

THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF MUSLIM INDIA

Presidential Address to the All India Muhammadan Educational Conference

Ramapur: 21 February 1936

Primary education the foremost requirement - Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru's report on education - contemporary Muslim conditions - need for theoretical and practical commercial education - agricultural education - standards of Muslim schools - co-ordination - careers guidance - Aligarh University and the College of Technology - the likely impact - religious education - Muslims and scientific education - the task of re-interpreting Islam - primary education and the State.

Primary education which was indeed the first charge on a modern State and which I had humbly advocated in the old Viceroy's Council and for which, in my humble opinion, I had not only made an advocacy but found ways and means whereby primary and compulsory education for boys and girls could improve, is the foremost requirement of the Muslim community, leave alone the whole country and the rural population. This work is one which affects us as Indians and which is on the border line between politics and socio-educational reforms. It is right and proper to admit that in lines known as the Arts section of education, in Government service, in Law, in Medicine, there has been great progress in the last 34 years. Recently, as you are aware, the Rt. Hon'ble Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru has written a masterly report on the needs of developing our educational methods. He advocates education which can make us fit for different avenues of functional service, namely Government service, legal service and Medicine. These principles can be kept

up. But, surely, there are other essential services for upkeep of the wealth, life, and, in fact, the spirit of the people requiring work that will have to be done in normal life of every nation, backward or forward.

We cannot help feeling that India is backward and that the Muslims have remained far behind in the real, economic, work of life. We are carrying it on a standard which must be called mediaeval. The number of our commercial classes is limited, specially amongst Muslims. Even the classes who carry on trade on the sea-coast, do it with the principle, learnt hereditarily which prevailed when the Arabs were the great commercial nation of the world. On the old coasts of India, here and there, we find sections of our Muslim community carrying trade on principles learnt in the cradle. And in provinces far from the sea, we are almost commercially nil. The English are a self-sacrificing people and naturally they are most advanced in commerce. Our sea-coast sections of Islamic Society are almost truly the most advanced in India. But in countries surrounded by land, such as Bavaria, Czechoslovakia [sic], people are much advanced in commerce. Similarly the peoples of Germany and France. The whole of the western continent of North America and great tracts of South America are commercially advanced. We have remained in the position which Geography has given us. Here on this line pure and practical commercial education must come, and then India will become a great commercial country. This has nothing to do with what I call the methods of applied science. It is the science of Exchange and Business organization that we should learn. This science of Exchange and Business organization must be taken up seriously by the people of the land coasts of Islamic India. For this we should have special commercial schools and classes, to which our children must be sent. People in the heart of the continent of Europe have risen on this account. Commercial education opens out ways of livelihood. Service must be given to people educated in this line as is done in Europe. Our Hindu brethren even in this have vast advantages. They have knowledge and experience in banking. There are reasons in which we need not enter, nor we need refer to, for their rise in this line. Their indigenous system is however not socially good. The less we have of it the better for the nation. The exchange side must be systematically taught.

Now, let us turn to agriculture. Here again the present state of affairs is disappointing. The present divorce between practical agriculture and theoretical education on one hand and between

scientific agriculture and primitive cultivation on the other is worthy of our serious attention. An immense bridge must be found to cross this wide gulf. Here again, gentlemen, there is work to be done. Forgive me for suggesting that every landlord should be a graduate of the Imperial College of Agriculture of Delhi. What I do want to see is that the Muslim tenant and the Muslim landlord should be graduates of the Imperial College of Agriculture, or at least they should be able to understand what the graduate of agriculture says. It is a pity that the question of a technical authority does not get an answer from agriculturists.

There are again other vocations where applied sciences are of essential importance. These are Engineering, Electricity, Mechanics. They supply us with the lines along which we can advance.

We turn now from agriculture to the improvement of the position of the urban population of the present and of the future. In Aligarh we have a centre from which not only education but enlightenment; in the most generous sense of the term, can be brought to the Muslim community throughout this country. This work of enlightenment should not be misunderstood. Gentlemen, what I mean is this, that this Muslim Educational Conference, which is hand in hand now with the University, can, with the help of the University, give new and fresh ideas to all sections of Muslim education. There are Islamia schools, colleges, etc., throughout India. In some places these institutions are actually behind the similar ones maintained either by Government or by other voluntary bodies such as Missions, etc. Through co-ordination of efforts, members of this Muslim Educational Conference throughout India should bring about a unity of ideal and work amongst Islamia schools, colleges and Madrasahs which are found from one end of India to the other, that the standard should be raised to one of equality with that of the best institutions of this country. This is indeed a matter which will require immediate handling, and unless this is done our boys and girls will more and more be out of the Islamia colleges as they will find that their standard is lower than that which can be found in their rival institutions. This business of co-ordination of effort and ideal is most important, and this Muslim Conference should take it up immediately in hand.

Now, as you know, in Europe there has been a great tendency, during the last 20 or 30 years, to try and find out, as early as possible, the natural inclinations of boys and growing up students for various walks of life. There are actually what are known as career masters. There are processes to keep in touch, on one

side, with the student, on the other, with his teacher, and last, but by no means the least, with the parent. Those who are naturally inclined to some particular work or who are of practical type of mentality, should be brought in touch, as early as possible, with such intellectuals as will develop their particular qualities. Here, again, we have so far left everything haphazard. There has been, along these lines, no thought out plan of action. This, to my mind, is one that can no longer be left hanging to mere accident. The Muslim Educational Conference is essentially a body from which this kind of work can be best thought out, planned, and, with the help of the Aligarh University, brought into full activity.

The idea of the Muslim University was already prevalent in Sir Syed Ahmad's time. Then it was suggested, as a memorial to his life's work after his death, by the various Presidents of this Conference at various times and ultimately realized, some 25 years ago. That great work is only half finished. The crore I asked for never came. The idea of the University was thought out in connection with the visit of our Sovereign to this country. I think it is appropriate that now, 25 or 26 years later, under similar circumstances, we should carry that work through.

What we want is that side by side with the present Muslim University with the present College of Science, and other institutions as they are, a great institution like the College of Technology should be established where engineering, electricity and all the sciences applied to life and actual work, can be taught. To this those who wish to get in, either by natural inclination, or through the advice of their career-masters we have been thinking of, or by the recommendation from the schools, may be admitted. This work, gentlemen, we should not leave, any more, in the stage of discussion and thought and idea. As soon as possible, under the patronage of His Exalted [*sic*] Highness the Nizam, the Chancellor of the University, with the guidance and experience of our Life-Chancellor, His Highness the Nawab of Bhopal, with the full support and help and encouragement from our great ruling princes of Muslim India, and from a few in the urban population, as well as with mass contribution carried out systematically, and last, but by no means the least, with the help and gracious support of the Central and Provincial Governments, we should now set to work to finish the incomplete process started 25 years ago.

This school will need just the amount to complete the gulf of 40 lakhs. The money is overdue, and should be collected very

soon; otherwise these 40 lakhs might in another 25 years grow to a crore. This work, gentlemen, is the immediate task before the Conference and the authorities of the University as well as the public of this country. Ultimately this money will come back to India hundred-fold. The work found will pay for it. The work will influence the idea and the imagination of Muslim parents throughout the length and breadth of India and will help the advancement of thought on modern methods of earning bread. I should like to see a resolution moved by some great person to carry this scheme through as the immediate work before the Muslim University and the Muslim Educational Conference. As early as in 1902 the idea of realizing the need of a Muslim University was the main object of our meeting at Delhi. Thirty-five years later I should like to see that work carried to completion.

Now there are two more items to which I wish to refer. First of all I come to a subject which may not appear, after the many words with which I have dealt with your wordy methods of living, out of time. This is the question of Religious Education. It would have been indeed easy for me to avoid touching this subject, placing it as one that was not of immediate practical importance, but I honestly believe that we are going on - as we have done so far - in a direction where we may find some day - and not very long ahead - a situation arisen, as has arisen in other Muslim countries . . .

Is religion different from Science or Philosophy? Is the former so interpreted and understood? No, there is possibility of bringing about the greatest intellectual reconciliation not only with modern philosophy and science but even with other subjects. Gentlemen, only a few months ago, or a couple of years ago, a well-known English paper, "Spectator," asked some leading persons to give a short and brief expression of their idea of Religion. My friend here, Mr. Abdulla Yusuf Ali, F.R.S.L., gave a short "tafsir" of the "Aetal-Kursi". I was then at Geneva, but Mr. Yusuf's "tafsir" was so beautiful, rational and soul-inspiring that for weeks all kinds of people, even some of the most distinguished figures of Europe, came up to me and said "Is it real Islam?" Once upon a time I said somewhere that other religions have taken in formalities, but Muslims have outformalized the formal. Both Christians and Hindus have made progress in Scientific education but Muslims have lagged far behind. What has happened in a country that is looked upon as the capital of Islam has inevitably happened in every Muslim country. This does not

mean that the faith of Islam is not true. Nay Islam is the most rational, most social, of all faiths.

It only means that our substitution and interpretation of Islam totally fails us. To this work gentlemen, however unpleasant and offensive it may be to the conservatives, thought is necessary if we are to keep alive the name of Muslim University and Muslim Educational Conference. I should have been guilty of neglecting my duty to the faith of Islam in the truth of which I have implicit and firm faith, if I had preferred to avoid a plain and clear reference to this subject. Howsoever unpleasant it may be, this task of reinterpreting Islam will have to be done. The work which Christianity has done, we must do for Islam. In fact without serious effort on these lines, we should not be able to hold up our own in face of the stress and strife of modern life.

A faith that can be believed in sincerely by philosophers, of whom any country can be proud, can never be in contradiction with the best thought of the present. As I have once said before, whatever its objective truth, it will not maintain subjective truth if it is interpreted in this old way.

Gentlemen, there is the vast problem of primary education and education of girls. This work should be taken up by the Muslim Educational Conference through its influence at Aligarh, but how is it to be done? The present method of voluntary education is absolutely adequate, but when we think of the New Constitution of this country, none will look at this with satisfaction. But it can continue, and, at least in the Provinces, there are possibilities to make education both for girls and boys compulsory. The need for girl's education is even greater because she has to be the mother of future generation [sic]. Loud speakers, Broadcasting, Films, can be brought only to the vast masses through the State. Primary education can only be imparted by the State. To the whole country, even financially, this will be a good business. The money will come to you. Expenditure on education will ultimately reduce the military and naval expenditure. Just fancy what India would be if primary education had been adopted in its full. It is very well known to-day that, in the richest countries like America, it is the State that has taken up either as State or as Municipal Board, primary education. In Europe, Germany, France and England it is the function of the State. There is a vast educational budget in all these countries. Every Government, even a Conservative Government, is anxious for the education of all classes of boys and girls. By compulsory

primary education our children will wind back their way to prosperity.

Gentlemen, as I have explained this morning, I have not had time of [sic] preparing myself for this address, and I am guilty for not having done so. As a human being I was not able to do so. I have given you a rough sketch of what our community wants. I may add, that, even from the widest point of view, from the point of view of 350 millions, the going down of 80 million Musalmans of the Indian society, generation by generation, decade by decade, and year by year, will be a great handicap for the whole of India.

Source: *Star of India*, Calcutta, 14 March 1936.

It has not been possible to determine the exact date of this session of the All India Muslim Educational Conference. As the newspaper published the speech on 14 March, and the dateline carried the words "by mail," the most that can be safely said is that the session would have been held in the first week of March.

The Conference, earlier known as the Congress, was established by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and it had its first session in Aligarh in 1886 under the presidency of Mawlawi Haji Muhammad Salimullah Khan of Delhi. The Aga Khan had already presided over the conference once before in 1902 at the Delhi session (see Document 2 in this book).

COMMUNAL UNITY AND REFORMS IN INDIA

A Message

Bombay: 9 March 1936

Reforms - Hindu-Muslim unity.

You must work for the reforms intensively in order to get the utmost out of them. While there were no immediate prospects of a solution of the communal problem, contact between the leaders of the two communities was unbroken, and he was not going to give up his efforts for the unity which would finally be achieved.

Source: *The Times*, London, 10 March 1936.

The message was issued by him just before leaving Bombay for Europe.