An Abstract

A STUDY OF HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF EDUCATION FOR MUSLIM WOMEN IN INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ROLE OF ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATION

BY

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Need of the Study

It is true, in a general sense, that there is inequality among men and women in their educational attainment. Women belonging to various socio-economic and cultural communities suffer from common educational deficiencies but the analysis of this problem would lead a researcher to a diversity of social and cultural contexts of women. Even the ways and means to overcome the low educational status of women require different approaches specific to the cultural ethos and social set up of each group. The present study on the education among Muslim women is a step towards studying a specific group among the general category of women in India.

The various perceptions and practices pertaining to Muslim women's education have appeared in the course of Indian history, in the form of debates and discussions in several magazines, activities of the various educational institutions, literary expressions such as novels, stories and poems. These efforts and ventures in educating Muslim women form an important intellectual resource that could even be harnessed in the present time.

A historical overview of the great drama of India education is represented in a number of important commentaries. However, there is hardly a specific account, which helps us to understand the historical development of the Muslim women's education in the Indian subcontinent. This study provides a historical context that helps us understand the nature of present condition hostile towards educating Muslim women.

The historical material on Muslim women's education has helped in documenting the scattered perceptions and practices of educating women at one place. Such a document should enable the theoreticians and practitioners of education to recognize the special treatment required in educating Muslim women.

Objective Of The Study

The proposed study has set before itself the following objectives:
1. To provide some description of the state and status of education among the Muslim women in the later half of the 19th century up to pre-independent India.

2. To document the efforts of individuals and institutions who contributed to the debate on education for Muslim women.

3. To critically examine the thoughts and endeavours of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and his contemporaries in promoting education of Muslim women.

4. To analyze the role of Muslim Education Conference (an offshoot of the Aligarh Movement) in creating and clarifying issues in education for Muslim women.

5. To document the history of the establishment of girls' school in Aligarh (which later developed into Women's' College) and study its role in the spread of education among Muslim girls.

6. To study the role of Aligarh Muslim University in relation to the spread of higher learning among Muslim women.

Design Of Study

The proposed research is primarily historical in nature. This means that the research is far removed from the events under study. The present researcher has relied on materials and manuscripts that were recorded in the 19th and 20th centuries. Also these are the sources that are kept and written by actual participants in, or witnesses of the saga of education for Muslim women. Understandably, most of the data cannot be collected through direct observation and the interviewing of the people was not always possible. However, the researcher interviewed the selected alumni in an effort to write about their historical memories.

The sources for data collection that were identified for the present research were as follows:

Archival material:

a. Correspondence among concerned individuals on the establishment of Aligarh girls' school.
b. Popular magazines that carried the debate on Muslim women’s education.

c. Records of the gazette from Aligarh Muslim University.

d. Proceedings of Muslim Educational Conference.

e. Official records and other documentary materials.

Library sources

a. Studies relevant to the understanding of education among Muslim women.

b. Literary sources such as Novels and dramas, biographies and autobiographies etc.

Biographical data was collected through interviews and questionnaire from women alumni of Aligarh Muslim University for the purpose of preparing some case studies.

The respondents who were interviewed were selected through purposive sampling. The basic assumption behind purposive sampling is that with good judgment and an appropriate strategy one can handpick the cases to be included in the sample. This sampling procedure satisfies the needs of the research as its topmost consideration.

Delimitation

The major reference of the study is confined to Aligarh Muslim University and its famous Women’s College. The time period of the study spans from later half of the 19th century to the late 20th century.

The background of Women’s College at Aligarh is prepared with reference to general state of women’s education in the country as depicted in various reports of education commissions and concerned individuals particularly in the later half of the 19th century and early 20th century.
However, the various perspectives and perceptions that influenced Women’s College at Aligarh originated from various places of the country. The present proposed study analyses their content primarily for the meaningful role they have played in clarifying and contesting ideas on Muslim women’s education.

Plan Of The Study

The present thesis carries ten chapters including the introduction and the conclusion. Chapter I gives the background and the need of study. It offers an outline of the chapter’s scheme. Chapter II examines the colonial perception of education of women in Indian society in the early 19th and 20th century through various documents that were officially produced during the time. The chapter confines itself to the history of women’s education during the period between Adam’s report in the mid 19th century up to early 20th century. The chapter looks into the four major agencies for the spread of women’s education viz. the Christian missionaries, the government, the liberal Europeans and some inspired Indians. The main objective of the chapter is to understand the state and status of Muslim women with respect to education. The purpose is to understand the extent of the presence and absence of Muslim women at various levels and areas of education. This chapter gives a historical background to understand the role of girls’ college at Aligarh in the 20th century.

Chapter III examines the concern for Muslim women’s education as represented in the Urdu novels written between later half of the 19th century and early 20th century in north India. The chapter focuses on the internal cultural orientations of the Muslim communities, their moods and manners, their favourable or unfavourable views or attitudes with regard to sending girls to schools. The chapter selects the universe of Urdu novels written by men and women who were actively engaged in the issue of women’s education. The chapter explores how the authors use the literary medium of the novel for the purpose of bringing about a major change in the mood, habits, manners and social customs which were creating obstacles in the educational uplift of Muslim women. The Urdu novels selected for the present focus primarily on women’s role in a family and the role of education in elevating or degrading it. The chapter selects two novelists, Deputy Nazir Ahmad and Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali for their novels that focused on the educational transformation of Muslim women.
Chapter IV examines some popular Urdu magazines around early 20th century for the information and ideas relevant to Muslim education. The chapter explores the relationship between the contents of the articles and the agenda of social reform and social relevance launched by the Muslim educational institutions that were engaged in programmes related to Muslim women’s education. The articles are probed in terms of how they project the problem of education as the problem of society i.e. how the issue of Muslim women’s education was responding to the events in contemporary history especially about the social changes that were occurring in the middle class families of Muslim societies around the early 20th century. Another area that the chapter examines in the various magazines is the depiction of the struggle and tension between women’s world in the household and outside, between the religious and secular knowledge.

Chapter V focuses on Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and his contemporaries for their role in promoting the cause of education among Muslim women. The group is divided into three sub-groups related to three distinct phases of the movement for educating Muslim women. The three phases are analyzed in terms of whether ideas for education are getting implemented or they remain at the level of utterances and official records.

The first phase focuses on Syed Ahmad Khan and his close associates who supported the idea of women’s education.

For the second phase of the movement, the chapter focuses on people who actively participated in translating the vision and proposals for educating Muslim women. But the efforts of this phase remain restricted to a local context. The third phase is explored for its scale of activities and the joining of large number of volunteers. The personalities described in the three phases belong to the generation that may be termed as contemporaries of Syed Ahmad Khan.

Chapter VI outlines the role of the All India Muslim Educational Conference with reference to the education of Muslim women. The Conference had its origin in Mohammadan Education Congress, which Sir Syed established in 1886. The word ‘Mohammadan’ in the title was substituted by the word ‘Muslim’ in 1923. The main
objective of this conference was to promote the cause of the educational uplift of Muslim community. The chapter examines how the objective of the Conference reflected in its actual concerns and practices over a period of time.

Chapter VII is a case account of Muslim Girls’ Intermediate College at Aligarh. The idea to establish a Muslim girls’ School was first presented in 1903 at the Bombay Session of Muslim Educational Conference. To record the idea, a resolution was passed. But the place to establish the school and other details were not discussed in the resolution. The chapter outlines Sheikh Abdullah’s efforts to give the resolution a concrete shape at Aligarh.

Chapter VIII is an account of Aligarh Muslim University and the development of Muslim women’s education. After the establishment of the M.A.O. College, the related education movement came to be called the Aligarh movement. This movement had two institutional components 1. The M.A.O. College 2. The Mohammadan Educational Conference (MEC). The chapter examines the development of the movement for Muslim women’s education through the activities and proceedings of these two institutions. The chapter discusses the role of the two institutions in creating a ground to establish Aligarh Muslim University in 1920. Subsequently the history of the gradual development of women’s education is traced up to the decade 1990s. The complex story of women’s participation in various curricular and co-curricular activities are traced as well as the reach of female students to subjects where they were earlier absent, is outlined.

Chapter IX focuses on selected case studies of female alumni of Aligarh Muslim University. These cases were selected during the course of doing the present research. The chapter relates to the profile of selected female students who were admitted for various courses in the university and passed out their respective examinations with professional and non-professional degrees. The case studies were conducted in order to give a personal account to a general description of history and society relevant to Muslim women’s education. The chapter examines the mutual influence of the processes of education and society in the biographies of particular cases of female alumni. The chapter focuses on such questions posed to the alumni: What factors influenced the choice of students in selecting the subject of study or the
courses in the university? Why was A.M.U. chosen as a place for education of the female students? What were the difficulties as well as the facilities the girls experienced during the course of acquiring education?

Chapter X summarizes the broad findings of the present study and reflects over the need to go beyond the limited scope of this research.