Deobandism and Aligarism: Responses of North Indian Muslim Scholars to Colonialism

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Abstract

The Muslim education of colonial period differs in many aspects from the phases preceding it. The period was eventful which marked the emergence of many powerful Muslim educational movements of which Deobandism and Aligarianism occupy a central place. The British invasion inflicted an adverse impact on the traditional Muslim education system. The substitution of Persian language by English and Europeanization of education deepened the severity of the problem. The aftermath of revolt of 1857 was a great blow to the existence of Muslims of north India. The inevitable consequence of the series of events was an adverse effect on the traditionally preserved educational systems of Muslims. It was the need of time to think on what they can do in unison to get rid of the woe. Given to the situation and context various responses were formed. Some of them observed that the Muslims must utilise the situation to gain modern English education so as to obtain governmental jobs. Contrary to it some others stressed the need of concentrating on the revival of traditional Islamic subjects. Some others raised voices for reconciling the modern secular education and religious education. Whatever it is, during the colonial period, various movements were launched by north Indian Muslim with a view to come out of the jeopardy they are in. Deoband, Anglo Muhammadan College, JamiaMillia, Nadvathul Ulema and Lucknow represented different faces of these responses.When Aligarism stood for reformism in muslim educational system with an aim of transforming the community from medieval to modern, Deobandism was responses of Islamic religious scholars to the colonial dominance of the British and the collapse of Muslim political power, who enhanced a sense of cultural continuity in a period of alien rule.

Through this paper the author aims to make a close comparison between the two movements in order to explore the similarities and differences between

them. That will be interesting to discuss the movements launched afterwards taking lessons from the two but having the elements of both.

Key words: Aligarism, Deobandism, Muslim Education Movements.

Introduction

While observing the educational development of Indian Muslims through a lens of history, a survey of which can be done in four periods; Arab-Islamic period, Perso-Islamic period, colonial period and post-colonial period. The very basis of this classification lies in the assimilation and accommodation mechanisms Muslim education adopted in its search for new ways when the impact and influence of different historical premises were at large. It is worth mentioning the thoughts and idioms of Muslim education formed in the length of the four periods and the dynamism and perceptibility manifested in it. At the same time the periods have also been witnessed historical junctures characterised by survival and stagnation born naturally out of the favourable and unfavourable conditions.

The first period which was in effect from the very advent of Islam to India till tenth century (A D) was characterised by a small scale Muslim population. As a result the system of education and methods of dissemination of knowledge were of primitive, the basis of which was the ways passed down by eminent scholars of Arabia (Chand, 1941).

The Preso-Islamic period (from 10th to 18th centuries) was indeed a mile stone in the history of education of Indian Muslims which witnessed the emergence of organised systems of Muslim education and Muslim educational thoughts. Various dynasties of Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) and ensued Mughal Empire (1526-1857) were instrumental in determining the destiny of Muslim education of the period (Soulath, 1996). Maktabs and Madrasas represented the formal learning centres of primary and higher education respectively. Formal education and spiritual sciences were the Persian elements that influenced Indian Muslims in their realm of knowledge. During this period an added enthusiasm was found towards rational sciences (Robinson, 2001). There emerged a civilization which was a blend of Arabic and Persian cultures. To Muslims, the period marked the formation of an identity of their own (Rahman, 1977)

As far as Indian Muslim education is concerned, the Arab-Islamic period was its infancy, in which considerable progress can be found in the subsequent period- the Perso- Islamic period. While approaching in an evolutionary line, these two periods represent the formative and constructive periods in the history of Indian Muslim education. A transition of which had taken place during colonial period mainly because of the British policies that aimed at hegemonising India and its people.

Colonial Period

British invasion adversely affected the Muslim education system. The replacing of Persian language by English and Europeanization of education triggered for new problems. Muslims were forced to live under British with humiliation in a soil where they ruled for centuries. Meanwhile, the British had developed an attitude of considering only those who are trained and socialised in a European system of education. This in turn created an atmosphere in which the freedom of Muslims to go with religious study was under question.

The aftermath of revolt of 1857 was a great blow to the very existence of Muslims especially of north India. The British attempts to reform indigenous customs, the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries and their economic policies caused for increasing tensions among Muslims leaders (Metcalf, 1982). The necessary corollary of these serial events was an adverse effect on the traditionally preserved educational systems of Muslims. It was the need of time to think on what they can do in unison to get rid of the woe. Given to the situation and context various responses were formed. Some of them observed that the Muslims must utilise the situation by gaining modern English education so as to obtain governmental jobs. Contrary to it some others stressed the need of concentrating on the revival of traditional Islamic subjects. Some others raised voices for reconciling the modern secular education and religious education. Whatever it is, during the colonial period, various movements were launched by north Indian Muslim with a view to come out of the jeopardy they are in. Deoband, Anglo Muhammadan College, Jamia Millia Islamia, Nadvathul Ulema and Lucknow represent different faces of these responses.

When Aligarism (Aligarh Movement) stood for reformism in muslim educational system with an aim of transforming the community from medieval to modern, Deobandism (Deoband Movement) was a response of Islamic religious scholars to the colonial dominance of the British and the collapse of Muslim political power, who had enhanced a sense of cultural continuity in a period of alien rule (Ibid).

Deoband Movement

Darul 'Ulum Deoband is one of the leading Islamic seminaries formed in the post-mutiny period with an aim of empowering Muslims educationally. A madrasa established in 1866 at Deoband in the district of Saharanpur of UP, later evolved into the proportion of a movement. Muhammed Qasim Nanautahwi (1832-1880), Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1829-1905) and Haji SayedAbid Husain were the founding fathers. By giving more importance to revealed sciences (*manqulat*), its aim was to strengthen the religious study among Indian Muslims. It proved to be a success in preparing a young generation trained in religious sciences which in turn helped preserve the knowledge legacy lost after the advent of British. Within the last one and half centuries it offered about fifteen thousand skilled scholars to service for society. It had also played a pivotal role in India's struggle for freedom and national movements

(Rizvi, 1980). British government's unsound educational policies and politico-economic stands predisposed Darul 'Ulum to grow more vigorously (Tabassum, 2006).

Slightly divergent from the educational systems which were in effect so far in India, the madrasa adopted a method of teaching religion by incorporating maximum infrastructural facilities available. Darul 'Ulum adpoted the systems of classroom, bench, desk and chock brought about by British to make teaching-learning processes more effective. Unlike mosque and house centred *dars* system, separate building for classrooms was constructed. Hostels and a big library came into being. Teachers were given monthly salary. Students' learning was organised in accordance with special courses. Annual examinations were introduced. Awards and certificates (*sanad*) were distributed to the successfully completed candidates (Metcalf, 1978).

As far as the syllabus and curriculum are concerned, Deoband's opposition to Western sciences is worth mentioning. Though it had incorporated *ma'qulat*, rational sciences (philosophy, logic, etc.) in its syllabus, its balance was tilted towards *manqulat*, transmitted or revealed sciences (e.g. the Qur'an and hadith). Sociology, economics, history, English and pure sciences were not a part of its curriculum. Its method of teaching and acquiring knowledge was still aural. Such a curriculum bereft of *ijtihad*, as Maududi argued, could hardly compete with and beat the West. Additionally, despite its call to revive pure Islam, the Deobandi School did not fully break off from Sufism. The emphasis on close relations between student and a chosen spiritual guide was in fact a crucial feature at Deoband (Ahmed, 2007).

The success of the *madrasa* can be measured from the spread of Deobandi schooling through similar schools. The 'Ulama of Deoband early tried to establish a system of branch schools that, following the pattern of British universities with their affiliating colleges, were to be subject to control of both curriculum and administration. Thus they founded many schools, particularly in Doab, Rohikhand, Muzaffarnagar, Galoothi and Nagina (Metcalf, 1982)

Theologically they are affiliated to *maturidism* and jurisprudentially they are *hanafis*. At the same time they are strict adherents to the thoughts of Muhammed Qasim and Rashid Ahmed. The thoughts and ideology put forward by Darul 'Ulum have been raised into the proportion of 'Deobandism'. The adherents of which are known generally as Deobandis. While comparing it with Sunni and Wahabi sects of Kerala, it has been observed that Deobandis recognise Sunnis in some aspects and wahabis in some other (Malayamma, 2011)

Aligarh Movement

Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), the most successful centre of reformist Islamic education, known more as a movement than an academic institution. This most respected and important educational centre for Indian Muslims was initially founded as Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College (MAOC) at Aligarh in 1875 by Sir

Sayed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) and subsequently raised to the status of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in 1920 (Upadhyay, 2003). Being the representative body of the upwardly mobile middle class Indian Muslims, the university created a significant impact on Muslim politics in India (Ibid). In another words the university had played a significant role in shifting the paradigm pertaining to the approach of Indian Muslims towards British.

If we look into the historical background of this movement, Sir Sayed Ahmed launched it with unique political and educational ideology and objective to restore the lost pride of his community after the fall of Mogul Empire. In the preceding two generations Muslims had fallen behind Hindus in adapting to modern education and so could not compete successfully with them for civil service and other jobs which required it. At that time, the experiment of modernizing Islam was regarded as dangerously radical by the orthodox *ulema* (Wright, 1966).

There was an urgent need of developing a political strategy that may assure social and political security of north Indian Muslims. Towards this end he developed a political ideology against the freedom of India from colonial rule and preferred to convince his community to align with the imperial power than to confront with them (Upadhyay, 2003). Accordingly, he made a tactical move to manage rapport between Muslims and British power by preparing his community as allies to British than their 'subjugation' under Hindu dominated power structures in the country (Ibid).
Sepoy mutiny of 1857 was a great blow to the Muslim which not only caused for the loss of many lives at the hands of British but for a steep decline in their socio-economic status also. After the fall of Mogul Empire Muslim elites were reduced to the position of hewers of woods and drawers of water by the British (Muhammad, 1978).

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was of the view that backwardness of Muslims could be eradicated only through western education. Accordingly he set up MAO College on his return from England with the help of British to impart western education along with Islamic knowledge (Upadhyay, 2003). It arouse out of dissatisfaction with British-Indian schools, government and missionary, as well as with Islamic *madrasas*, which were supposedly giving the wrong kind of education to the wrong kind of the people (Lelyveld, 1978). Instead, Aligarh's founders sought different foreign models, and introduced features of curriculum and social environment designed to attract a new clientele for English education (Ibid).

In its long history, AMU has produced a considerable number of eminent Muslim personalities like Mohammad Ali, Mawlana Saukat Ali, Dr.Zakir Hussain, Liyaqat Ali , Field Marshal Ayub Khan, SK. Mohammed Abdullah, Mufti Mohammed Sayeed and others (Upadhyay, 2003). With four high schools, faculties of various disciplines, medical, engineering and dental colleges and number of professional courses it is imparting education to about 25,000 students through about 1300 teachers and 6000 non-teaching employees (Ibid).

As an Islamic modernist Sir Syed's thought was ultimately aimed at the twin goals of the rationalization of Islamic dogma and the liberation of Islamic law who believed that only by reconciling with modernity and Western rule could Islam survive (Brown, 2009)

Opposition to him came neither from opponents of modern education nor from people discontented with British rule. Opponents were, rather, people who had come to terms with British rule without the kind of modifications of religious beliefs that Sayyid Ahmad proposed (Metcalf, 1982). One main feature which distinguishes it from other educational institutions in India is that most of the students are obliged to live within its precincts, thus removed from the injurious influences which in an Indian home prejudice the growth of young mind (Graham, 1974).

Conclusion

A comparison between these two movements will bring into light differences more than the similarities. Both of them along with Nadwatul 'Ulama (educational movement of colonial period which was a blend of Deobandism and Aligarism) are the institutional loci that credited with triggering an unprecedented enthusiasm among Indian Muslim towards accumulation of knowledge, in their cause for nation building. All contributed to the substantial religious self-consciousness of the period; all reflected and encouraged the growing sense that Muslim resident in British India were tied together in a separate community; and all fostered the use of Urdu among educated Muslims. Aligarh and Nadwa were, however, notable in seeking an active political role in relation to the colonial government, a role that most 'ulama in the late nineteenth century either shunned or ignored.

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