enlightened of its members on the side of education"³. This shows that the Muslim community was not interested in acquiring the Western system of education.

In 1871, a report was submitted by the Director of the Public Instruction to the Chief Secretary, which reads "It is no doubt very much to be regretted that the Muhammadan community should as a general rule, stand aloof from active co-operation in the educational labors now carried on under the auspices of Government. I fear however it will be a work involving much time and difficulty to bring about change in the feelings and course of action of the Mussalmans of this Presidency. Moreover, the intellectual view of Mussalman will have to be greatly modified to allow of their seeking such education. There is nothing to prevent grants being given to Mussalman schools, the reason for such grants not having been issued is simply that they have never been applied for. On the whole, then I am of the opinion that it is not practicable at present for this department to do much more than it is doing for the education of Mussalmans. Musalmans were exempted from fees increase. Separate 2 schools were maintained by the Government"⁴. Thus, we find that modern education had not fascinated the Muslims in general. We find that the Tamil-speaking Muslims

too, preoccupied with their commercial and religious pursuits, did not realize the emerging importance of Western Education. Anyhow they seem not to have found it useful in their traditional occupations. So, they kept away from Western education and continued to instruct their children in their local tongue, in the traditional *Quranic* schools, where they acquired some rudimentary knowledge and became familiar with the simple but central principles of Islam like belief in one God⁵. With the political debacle of Muslim rulers the Urdu-speaking Muslims, who were attached to the learning of Arabic and Persian, lost the opportunities in the newly installed British Government. The British being considered as usurpers the Muslims were reluctant and hostile to the British system of education. The upper caste Hindus⁶ were making use of the educational facilities, provided by British and Christian missionaries, while Muslims due to religious sentiments had decided not to learn English, which was considered the language of infidels by them⁷.

4. The Slow Progress of Acquisition of Modern Education and its Consequence

The Madarasa-i-Azam recognized the growing importance of English and secular studies and added them its Curriculum. The Nawab of Arcot was perhaps the first among the Indian Muslims to implement such a measure⁸. In 1870-71, not a single Muslim was graduated from Madras University⁹. On finding the pitiable condition of the Muslim education the Governor-in-Council consequently directed the Director of the Public Instruction to start elementary schools in Arcot and Vellore and also to take necessary steps to start corresponding classes without any delay for the benefit of the Muhammadans.

In 1872, for the exclusive benefit of Muhammadans, the Madrassa-i-Azam and the Harris School was established. Both these institutes provided the Muhammadan youth of Madras with an opportunity to get a good school education and made themselves fit to pursue their higher studies that were provided in the Presidency College. In 1872, despite these advantages, only one Muhammadan student had evinced adequate perseverance in his studies to acquire the Bachelor of Arts degree. It was in the same year the Government extended exceptional educational facilities to the Muhammadans¹⁰.

The laggardness of Muslims in the sphere of education resulted in missing their opportunities in the public employment. The rationale behind the failure of Muslims to succeed in getting hold of public employment was an alleged notion among the community that whether qualified or unqualified the Government and its officers were reluctant to employ Muhammadans, in the public services¹¹. As a result of neglecting modern education, the creams of the Muslim community, except some princes, were thrown into a desperate position and incidentally, along with the middle and lower classes they had to struggle hard for their existence. The educational condition of the Muslims was very much linked to one of the earning opportunities by the means of employability in public services which had diminished to a remarkable extent during the British period. In 1872, there were only 19 Muslims among the 485 persons employed in the higher subordinate appointments in the judicial and Revenue department of the Madras presidency. The absence of Muhammadans with a lesser share in the public services was the result of the educational backwardness and reluctance on the part of the community to take the western education and this was considered as a political and social evil. In order to investigate into the problems related to the public services of the Government of India under the Presidentship of Sir Charles Aitchinson, a Public Service Commission was appointed. The object of the commission was to prepare a scheme that might possess the essential elements of definiteness and to do full justice to the claims of the people of India to higher and more extensive employment opportunities in Public Services. The commission discarded the idea of changing the scheme of employment to the covenanted civil service. It had been recognized that the examination was to bear a distinctively English Character and it would test the English qualifications of the individuals. Naturally therefore it was decided that it would be held in English country, namely England which was the centre of the English system of education¹². So, when English became the qualification, Muslims' preponderance of Persian, Arabic, and Urdu in no way help them to fetch positions in the public services.

In 1893, some of the Madras Muslims came out openly and asked the Government to take necessary steps to end illiteracy and enable them to progress educationally¹³. The Government too was impressed by their request and referred the matter to the Board of Education which

found that the Muslim boys somehow were educated up to the primary level but did not go beyond it. So to improve their position at the secondary and higher levels, the Board recommended some measures, like opening a boarding school and some free libraries.

In Madras Presidency in 1900-01, the number of Muslims attending school was about 41,168. To promote education among Muslims during 1906-1907 various concessions were granted by the British Government to the community. But it was unfortunate to note that there was no progress in the outcome achieved and it was fairly lacking parity with the efforts on the part of the Government. The report on education says that "one of the causes that retard progress is the apathy of the community itself, and little progress can be expected until the Muhammadan community as a whole realizes its responsibility in this respect"¹⁴. With the establishment of the Muslim League in 1906 and its exclusive demands of it to the British Government made it possible to further the community's progress but with the triumph of the political trap of divide and rule. In 1906 the number of institutions for the Muhammadans was 2,181 with 88,256 pupils and in the close of the year 1907, the number of institutions for the benefit of Muhammadans increased to 2,200 with 93,952 pupils¹⁵. The total number of Muhammadans studied in all the classes of the institution during 1906 was 1,18,929 and it increased to 1,26,036 on March 31, 1907. The above-mentioned statistics of institutions were put in solely of the public institutions and the strength of the pupils was that of both public and private institutions. The total number of Muhammadans in arts colleges was 76 and that was 4 less than the strength in 1906. Again in the English language examination of the B.A. degree, of the 16 students that appeared only 4 among them passed. All 8 students had passed in the second language division, whereas in the science division, only 5 out of 15 were passed. In the First Arts examination out of the 37 students only 16 of them passed¹⁶. In the same period, the total number of secondary schools dropped off from 10 to 7 because of 3 schools being converted to elementary schools under a new classification and this would have affected the progress of Muhammadans to their advancement to the secondary schools. Among these secondary schools, only 2 of the schools that had the strength of 493 pupils were complete secondary schools and they had the forms above the third. In the public secondary schools of both Muhammadan and non-

Muhammadan types, the total number of Muhammadan students was about 5,535 and the Muslim girl students were also making a petite educational progress with the presence of 310 among it. About 201 Muhammadans students sit for the Matriculation examination and of which just 22 of them passed and the pass percentage of matric examination is just 10.9 percentage¹⁷. The pass percentage of the Mohammadi in the matriculation examination is much below the average of the Madras Presidency. Again 10 Muhammadan students had appeared for the Upper Secondary examination of whom only 1 among them passed. The number of Muhammadan elementary schools and their strength of both boys and girls' had made a little progress. The number of private institutions also decreased due to the transferring of private institutions into the list of public institutions. In the elementary schools, there were about 77,512 Muhammadan students and of which also 12,521 girls. From the above statistics, we can judge that the progress of education among the Muhammadans had made a little progress and it is pertinent to point out that the numerical statistics draw out the educational attainment of Muhammadan girls which is also clearly noticed¹⁸.

In 1907 there was an increase in the number of Institutions for Muhammadan girls from 195 with 7,304 pupils in the previous year to 229 with 8,958 pupils. The above numbers include the public and private institutions which had contributed to the growth. Regarding the public secondary schools of Muhammadan girls, the number and strength had decreased, whereas, in respect of both the number of schools and strength of girl students, a growth was noticed in the schools in the elementary grade. In all classes of the institutions, the total strength of Muslim girls increased from 22,336 to 23,336 during 1906-1907¹⁹. But still, it was pitiable to note that no girl student from the Muhammadan community appeared for the Matriculation examination in 1907. The special schools for the Muhammadans were reduced from 7 to 6 but the strength of these schools had increased from 242 to 269. Among these 6 schools, 3 were training institutions (2 for masters and 1 for mistresses) and another 3 were industrial schools. In the professional colleges, the total number of Muslim students was just 16 of whom 1 was in the Law College and 3 of them were in the Teachers' College. In the medical College, there were 5 Muhammadan students and there were 7 Muhammadan students in the Engineering Colleges²⁰. There were in all

138 males and 11 females in various training schools. There were 3 industrial schools of which the 2 were for males, viz., the Anjuman-i-Mufid-i-Ahl-i-Islam, Madras which had a strength of 86 and the Anjuman-i-Industrial school, Vellore had a total strength of 76 students²¹. On the whole, even after taking efforts the pace of growth of education among the Muslims was not as expected.

5. Conclusion

With the passage of time the Muslims came to realize the reality of changes that were taking place in the country. A situation came that it was not possible for the Muslims to remain aloof from the transformation taking place in the field of education and politics. In 1918-19 number of Muslims in schools rose to 1,53,496. With a slow phase, the Muslim community entered the field of modern education. As the largest religious minority, the Muslims started to make a complaint that they had very little share in the administration and public services. This complaint and their modest acceptance of modern education bring out them as a tool to the British in projecting the Muslims as competitors to other religionists and in flagging off the policy of divide and rule.

6. References

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