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On Educational Challenges Facing Muslims in Bengal

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Hon'ble Nawab Bahadur and Gentlemen,

It is with a sense of gratitude that I express my deep thanks to you all for the great honour you have done me by electing me as your President this year. The honour of presiding over the deliberations of the Educational Conference is justly regarded as one of the highest which the Community can confer on any of its members. It is an assemblage of earnest and representative men in all walks of life from every corner of the Presidency – men inspired with genuine feelings of zeal and patriotism and gathered together for the mutual exchange of their thoughts and ideas on matters vitally affecting the welfare of the Community. To be elected President of such a distinguished gathering is an honour of which I am deeply sensible and for which I am sincerely grateful to you. More so am I when I cast my eyes upon the imposing audience before me representing education, culture, wealth and honour and call to mind the illustrious names of those who have graced the chair in past years.

Gentlemen, I must frankly confess I have no pretensions to academic attainments though I have always been an ardent student of the problem of Muhammadan education. I have always tried to work up the cause of Muhammadan education on the firm and honest conviction that education and education alone is the perennial source of all strength and the surest path to our salvation and progress. But I wish your choice had fallen on some worthier man than myself. It is, however, with utmost diffidence that I have ventured to obey your summons and I am fully conscious of the great responsibility that hangs on me. But I hope, gentlemen, the generous indulgence which prompted your choice would also induce you to overlook my shortcomings.

For the first time after the reconstitution of the Presidency, representatives from both the parts of Bengal have met together to discuss problems of Muhammadan education and to devise measures calculated to serve the best educational interest of the

community. The administrative changes necessitated the amalgamation of the two conferences into one, but events of grave concern to the Islamic world stood to a large extent in its way. The atmosphere is now comparatively cool and the initial difficulties have also been overcome, and here we have met in response to the call from our noble guide, the Hon'ble Nawab Sir Khwajah Salimullah Bahadur.

Gentlemen, the problem of Muhammadan education has assumed large complications, and I wish you all to realize the full importance of the problem before us. On you, gentlemen, lies the determination of the future, and however vast in magnitude it may be, and however complex its issues, you should not go away without a correct perspective of the present and a sure remedy for the future. Gentlemen, Islam embodies within its sacred bosom all the elements of culture and progress. It stands for all that represents light and culture and opens up a bright vista leading up to the world beyond. It is the living force that uplifts the soul, elevates human nature and moves the world forward. If a Mussalman lags behind, it is because of the weakness in his faith which takes away that freshness that gives colour to life.

An Indian Moslem is a unit of the Moslem world first and an Indian afterwards. This fact renders his onward march in the path of general progress more difficult than is the case with our Hindu brethren. And, in spite of this difficulty the Muhammadans in this country as a nation, I think, have hitherto proved themselves to be a forward as would be a matter of pride for any nation of the world. Gentlemen, I am far from accepting that Muhammadans as a nation are backward. Those who are under the delusion, should turn their eyes to the palmy days of Islam when the Moslems were the torch-bearers of civilization at a time when Europe was steeped in darkness and ignorance. Were not the Arabs of Spain the sponsors of Philosophy in Europe? Is it not a fact that through Averroes Aristotle was made known to Europe? Again, were it not the Moslems that preserved and improved on the Grecian lore but for which it would have been consigned to the cold shade of oblivion, the modern civilization might perhaps have been thrown many centuries back? Does not every branch of learning bear the impress of their genius, and does not the modern world owe a great debt of obligation to them? Is it not that the main impetus came from the living force of Islam which by a magician's wand, as it were, transported the wild Arabs of the desert from the region of darkness to the realm of light? Is it not, as if, a spark had fallen upon what seemed black and unnoticeable sands, but lo! The sands proved explosive power, blazed heaven high from Delhi to Granada? Belief is life-giving; the history of a nation becomes great as soon as it believes.

And after all, we have noble traditions round which have gathered so many sacred associations closely bound up with our national life. We have a system of education linked up with our palmy days. This system was recognised after the advent of British rule in India, when Warren Hastings, the far-sighted statesman, who was the administrative organizer of the British Indian Empire, established the Calcutta Madrassah in the year 1782. The original intention of the founder was to promote the study of the Arabic and Persian languages and of Muhammadan law, with a view more especially to the production of qualified officers for the Courts of Justice. For about half a century the successful students of the Madrassah monopolised almost all the judicial and executive posts under Government, and they predominated at the Bar. Justice had all along been administered in India in the language of the conquerors. From the beginning of their rule Persian was the official language of the Mussalman

rulers. The Hindus readily learnt Persian and some of them even became teachers thereof. The English continued the use of Persian in Courts so as to make as little change at first as possible. But in due course Persian gave way to the Indian vernaculars and English as the Court language of British India.

Our utilitarian fellow-countrymen, the Hindus, quick to perceive the immense advantage which a knowledge of English literature and science would give them, early devoted themselves to Western studies. Although the Government of India did not pass any definite legislative measures dealing with education after receiving the first educational despatch from the Court of Directors in 1814, the advanced section of the Hindu community, under the guidance of the celebrated patriot and linguist, Raja Ram Mohun Roy, and the philanthropic watch-maker, Mr. David Hare, established as early as 1816 an institution called 'Vidyalays' for the education of Hindu children in the English language and literature. In the course of a few years a taste for English was widely disseminated and independent schools, conducted by young men educated in the 'Vidyalays', sprang up in every direction. The tide thus set in strongly in favour of English education.

When Lord William Bentinck was Governor-General of India, a controversy arose as to whether the oriental languages or English should be the medium of education for the people of India. There was a great agitation among the advocates of oriental learning and the authorities were influenced by this. Finding that a decision was likely to be come to in favour of oriental learning, Raja Ram Mohun Roy and Mr. David Hare, the pioneers of English and they succeeded in persuading Lord William Bentinck to acquiesce in their view. Dr Duff, the most celebrated missionary educationist of the time, also took a prominent part in the agitation for the introduction of English. Lord Macaulay, at the time a Member of the Governor General's Council, wrote his celebrated Minute, and Lord William Bentinck passed the memorable Resolution of the Government of India in March, 1835 in favour of English education. Whilst the Hindus were thus showing readiness, zeal and generosity towards the spread of English education in India, far different were the feelings of the Mussalmans, whose attitude towards English education was anything but friendly.

We were still under the influence of our traditions when all at once the system of education was changed. While the Muhammadan society was in a state of dismemberment for want of proper guidance, and while the Muhammadans had not fully recovered from the trance caused by the dissolution which inevitably follows the overthrow of a nation, and while the Muhammadans were smarting under the shock they had thus received, the Hindus with their keen eyes and accustomed to centuries of foreign rule were reading the signs of the time, did not fail to catch the glimpse, distant though, of the future means of their social and political regeneration through an education which the ruler of the time could not be in full sympathy with.

After the Education Commission of 1882, it has been universally recognized that the present system of education has been framed without reference to the needs and requirements of the Muhammadans. Apart from our historical and social traditions that are causes which weigh us in our educational race, it is an established fact that Muhammadans, like any other nation of the world, are very slow to adopt a system of education that is foreign to them, and naturally so. Every self-respecting nation is, and

I think ought to be, proud of its own institutions. When schools on Western lines were first established here, the Moslems did not for this reason rush to them. Neither was there any great increase of students in the Madrassahs owing to their defective training and orthodox methods of teaching. The case of Hindus was otherwise. They were accustomed to follow alien ways. When the Muhammadans were in power, the Hindus adopted the Muhammadan ways of education. With the change in administration they naturally identified themselves with the new movement.

By a system of training in Persian, the Muhammadans then were able to secure posts of responsibility in the Judicial and Executive Services and in the Professions. But when education on Western lines was ushered in, there was no system of high training as now. After acquiring a little knowledge of English, students were supposed to be fit for responsible posts of Government with suitable emoluments which helped them to educate their children. For the reasons I have already mentioned Muhammadans did not care to adopt the new system of education, little thinking that they thereby deprived themselves of the State patronage in service and gradually became poorer and poorer and unable to educate their children in spite of their cherished wishes. Then again restrictions of all sorts came which still more deprived them of the means to educate their children.

Gentlemen, as you are aware, every facility was provided at a time when the Muhammadans were not fully alive to the need of English education. When in accordance with the policy laid down in the Despatch of 1854, which was re-affirmed in 1859, the University was established in Calcutta, there was no necessity for half a century to effect any change in the general system of education, in residence, discipline or the rate of fees. Restrictions have been imposed at a time when the Muhammadans have begun to knock at the doors of the University. True it is that the difficulties have arisen out of a desire on the part of the authorities to introduce efficiency in response to the requirements of the times, but I must say that it is the duty of everyone to think out measures to surmount these difficulties without impairing the efficiency aimed at. It is a happy sign of the times that the Muhammadans are straining every nerve to move along an unaccustomed path in the face of all their difficulties. And what we want now is that no artificial cause should block it. Muhammadan students in large numbers are refused admission owing to want of accommodation in schools and colleges. A large section cannot meet the expenses which have so much risen under new University Regulations.

Remember, gentlemen, that while asking Government for special facilities, we are in no way relieved of our responsibilities in respect of education of our boys. In fact the future of the community lies entirely in our hands. It is no good asking Government for facilities if we do not exert ourselves to the utmost. None can save us if we do not know how to save ourselves. To our Hindu brethren, I would say that they too have a responsibility in this matter. I would only ask them to realize that unless they help and co-operate with us and grant us a little space to make headway, the general advancement of the country as a whole would be retarded. It would surely be deplorable to the Hindus and Muhammadans alike. I would also tell them that we are prompted by no feelings of jealousy when we say that a benefit enjoyed by the Hindus is virtually denied to the Muhammadans; it is the sense of envy arising out of admiration for the brilliant success attending their efforts. We are inspired with the desire to follow their wake and not lag behind in the race of life.

Gentlemen, purely secular institutions are not suitable for Muhammadans while traditional ones are in urgent need of a thorough reform. The secular education is divorced from religious instruction and moral teaching. This defect has been felt not only by the Muhammadans but by the Hindus as well. Both the communities have been awakened to the necessity of such modifications in the course of instruction as to include religious and moral teaching. The crying demand and endeavours for the establishment of denominational Universities are unmistakable signs of the time. It is only a necessary consequence that there has been a real and effective demand for religious education. Eastern life and society are based on religion. We have no morality apart from religion, and to us, Mussalman's life from cradle to grave is an unbroken rule of religion. With the in-rush of western thoughts, everything was disturbed to an abnormal degree. The people became ultra-rationalistic in their tendencies, and as a consequence the religion divested of its earnestness, was reduced to a mere form.

For a long time the policy of neutrality was synonymous with indifference to sectarian education. But happily Government has now relaxed that attitude and is prepared to allow religious education in secular institutions so long as it is unobtrusive and unhostile to the tenets of the other sections of the community. Conferences have of late been held by Government in every province to frame a workable scheme, and I understand the matter is now before Government for final decision. It is our fervent hope that early orders acceptable and suitable to all the communities will be passed.

As regards traditional institutions, I confidently trust that if the Madrassah Reform Scheme as incorporated in the Dacca University Report, is given effect to, it will to a great extent meet the demand for thorough religious instruction. It will also provide for bifurcation at the end of the Junior course to enable one batch of students to pass on to ordinary school while the other batch will proceed to the senior section leading ultimately to the Islamic Faculty of the Dacca University. Gentlemen, the greatest advantage of the Madrassah Reform Scheme would be that our boys will receive their early education in the Junior Madrassahs where there will be ample provision for religious instruction side by side with secular education. They will thus economize a good deal of their time that they now waste in receiving the Quran education in a most unmethodical way in mosques with imperfectly educated mianjis. To attain this end it is necessary that there should be a network of Junior Madrassahs throughout the Presidency.

From the Report of Director of Public Instruction it is evident that the Muhammadan element compares very favourably in point of strength in Primary schools. But unfortunately we are handicapped in the race in the higher courses of secular education. We lag behind the Hindus not because of our innate disability but because we lack the requisites for the pursuit of higher education. If the facilities that we require were only for some time afforded to us, we are confident we would, with religion at the back to incite our action and accelerate our progress, retrieve our lost ground and prove to the world that the Mussalmans are at least as adaptable to the needs of the time, and as capable of assimilating the newest thoughts and ideas as any other nation in the world. While we ask for special facilities, nothing could be further from our mind than any idea of praying to Government for special concession in the shape of the relaxation of the general standard of efficiency for Muhammadans. We

would consider it as an insult to the intelligence of the community we have the honour to belong to. The national pride would not permit for a moment the acceptance of such a favour even if the benign Government in its anxiety for the amelioration of our cause were desirous of granting us such concessions. Given similar advantages we are not prepared to acknowledge the superiority of any nation in the race of progress. What we require is the removal of the handicap and the grant of proper facilities for education. We are not a weak nation, but we are poor and our poverty is proverbial. We are true to our religion and with proper means to keep on education we are always ready “to pursue knowledge even to the corners of China” – I mean the other extremity of the world – in accordance with the dictates of our noble Prophet.

Calcutta University

Gentlemen, the University is the final and sole authority, which guides the whole system of secondary and higher education and is the fountain-head of learning, light, and culture. Unless all sections of the people have effective hand and voice in the guidance of its affairs which are so indissolubly bound up with their destinies, their advancement is doomed. And yet it is on such a body that the representation of the Muhammadans is despicably insignificant, while on the Syndicate which is the real governing body of the University, no Muhammadan has the good luck to have a seat. It is true that the Regulations of the University provide for admission into the Senate through election, but you are well aware how far under the existing circumstances our co-religionists can avail themselves of that channel. In fact, no Muhammadan has yet been able to be elected a Fellow. Thus the only course left is to enter the Senate by Government nomination. But it is a great misfortune for the Muhammadans that the Government has not hitherto used his power of nomination to their advantage. It is but right that Government should have utilized this power to keep the balance and preserve due proportion among the several communities for whom the University exists, and this can very well be done as Government has power of nominating 80 per cent of the Fellows. In their April Circular Letter of April 3rd, 1913, on Muhammadan Education, the Government of India states this point clearly as one of the reasons which has retarded the spread of secondary education among the Muhammadans. “It is represented that in certain parts of the country, the great majority of secondary schools are managed by Hindu bodies and it was recently observed that among the one hundred ordinary members of the Calcutta Senate only six were Muhammadans.”

It is disconcerting that the University, which is a representative body presiding over the educational welfare of the people, should be so exclusively sectarian in its character. Instances are not wanting of the interest of the Muhammadans being overlooked in the University. Only the other day the University received a grant of three lacs of rupees from the Government to erect a Law College Hostel, and no provision was made for Muhammadans for their Hostel accommodation. The Government did not specify that the sum was to [be] spent for Hindus only. Can there be a more flagrant breach of duty on the part of the University? I shall take liberty of giving another instance. The Government grants a sum of about ten thousand rupees and sometimes even more on an average – which is further supplemented by University Grants for Calcutta Messes. Till last year only one Muhammadan Mess

received a paltry sum of Rs. 20 per mensem and one other perhaps a similar sum. Apart from the question of grant there are other matters of vital importance to the Muhammadans. The chair of Indian History (Research) was made over to a Sanskrit scholar for a period of seven years, instead of two which is the usual term of appointment of all such appointments for Research Work.

Being a Sanskrit scholar it is natural he would pay the greatest attention to the Hindu period, and the Muhammadan period which requires a Persian scholar may not possibly receive that attention as it would be at the hands of a Persian scholar. Here again, in matters of this sort, the Muhammadans are at a disadvantage for want of due and proper representation of the community on the Senate and Syndicate of the University. I may also draw attention to the fact that there is no Muhammadan member on the Sanskrit Board to represent Muhammadan interests. Then I pass on to the University Office, which employ a large number of officers, and strange to say there does not appear a single Muhammadan on the staff. To be Senators and Syndics is the aspiration of the educated. May we ask whether Muhammadans are to be virtually deprived of their aspirations? We are not in dearth of competent Muhammadan graduates. That we have been backward is true no doubt, but if it is so to-day, it is because we are forced to remain behind. Our men have practically no access to the University, its Office, Senate and Syndicate.

Dacca University

Gentlemen, when the announcement of a teaching and residential University was first made, we thought that sufferings were at an end. Realizing our situation that we are not getting adequate benefits from the Calcutta University, Government is granting us university in a part of the country where the Muhammadans form the bulk of the population to enable Muhammadans to be represented adequately in the management of its affairs and reap the full benefit of it. For this we rejoiced, but when there was agitation against the proposal for such a University, we were suddenly apprised that the proposed University would be limited to the Municipal area of the town of Dacca. That was a rude shock to our high hopes and ambitions.

As a member of the Dacca University Committee it was indeed a surprise for me to hear that this University has not even the power of examining candidates for the Matriculation Examination, and they were only to admit students who had matriculated from the Calcutta University. Even the Law College of Dacca is proposed to be controlled by the Hindu University of Calcutta. The time is not yet ripe for dispensing with the federal system altogether. If the federal system is to be discarded and the teaching and residential type should take its place, what becomes of the present Universities? Are they to be abolished and when, and if so, we should have a multiplicity of Universities all over the country, at least in each important town. Such a step at this stage is financially and otherwise impossible. Then again why was the proposal made for starting a new University if not to remove the admitted congestion of the Calcutta University?

Apart from it there is also the consideration of developing higher education in Eastern Bengal. You are well aware what progress was made in education during the years the

Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam held sway. It would certainly have been a better plan to make the Dacca University both a teaching and a federal one – the Colleges located in Dacca as a teaching University at Dacca and a federal University of those situated in the districts of East Bengal and Assam, the supervision of which from Dacca would be more convenient. When first the announcement was made hopes were entertained that the proposed University at Dacca was a compensation to some extent for the grievous loss sustained by the memorable administrative changes. The narrowing of the scope and jurisdiction of the University was never in the least expected and quite contrary to all expectations. The announcement came to us like a surprise.

In support of our arguments, we have an instance in point in the case of the Patna University. It has been decided that this will be a residential University so far as Patna is concerned, and a federal one for the rest of the province. I fail to see how a scheme, which could be considered workable in Behar and suited to their progressive ideals of education, could not be recognized in Bengal to suit similar conditions, and to remove wants of almost an identical character.

Gentlemen, I would like it to be understood that although we are much disappointed in this matter, yet I believe that as the scheme stands, it will be so of some benefit to those districts and to the Muhammadan Community which dwell in them. In the Dacca University scheme we expect to be greatly benefited as we will have some part in its management. The Faculty of Islamic Studies will make the students of our Madrassah, whose number is very large, fit for secular avocations – and I lay special emphasis on this department which will be an immense boon to the people. Our grievances about the vernacular might be somewhat redressed if the scheme be given effect to as recommended by the Committee. But the Report of the Committee and its recommendations have three stages to pass through – first the Local Government, then the Imperial Government and finally the Secretary of State. It has already passed through the hands of the local and Imperial Governments while the Secretary of State has accepted the proposals of these Governments in the main. But we are as yet in the dark as to the changes the report has undergone in these three stages. But we are as yet in the dark as to the changes the report has undergone in these three stages. We cannot be satisfied till we see the scheme worked out as expected.

Collegiate Education

Gentlemen, I have already stated to you the difficulties we have to contend against in the University in matters of Collegiate education. Our students desirous of entering the College classes are often hampered in their efforts to get admission to colleges for want of accommodation. This is a most deplorable state of affairs in the career of young Musalmans. Unless some seats are reserved in the various colleges and some new colleges are started for them in places where there are urgent demands for the same, Muhammadans cannot make much advance in Collegiate education. You will be glad to learn that there are proposals for the establishment of two colleges for Muhammadans – one at Dacca in connection with the Dacca University and the other

at Calcutta. This can help the Muhammadans a great deal in their Collegiate education.

The demand for residential Hostels for college students is still more pressing. Unless boarding arrangements for Muhammadans are made in every college, the difficulty of Muhammadan boys cannot be effectively and promptly solved. Of all the works attempted in India there is none more difficult than the work of higher education. But unfortunately the importance of educational services has not received the recognition which it deserves. The educational officers have not only to produce a higher degree of fitness but to raise the character of those who partake of its advantages and so to supply Government may, with confidence, commit offices of trust. In the words of Sir Valentine Chirol, the Educational Service is regarded as an inferior branch of the public service and this is at a time when the immense importance of education is reiterated by every representative Government. The inadequate terms on which the educational officers are employed, operate unfavourably upon the service and hinder it from attaining that consideration which the importance of its work rightly deserves.

As the service is now constituted there are no high prizes to reward efficient work. The conditions of service in the Education Department should be reconsidered and such emoluments offered as would induce the best graduates to join the Education Department. The fitness of Muhammadans has been acknowledged in highly responsible branches of the Public Service. There are men who still adorn the Bench and the Bar, and it is idle to contend that competent Muhammadans cannot be had to fill high posts in the Educational Service. If due steps are taken to enhance the prestige and range of the Educational Service and a few posts corresponding to the sister appointments in the Provincial Civil and Judicial Services are created and thrown open to qualified Muhammadans as well, the indifference with which the Educational Service is now looked upon by them will disappear. There is no denying the fact that Government will gain strength from the spread of education among an important but hitherto educationally neglected section of the community.

Secondary Education

Gentlemen, in the field of secondary education, as referred to the most formidable abstacle in the way of a Muhammadan boy is the multiclicity of languages which he has to face. He has to learn Bengali as the vernacular of his Province, Urdu is the lingua franca and medium of elementary instruction, Persian as a social accomplishment, Arabic as his sacred language and English as a passport to appointments and medium of modern light and culture. Thus while a Hindu boy is required to learn three languages, namely Bengali, English and one classical language, the Muhammadan boy is required to learn as many as five. He is thus greatly handicapped almost at the very start. If the Muhammadan boy is to compete on equal terms with the Hindu boy we must have to solve the question of this multiplicity. Unfortunately this question cannot be solved satisfactorily unless we agree to make Bengali and Persian as alternative subjects in junior Madrassahs and Persian, Urdu and Arabic as alternative subjects in schools.

In other words a Muhammadan boy may take up (i) Arabic, (ii) English (iii) Persian, Urdu or Bengali in the Junior Madrassah course and (i) English, (ii) Bengali and (iii) Persian, Arabic or Urdu in the School course. To take up Urdu in the School as an alternative subject is only possible if it is so recognized by the University as one of the subjects of the second language. There is no reason why Urdu should not be accorded such recognition. It has risen to the dignity of a literature and the language is full of scientific, philosophic and religious thoughts. Though Urdu is not the vernacular of the Muhammadans of Bengal, yet it is regarded as their national language through the medium of which to hold communications in society both in the provinces and abroad. A knowledge of this language is recognized as an accomplished among all respectable Muhammadans, and hence they require their children to be taught Urdu. Preference is so given to Urdu as many of the religious books written in Arabic have been translated into that language and those who cannot afford to teach their children Arabic, teach them Urdu by which to give them an insight to the principles of their religion. Besides it may be noticed that Arabic and Persian is taught in schools through the medium of Urdu. Though Urdu is not the vernacular of the Bengal Musalmans, yet it is absolutely necessary for their children who study Arabic and Persian to do so, through the medium of Urdu, which language they are obliged to learn in addition at least for this purpose.

If Urdu is adopted as a compulsory subject of study alternative to Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian, the Muhammadans will very largely flock to secondary schools and Urdu will in the near future occupy a very prominent place among the other highly developed languages of the world. The Bengali language alone cannot help the Muhammadans in uplifting them from their present condition. The introduction of Urdu will contribute to the preservation of harmony between Collegiate education and the instruction on traditional lines imparted through the medium of Arabic and Persian. Should the recognition of Urdu be permitted, Urdu will be taught not in lieu of but in addition to Bengali. Such a concession will inspire confidence among the Muhammadans, who would no longer hesitate to send their children to schools.

Urdu is a language of great force, and if fostered it may soon attain the perfection of Persian, from which it has derived its first inspiration. Of late years it has even become richer than Persian in several respects. There have been two stages in the development of Urdu literature. The first stage was created by such eminent Persian writers and poets as Sauda, Meer and others who imported into Urdu all the elegance of style, depth of feeling, richness of vocabulary, range of thought and variety of imagery. In fact, they and their successors, Anis, Dabir, Ghalib and others made Urdu, Persian of India. The second stage is that of polish and refinement which is marked by the absorption of modern ideas due to the introduction of western culture. The chief exponents of this phase have been Sir Sayyid Ahmed, Hali, Dr. Nazir Ahmed, Shibli Nomani, Dr. Iqbal Husain and other writers whose number is daily increasing and who have been imbued with western thoughts and some of whom were products of western culture. Hence when Persian literature has generally remained stagnant, Urdu literature has been passing through stages of development and is quite in touch with modern ideas and thoughts and the sources of light and culture.

Urdu will form a connecting link between the school and Madrassah course in case it is adopted as a second language by the University. Now that Bengali has been introduced into the Madrassah curriculum, the adoption of Urdu as a second language

in secondary schools will facilitate the migration of Muhammadan students from the Madrassah to the school at the conclusion of the Junior course and will thus help in the spread of higher education among the Muhammadans. It will further go to create a healthy spirit of emulation which is at present non-existent between students of the two classes of institutions.

The introduction of Urdu in secondary schools as a second language will facilitate the admission into them of many of the madrassah students who do not wish to specialize in Arabic. Such a step will go a long way to popularize both the school and the Madrassah course and will ultimately result in raising the standard of education among the Muhammadans, in removing that apprehension of irreligion which the orthodox class attribute to English education divested of religious instruction. Notwithstanding the advance that the Muhammadans have, of late, made in English education. There is still a large and important section who stand aloof from active co-operation with the present system of education and lose the advantages both material and social which others enjoy.

The adoption of Urdu as a second language coupled with a more systematic recognition of English and Bengali in the modernized Madrassahs will be not only acceptable to the Muhammadan community, but will enlist the sympathies of the more orthodox members on the side of education. What is wanted is that Muhammadans should be given their full share of high class intellectual training and sound knowledge useful to them in life combined but not clashing with that oriental scheme of courses of instruction suitable for Muhammadans and the general disinclination of the orthodox class to exchange their earlier modes of study for others more consonant with modern habits of thought that have kept away many Muhammadans from the higher range of English education at which studies impress real culture and fit young men for success in competition with other sections of the community. The adoption of Urdu in secondary schools will remove one of the greatest obstacles that the existing system of education presents to the Muhammadan Community in Bengal. Gentlemen, the unsuitability of Bengali text book is another burning question that should here engage our attention. The prescribed Bengali text-books ordinarily contain lessons mostly derived from Hindu sources and are generally full of references to Hindu mythology. A Muhammadan boy reads his books and imbibes ideas which are neither congenial nor desirable. This sad state of affairs attracted the attention of English education. Some of their remarks are worth quoting which would give unbiased ideas regarding the difficulty experienced by Muhammadan students with regard to the vernacular of the country. Mr. E. C. Bayley, C. S. I., writes thus: "Is it any subject for wonder that they held aloof from a system which, however good in itself, made no concession to their prejudices, made in fact no provision for what they esteemed their necessities, and which was in its nature unavoidably antagonistic to their interests, and at variance with their social traditions?"

Sir William Hunter, the versatile author of the "Imperial Gazetteer of India", writes in a stronger language. This is what he says in regard to this vexed problem: "The language of our Government schools in Lower Bengal is Hindi and masters are Hindus. The Mussalmans with one consent spurned the instructions of idolators through the medium of idolatory." Besides, there has been a tendency in recent years on the part of certain sections of the Bengali authors to studiously avoid simple words

of Urdu and Persian origin only to replace them by words of Sanskritic origin. This immensely adds to the difficulty of the Muhammadan boy. His Bengali contain a strong admixture of words of Persian or Urdu origin, though often in a corrupt form. Consequently Bengali if thus permeated with words borrowed from Sanskrit, becomes as difficult to him a Persian. The Dacca University Committee went minutely into this matter and their recommendations are worth repetition here –

“The Sub-Committee express the view that no book should be rejected as a text or model on account of its containing words conveying ideas and sentiments peculiar to the Muhammadans, Buddhists or other sections of the population, or such words in common use among them as have not an exact equivalent in current Bengali; all indigenous sources should be drawn upon to enrich the vocabulary and to increase the expressive power of the language, so that its growth and expansion should become the common concern of every section of the people.”

“Bengali literature is at present permeated mainly by Hindu ideas, and there is a great paucity of literature on subjects derived from authentic Arabic or Persian sources such as will interest Muhammadan students. To remove this defect, the sub-committee suggest that the Government or University should encourage authors to publish Bengali books of a Muhammadan character and that such books should be included in the works prescribed as models of style. In their Report the Sub-Committee, which was composed of a majority of Hindus, recommended with the single exception of one of the latter that when a question bearing on mythology is set in the examination papers, there should be an alternative question of a general character. In making these observations, I do not advocate the introduction of a new dialect such as the Musalman-Bengali so called. Far from it. The idea contained in the recommendations is not to change the very structure and form of the language but merely to introduce such words as would convey the sentiments and traditions peculiar to the communities and only such words as have no exact equivalents or significance in Bengali.

The language as it now stands do not by any means convey to the Mussalmans especially in full satisfaction of their sentiments and traditions. Words and phrases may be used in Bengali as near equivalents, but they are far from carrying a real sense and picture to the Mussalmans especially in full satisfaction of their sentiments and traditions. Those who are aware of the genesis of the Bengali language need not fear anything from such incorporation. A living language must express the floating ideas and thoughts of the people. Language must be shaped according to ideas and thoughts of the people. Language must be shaped according to ideas, not vice versa. To speak of the Muhammadans who form more than 50 per cent of the total population, they have a right to shape the language according to their needs. Language is full the birthright of every man. It is in the national interests of the country that the Bengali language should enrich itself, by freely borrowing subjects, ideas and words from other sources, The English language is the richest language in the world, but the percentage of pure Anglo-Saxon words is not very great. The incorporation of foreign words has made the English language what it is, and I think we should take a lesson from this. Need I say in support of our contention that even the Government of Lord Mayo in 1871 passed a Resolution which states “that greater encouragement should be given to the creation of a vernacular literature for Muhammadans – a measure, the importance of which was specially urged upon the Government of India by Her Majesty’s Secretary of State on more than one occasions.”

Gentlemen, you are well what a great impetus was given by the late East Bengal and Assam Government to Education, and how in that brief but memorable period of its existence the Muhammadans advanced by leaps and bounds by the spread of education. I need not tax your patience by giving you an idea of the progress then made by actual facts and figures, and for these I refer you to my Report in which I have given statistics regarding the various branches of learning. Even a cursory glance cannot but give you the impression that the number of secondary schools in existence at present are far from meeting the demand created by the thirst and eager desire on the part of the Muhammadans to take advantage of education. I may here take the liberty of mentioning that I have repeatedly brought before both the East Bengal and Bengal Councils and urged this matter with all the force I could command. The demand – and a pressing demand too – has arisen for an increasing number of High and Middle schools and Junior Madrassahs. Unless they are multiplied and scattered about throughout the country, and specially in Muhammadan centres, I am afraid there will be a check to the progress of the Muhammadans in matters of education. The time has arrived when a network of secondary schools should be established, more especially in such localities as are largely populated by our people. At a time like the present when we feel the bad necessity of the increase of educational institutions, there can be no better and more encouraging words than the gracious message of His Imperial Majesty the King Emperor whose words still ring in our ears, and which should be inscribed in letters of gold on the thresholds of every true Moslem. His Majesty touches the key-note of our pressing need and stretches forth as it were his gracious hand and offers a sovereign remedy – the panacea to all our ills – to enable us to save ourselves. The gracious message runs as follows:

“It is my wish that there may be spread a network of schools and colleges, from which will go forth loyal and manly and useful citizens, able to hold their own industries and agriculture and all the vocations in life. And it is my wish, too, that the homes of my Indian subjects may be brightened and their labour sweetened by the spread of knowledge with all that follows in the train, a higher level of thought, of comfort and of health. It is through education that my wish will be fulfilled, and the cause of education in India will be very close to my heart.”

Sage advice like this has sent a joyous thrill to the hearts of all interested in education, and I assure you words like these cannot but influence us for good and help us to save ourselves. In helping to save ourselves we perforce, throw up our hands earnestly appealing for assistance, and who can save us better except our Government. In this connection might I suggest that in order to arrive at a correct impartial estimate of our just demands, it is better that Government orders for a survey to be made and report on the number of all the various kinds of secondary schools, the total population, number of students in these institutions as compared with the population of the communities, with a view to learn where there are urgent demands for secondary schools of all kinds to be started. It is only then I believe a true estimate can be formed of our wants as regards schools and colleges. At present Government High Schools are located in District Head-Quarters. But Muhammadans cannot reap the full benefits of such schools, as they do not generally reside in the Head-Quarter towns. These places are usually inhabited by men either in professional or the public services.

Unfortunately Muhammadans are very poorly represented in these vocations of life and quite naturally they do not take advantage of these institutions. It follows, therefore, that secondary schools of all kinds should be started in Muhammadan centres if the benefits of education are to spread among the Muhammadans, and then alone will the King Emperor's cherished desire be achieved so far as his faithful Mussalman subjects are concerned. I said that the benefits of the Government Zilla Schools are mostly enjoyed by other communities and very little by the Muhammadans, who are also at a disadvantage in another respect. The cost of maintenance of purely Muhammadan institutions like the Madrassah and Anglo-Persian Departments is not wholly met by Government. These institutions take up a considerable portion of the Mohsin Fund. If Government pays for these very few institutions as in the case of Zillah Schools, the portion of Mohsin Fund that is being paid at present may very well be devoted towards helping poor deserving students with pecuniary assistance to prosecute their studies. The Muhammadans are proverbially poor, and it needs no emphasis on my part as it is too well known to require any convincing proof. I have already referred to the desirability of having an increase of secondary institutions all over the country, especially at Muhammadan centres. I do not mean that all of them should be entirely Government institutions. Your aid and co-operation is very necessary in this matter, and unless local people try their utmost to start schools with substantial help from Government, it will be impossible to have so many institutions as we have in urgent need of.

Gentlemen, a great deal of success, however, depends on the selection of teachers. The mere existence of schools is not an index to the existence of education. The schools should be placed in the hands of teachers representing the different sections of the community from which the pupils are drawn. Schools at centres of Muhammadan population should as a general rule be conducted by Muhammadan teachers, and controlled and supervised as far as possible by Muhammadan Inspectors.

One of the principal disadvantages under which our boys in schools have to labour is the dearth of Muhammadan teachers on the staff. It is a self-evident truth that a student derives much inspiration from a teacher of his own nationality. It is, therefore of great importance that every school, particularly those that have got a large number of Muhammadan boys on their rolls, should have a fair proportion of Muhammadan teachers. From the table annexed to the Annual Report on Public Instruction it will appear that the Muhammadan teachers become all the more absent as we pass from the Primary to the Secondary Institutions. To be effective, the education of Muhammadan boys should in the early stages at least be as far as possible in the hands of Muhammadan teachers; and it is desirable that every schools should have on its staff Muhammadan teachers, not merely teachers of second languages – in proportion to the Muhammadan boys reading in it.

Schools at centres of Muhammadanism with Muhammadan teachers on their staff induce pupils of that persuasion to join them. The absence of Muhammadan teachers is unfortunately too marked in institutions maintained or aided by Government. It is expected of teachers that they should sympathize with the feelings of the students, and this is fully possible only when the teachers are of the same persuasion as that of pupils. Any want of sympathy on the part of teachers with the sentiments and ideas in which the boys are brought up in their houses must tend to injure the true interests of education. The services of competent Muhammadan teachers cannot be had unless

better prospects are held out to them. To attract the best talents should be made to bring the emoluments of the Educational Service on a par with those of the Provincial, Civil and Judicial Services. There will be no dearth of capable Muhammadan candidates in case the Educational Service is reorganized, its prospects improved and better facilities ensured. At the same time I cannot urge too strongly on our educated youths to take up the profession of education more largely even at some sacrifice. There is no profession nobler than that of the teacher of youths, and no sacrifice would be more pleasing to God and to the Prophet than this. None knows better than our educated youths our wants and requirements as a community.

In matters of education the call for volunteers to sacrifice their all if needs be on the altar of education is louder and incessant than ever, and yet the realization of our dreams is still to come. For the amelioration of their conditions there are concrete instances in India, nay in Bengal itself, of individuals in other communities taking up any cause dearer to them at personal sacrifice. Without altruistic and unselfish work at some personal sacrifice nothing better and nobler can be achieved. Our community can boast of young men capable and fired with zeal and enthusiasm for their national welfare and honour and yet we find them hanker after higher services in other walks of life, than the ennobling profession of teaching. My young friends owe it to the very education they have had to help their community to raise itself by taking to the art of teaching and thus help to be character moulders of the rising generation. You may not help with your money and substance, but you may do a great deal more by a little sacrifice for the well-being of your community.

Gentlemen, there is one point with reference to the Inspecting Staff of the Department that occurs to me. The members of the Inspecting Staff that belong to other nationalities must be naturally finding it a difficult task to fully appreciate and realize the grievances, needs and requirements of our community, particularly in the mofussil and with regard to education in its lower stages. It, therefore, seems very desirable that as far as possible, be Muhammadans at least for a considerable length of time. The appointment of Muhammadans as Sub-Inspectors of Schools has gone largely popularize education among the Muhammadan community. An extension of the policy in the matter of the appointment of Deputy Inspectors and Superior or Inspecting Officers will also add to the popularity of education among the Muhammadans and should be insisted upon by an order of Government.

Gentlemen, it may be observed that in aided schools Muhammadans are not generally represented on the governing bodies. This is a serious drawback and one which does not tend to popularize education in the eyes of the Muhammadans and thus retard it where there is a sore need for the same. Steps should therefore be taken to remedy this apparent defect. Such representation is absolutely necessary in order to safeguard the interests of Muhammadan boys and bring to notice of that body their special needs and grievances. The presence of an adequate number of Muhammadan members on the Committees of Management in all these aided schools is not only much to commend itself to keep the balance of power, but also a source of confidence and encouragement to the Muhammadan teachers and pupils to see their community represented and having some control in the management.

Gentlemen, I have already brought to your notice that the Government schools are taken less advantage of by the Muhammadans for reasons adduced. The obvious

difficulties can to a great extent be surmounted by means of hostels. That the system of hostels in connection with schools have helped to popularize education and improve the disciplinary character of the students none can gainsay. I may tell you from experience in Eastern Bengal that the few hostels attached to institutions there have helped considerably to enhance the value and importance of education among Muhammadans and helped to shape the character of the students. If Muhammadan education is to advance, Government should provide hostels attached to all their institutions and give substantial help to aided schools to have hostels for Muhammadan students attached to them.

Primary Education

Gentlemen, I have very little to say as regards Primary Education which, as I have said, is hopeful. We are not so backward in this as we are in the upper stages. Government is doing much in the direction of Primary Education, as may be seen from the speech of the Hon'ble the Director of Public Instruction in explaining the Education Budget this year. I have also drawn your attention to the language question and the vernacular problem, but I have this much to say, that care should be taken to make Primary Education as cheap as possible, if not altogether free. The course of instruction should be in conformity with Muhammadan sentiments, secularized Maktabs should be substantially and widely encouraged while moral and religious elementary training might be given through the medium of the vernacular. While I am on this subject, I am sure you will be much gratified to learn that the Bombay Government in a pamphlet issued by them recently described measure adopted to popularize local Board Schools by giving facilities for religious instruction in them out of school hours.

It is difficult to suggest any measure of equitable distribution of expenditure on Primary Schools for Muhammadans in District Board or Municipal areas seeing that all such schools are attended both by Hindu and Muhammadan pupils. It will, however, to some extent meet the object, if the grant assigned to Primary Schools is distributed on a geographical basis. This will bring into existence many schools in virgin areas, and will thereby aid in the extension of education in many Muhammadan localities which are still without any public institution.

Gentlemen, as far as rural schools are concerned, I have repeatedly urged Government to include in the curriculum of Primary Schools some practical training in Agriculture. Bengal and especially Eastern Bengal is pre-eminently an agricultural country and the majority of the population is agricultural, Muhammadans forming a larger portion of this class. With a view to improving agricultural methods as far as practicable, and to kindle a desire in at least the rising generation among the agriculturalists, practical training is necessary, and as I have already advocated, Primary Education to be as cheap as possible if not altogether free, I would here lay emphasis on the point of making rural school education having practical training in Agriculture included in their curriculum. If this were done, great good will result to the agriculturists, and the Government too in the words of Hazrat Omar (may God

grant peace on him) will realize that the stability and the material prosperity of a Government depends on the development of the agriculture of the country.

I may be allowed to say that the attention of the India Government has been drawn to the importance of the education which should be imparted to the sons of the agriculturists. The view of the Government of India was expressed in paragraph 21 of the Resolution on Indian Eduactional Policy, of the 11th March, 1904, that “the aim of rural schools should be to give to the children a preliminary training which will make them intelligent cultivators, will train them to be observers, thinkers, and experimenters in however humble a manner, and will protect them in their business transactions with the landlords to whom they dispose of their crops.” If you seriously take into consideration the miserable lot of the agriculturists you will find how necessary it is for him to have a knowledge of agricultural methods which in the long run would prove useful to him and to his country. I may here say that the present Director of Agriculture, Mr. J. R. Blackwood, is solicitous that agricultural training be given in rural schools. (See Report on Agriculture of 1912-13 by Mr. Blackwood).

Female Education

Gentlemen, I will be wanting in my duty if I do not mention something about female education. Education of our boys depends to a large extent upon the training we give to our girls. Home is the first school of learning, and unless mothers are educated, children cannot be expected to get the formation of their character; and this is a very vital matter. From the Report of the Director of Public Instruction we find that there has been a rapid and unexpected progress in female education among the Muhammadans of Eastern Bengal and Assam:

Year	The number of Muhammadan girls
1907	16468
1908	29265
1909	42466
1910	46635
1911	52142
1912	59751

This progress should in no way be checked but helped to advance, and this end can only be attained by the multiplication of Purdah schools and greater encouragement of Zenana classes.

Professional and Technical Education

Gentlemen, the professional and technical education should also claim our attention. It must be admitted that of late years there has been an increase of students of Law, but it is a matter of regret as well as dismay that the legal profession should claim so much of our young talent to the neglect of others. While this is the case with the legal profession, the Medical, Engineering and the Industries are left severely alone and

totally neglect by our young men. When the lists of successful students in connection with examination in the profession and technical examinations are scanned, a keen disappointment is felt in the absence of Muhammadan names. It is unknown that our young graduates hanker after Executive service in preference to the leading profession. Will they not consider this question seriously?

Funds

Gentlemen, one point more and I have done. I have discussed at length the question of Muhammadan education in almost all its bearings – a question on which the salvation of our community depends. It is after all a question of ways and means.

(a) The sinews of war must be supplied otherwise we will not be in a position to translate our best intentions into action. The Education Commission of 1882 realized the situation and their principal recommendation amongst others was about the allotment of funds, and it is as follows: “That the special encouragement of Mahomedan education be regarded as a legitimate charge on local, on Municipal and on Provincial Funds.” The effect of this Resolution does not appear to have gone beyond mere acknowledgement of the principle of special assistance to be afforded from public funds in the matter of Muhammadan education. To give effects to the recommendation what is needed is that separate allotments should be liberally assigned to Muhammadan education, under the following heads by the District and the Municipal Boards as well as by the State:

1. Establishment and encouragement of:

- (a) Hostels for Muhammadan boys (b) Government or Aided High Schools in Muhammadan localities (c) Government or Aided Schools in Muhammadan localities (d) Secularized Maktabs (e) Senior Madrassahs – Government or aided – conducted on modern lines (f) Junior Madrassahs – Government or aided – conducted on modern lines (g) Schools for Muhammadan girls (h) Zenana classes at Muhammadan centres.

2. Improvement of the High Schools attached to Government Madrassahs.

3. Stipends to Muhammadan students in Colleges, Schools, Professional and special institutions.

(b) But while we have every right to insist that our legitimate claims should not be overlooked in the distribution of Public Funds in furtherance of educational schemes, we cannot be absolved from the duty of putting our own shoulders to the wheel and supplementing Government aid by our own efforts. We should never forget that the old adage “Heaven helps those who help themselves” holds true in all the affairs of life, and nowhere is it more true than in matters affecting popular welfare. No measure worth the name has ever succeeded except by the whole-hearted exertions of devoted workers who have depended more on their efforts than on extraneous help. Help and assistance from any quarter must be not only welcome but may even be necessary, but the main duty must rest with ourselves. And in the matter of Funds, we

have to recollect that there are other demands on the public purse which Government cannot justly ignore.

Gentlemen, in a case like this I would implore you to give liberty of your money and substance and thus help to wipe out the standing reproach that we are a backward community. I have explained to you sufficiently, and laid bare in detail, our wants and requirements in matters relating to education, and I have no doubt, every one of us feel our backward condition in every walk of life very keenly – so keenly as to set everyone of us thinking what to do to raise our status by means of education. It lies in your power to stretch out your hand of sympathy and support. Let me repeat it to you that it is a question of funds. Brethren, it is for you and me to obliterate this standing disgrace. Will you not, I beseech you, contribute towards this noble purpose your personal service, and your money. No sacrifice will be too great in this great and glorious cause of helping to diffuse light and knowledge. I sincerely trust that my appeal for funds will not be in vain. Here is an opportunity for you and a golden opportunity to show your love for your community, in the name of education.

Gentlemen, it would be ungrateful on my part if I do not take this opportunity of expressing our heart-felt thanks to the Government of H.E. Lord Hardinge for their keen interest in our welfare and for the policy on Muhammadan education delineated in their Resolution of 21st February, 1913, and circular Letter of April 3rd of the same year. This has given encouragement and inspired hopes in the minds of those who are striving to push Muhammadan education. We are anxiously waiting to see that the schemes are satisfactorily and fully carried out by the Local Government.

And now coming to the conclusive stage of my address to you, I feel it my duty to remind the Government that our policy is one of co-operation. We may want Government to do something for us. We may criticize any measure and sometimes may proceed to the length of strong criticism. But it is because we feel so sorely about our educational needs. It is because we have a great leeway to pass. His Majesty the King-Emperor's gracious message still rings in our ears, and we shall by the help of God strive in the spirit of that message to carry out our desired object of furthering education in our community.

Gentlemen, the present is the most critical period for the Mussalmans in Bengal. We are faced with a sociological problem in which success depends upon certain moral and ethical laws. A vast process of evolution has been visibly affecting the Hindus around us. The horizon of their intellectual outlook is being widened. A new stage of intellectual revolution is just begun. Arts and sciences are being pursued with the sole aim of extending the bounds of knowledge. Hinduism and Aryan culture in India are being studied and interpreted in accordance with the best tenets of modern science and philosophy. Hindus have been feeling the spur of forward spirit which makes small nations great and great nations greater. Amidst these surroundings, we the Muhammadans are faced with a silent process of intercommunal rivalries which mark the rise or fall of societies, and prepare them to live or die.

The time has come for definite and decisive action on our part if we wish to exist at all as a living community. We may cry in vain for years for the recognition of our importance in this country. But I want you to realize that by legislation, resolutions and orders, societies have never risen and can never rise to prominence. Legislation

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and orders may serve as temporary props but ultimately the problem is that of the survival of the fittest. It is education and education alone that prepares the social units for this struggle, and unless we Muhammadans are determined upon a definite and deliberate plan of action, we are bound to be swamped by the tide of superior forces. Even the spirit of religion for which a Muhammadan lives and dies, will slowly be sapped and disintegrated, and the spirit will die away leaving only a semblance as it remains. Live or die or be absorbed by another is the eternal law of nature and man.

Gentlemen, I thank you all for your patient hearing.

(Source: Professor Dr Muhammad Abdullah, *Adunik Shikha Bistare Banglar Koyekjon Muslim Dishari*, Dhaka: Kamiyab Parkashani, 2000, pp. 261-308).