CHAPTER - VII

ALIGARH MOVEMENT AND
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(A) Aligarh Movement and Early Muslim Women Discourses during 19th Century

During the 19th century women became the subject of reforms in the socio-religious programme of the educated modern thinkers of India. Raja Rammohan Roy was the first in the 19th century reformers, who considered as the “champion of women rights” because of his social reform movements against the system of *Sati*[^1]. Ishwar Chandra Vidhya Sagar championed female education and led the campaign to legalise widow remarriage. Kesew Chandra Sen, a leader of Brahmo Samaj[^2] sought to bring women into new roles through schools, prayer meetings. Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj[^3] encouraged female education and condemned customs of dowry, polygamy etc. However, the name of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan appeared first in the horizon of Muslim community as a pioneer reformer in the social and cultural sphere. He started his programme of reforming the Muslim society from the town of Aligarh which later became the center of his reformist activities and came to be known as Aligarh Movement in Indian history.


[^2]: The Brahmo Samaj began with a group of Bengali Hindus who wanted to rethink their religious heritage. In 1815 Rammohan Roy assembled his friends for religious discussions and by 1828 they were meeting for weekly services and sermons as the Brahmo Sabha. Debendranath Tagore, author of the Brahma Covenant and a volume of scriptures and the designer of revised rituals, founded the Brahmo religion. When his followers wanted more dramatic action in the areas of caste equality, temperance, and equality for women, the Samaj split and then split again. By the 1870s it was considered a separate religion.

[^3]: In Northern India, Dayananda Saraswasti (1824-83) launched a vigorous campaign against popular Hinduism including the brahmin priesthood, rituals and pilgrimages and customary prohibitions on widow remarriage and female education. Holding the Vedas infallible, he established the first Arya Samaj (Noble Society) in Bombay in 1875. Within a few years, reformers in Delhi, Lahore, and other North Indian cities had set up independent Arya Samajis.
Though the central concern of Aligarh Movement was to provide modern education to the Muslim community of India during 19th century but it also took many other aspects of socio religious cultural and political issues of the community.1

In this chapter an attempt has been made to analyze the discourses on Muslim women by Sir Syed and his Associates and to what extent they were concerned to provide traditional and modern education to Muslim women in 19th century. This chapter also focuses the contribution Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah and his Associates for the development of modern education to the Muslim women through the platform of Aligarh Movement in 20th century. An attempt is made to study the women discourses and his revolutionary ideas related to the gender issues along with his other women ideologues and to what extent he was differed with Sir Syed views regarding women education have also been focused here.

On the other hand it is alleged that Aligarh Movement did not take up the issues of enhancing the condition of women and also even its founding leader Sir Syed Ahmed Khan did not bother to provide education to the Muslim women.5 There might be some difficulties with Sir Syed, when he took up the significant task of uplifting his community for which he felt the provision of education was of paramount importance. The issue of women’s education could arouse the Muslim religious sentiments and create unnecessary controversies in turn disturbing Sir Syed’s programme and shattering his dream of converting his community into a progressive educated community. It is interesting to note that wide range discourses on women issues were also discussed by Sir Syed and his Associates in 20th century. The basic issue of these discourses was to provide traditional and modern education to the women folk of the Muslim community to enhance their position in the society.

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Some of the followers of Sir Syed hold the opinion that Sir Syed’s thinking on gender issues was strictly traditional \( (kadamparasti) \) and adhered to customs \( (rivajparasti) \). But after going through the writings and speeches of Sir Syed and other leaders of Aligarh movement over the discourses on women, it seems that women became a focal point of their reform movement. Progressive approach was taken up to enhance their social status of Muslim Women not only by Sir Syed by his followers in Colonial India. We find a number of instances in the writings of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan wherein women issues were focused greatly and thus it unfolds Sir Syed’s positive approach towards their development. His encounter with the educational set up of England during his visit in 1869 A.D inspired him a lot. He expressed his astonishment where he saw the system of education prevalent there for the women of that country, and had the desire to provide the same kind of education for the women of his community in India\(^7\). His meeting with an English women namely Miss Mary Carpenter\(^8\) on Steamer “Baroda” on his way to London reflect positive attitude towards women education as he was much impressed by the philanthropic works of Miss Mary Carpenter for the female education in India. Sir Syed writes:

“Miss Carpenter who is a famous lady to whom I met on my way to London and who worked for the betterment of the Indian women in the field of education in Calcutta and Bombay... we had talk on the issues of education for women... and for education of masses...”\(^9\)

Therefore Sir Syed was not against the education of women as it reflected from his above conversation with Mary Carpenter. He further writes in her diary on her request about his perception on female education. To quote:


\(^{21}\) AIG. 21 May, 1869.

\(^{8}\) Miss Mary Carpenter (1877-1907) was born in Ekstor in England was a social worker and educationist. She established a school in Bristol for poor children. She took part immensely to raise the standard of the orphan children. She also opened many schools for girls in Bristol and she visited India four times. She published her work in 1846, Our Convicts. Her work “The Last Days of Rammohan Roy” also published in 1866 and the other work “Six Months in India” got published in 1868.

\(^{9}\) AIG. 21 May, 1869.
“Since I heard of Miss Marry Carpenter’s benevolent and philanthropic intention respecting female education in India, I was extremely anxious to form acquaintance with that noble lady and I must consider it a providential boon that I was fortunate enough to have the pleasure of meeting her on board the steamer ‘Baroda’ on my way to London... bettering the moral condition of women is in itself the proof of the benevolent intentions and noble designs of Miss Carpenter... it is very noble of Miss Carpenter that she has taken great pains in educating her Indian sisters and it is my hearty prayer that every success will attend her noble exertions...”.

Therefore Sir Syed acknowledged the works of Miss Marry Carpenter and praised her endeavors, for the cause of female education in India. Sir Syed also wanted to provide female education to his country women. He narrates his experiences of England visit where he saw the abilities of women of that country due to the kind of education which they had been provided. He pleasantly mentioned about an English women under whose supervision a work shop was placed. He praised her ability to deal the work assigned to her. He writes:

“This workshop is under the supervision of a lady and the machineries which are available in this workshop and the works which assigned to her she did to her capacity in this workshop”.

After his visit to the collegiate school of Northern London which was famous for imparting education to females. The College administration had an immense influence on the mind of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and inspired by it, he writes:

“I was eagerly waiting since long time to see and to inspect the collegiates of girls in this country and the way they provided education to the girls... it is my desire to see all of them and later to inform the same for my countrymen”.

Sir Syed was very much impressed by the educational system of England where special arrangement was made for the education of masses. Sir Syed also narrates the story of his land lady Mrs Elan Valt who was curious to read books while in illness. It had a lasting impact on Sir Syed’s mind. In this way Sir...
Syed was not opposed to the education of women but he wanted them to educate in their own language. And he considered the improvement of the education of women, as necessary for them but he did not prefer school education for them. Even his discourses on women includes his concerns for the rights of women in a number of treatises and articles published in his self-founded Journal Tehzibul Akhlaq, Sir Syed sought to highlight the legal rights of Muslim women. Inter Alia he criticized omen for lack of common sense and exercise of rational faculties. He claimed that gross ignorance and respect for baseless customs and traditions lay at the root of their irrational behaviour. Additionally, he wrote powerful reformatory treatises in advocacy of widow remarriage which he considered an issue of great importance. He sought to highlight the serious social implications which could have arisen due to the neglect of this social problem. He took Swami Dayanand Sarawati (1824-83) to task that he should had taken up this perilous societal problem rather than preaching about theism. As Sir Syed faced stiff opposition from his co-religionist in his attempt to introduce western education among the boys, seems to have made him more apprehensive and cautious and did not encourage him to provide such avenues to the women, alas, the conservative elements of the society should react and revolt against him. Besides, he believed that unlike the west, in India the time was not yet ripe to found modern schools for girls.

The discourses on women in Aligarh Movement became significant for the first time when debates were mooted out for the school education to the Muslim women through the platform of All India Muslim Educational Conference, an educational body founded by Sir Syed in 1886 in its third session which was held at Lahore in 1888 where a significant and a historical resolution was passed for the establishment of a girls school for Muslim women.

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14 Majmaa Lectures, op.cit., pp. 266-69.
community. The proposal was put by Shaikh Khairuddin and seconded by Khalifa Immamuddin- District Inspector Schools. The resolution reads as:\(^{15}\):

"The Muhammadan Education Conference unanimously agrees to the proposal that Muslims should establish schools for the education of Muslim girls. These schools should be in accordance with Islam and the ways of the Sharif sections of the Muslims".

The proposal was of its first kind in history as it brought a revolutionary change in the traditional thoughts of Muslim community during 19\(^{th}\) century. A pioneer step was initiated by Shaikh Khairuddin who brought change in the outlook of his co-religionists regarding the education of women. He gave a thought provoking speech and wished to convince the members of his community about the education of women. As he said:

"Honorable President...if we want to know the real picture of any civilization, we must look at the status of women of that civilization......those who are aware of the condition of Europe they must be knowing the educational status of the women of that country. They are not far behind from the men of that country in terms of educational qualification.......they are doctors, lawyers, and barristers by profession..."\(^{16}\)

With this above mentioned speech Shaikh Khairuddin proposed his viewpoint to establish a girl’s school. The proposal received appreciations from the other leaders of the community and it was seconded by Khalifa Immamuddin who also put forward his views in favour of the same. To quote Khalifa Immamuddin:

"Honorable President and gentleman.....I strongly favoured the resolution of Shaikh Khairuddin, I will not say much about it ....if you (people) want to spread the education for the women of our community, it would automatically help in spreading the education for the male members of our community. ..... Here I mean to say that such type of education may be given to the women folk that would lead them to the proper understanding of Islam..... they should also learn the

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\(^{15}\) Proceedings of All India Muslim Education Conference 1888, Lahore Session.

\(^{16}\) The Speech of Shaikh Khairuddin regarding the proposal of establishing girls school see. For details, \textit{Ibid}
essential of home management through the kind of education which they would receive. 17

The proposal was unique in the sense that it strongly advocated the message of uplifting women through the modern education. Sir Syed was the same product of the 19th century traditional society who carefully listened to the arguments of Shaikh Khairuddin and Immamuddin. Finally he stood against the motion and rejected the ideas that had been presented and emphasized on the traditional mode of education for the women. To quote Sir Syed:

"I have the same opinion towards the education of women, as our elders had. If the new way of education is is being arranged for the women today by the Government or by Muslims or any other Islamic organization is no more acceptable to me. To establish school for the education of women and in this respect to imitate the girls’ schools and colleges of Europe is not suitable in the present condition of India."

Thus Sir Syed was not opposed to women’s education in principal but only to their education through the schools. He preferred the education of boys at Aligarh instead of girls and believed in the principal of down filtration theory to educate the women folk. He cautioned the Government that any endeavour on the part of officials to introduce female education would prove “complete failure” and probably produce “mischievous results and waste of money”. To Sir Syed the best way to educate was through the education of the men for he hoped that “the enlightened fathers, brothers and husbands would naturally be most anxious to educate their female relations”.

17 The Speech of Khalifa Immamuddin regarding the proposal of establishing girls school see. For details, ibid.
His testimony before the Education Commission of 1882 on the question of female education also reflected the same viewpoint. As he said in the cross examination before the Education Commission:

"The matter of women education much resembles the question of oriental philosophers who asked whether the egg or the hen were first created. Those who hold that women should be educated and civilized prior to the men are greatly mistaken. The fact is that no satisfactory education can be provided to the Muslim females until a large number of Muslim males received a sound education. The present state of education among Muslim females is in my opinion, enough for domestic happiness considering the present social and economic condition of the life of the Muslims of India."

In his view any thoughts of schools education for women was not only premature but might arouse opposition or at the very least divert resources away from his efforts at Aligarh to educate men. He also observed that there was no Muslim house without the governess (ustani) who taught the girls, and a sort of indigenous education of moderate degree prevailed among the girls and they studied religious and moral books in Urdu, Persian and Arabic.

Though he considered the improvement of education among the females, and he delivered speeches about the necessity of the education of the Muslim women. To quote Sir Syed’s speech of 1884 which he delivered in Gurdaspur.

"I am not unaware about the education of the women of our country: I whole heartedly have the desire to see the improvement in the position of women. The opposition which I have against the

Sir Syed’s cross examination by Syed Mahmud in connection with the evidence taken before the members of Indian Education Commission 1882, NWPEC Report, p. 300

Sir Syed’s cross examination, op.cit., p. 299
ways (schools for girls) to which our community is willing to adopt to educate them.²⁹

Though the resolution of 1888 resolution did not bring the satisfactory change in the mind-set of the leaders of the community in respect to providing and establishing school to the education for the women, and it also received stiff opposition from Sir Syed himself. Besides, many other leaders from Aligarh fraternity came forward in favour of providing education to women and spoke about its necessities for the development of women folk. In the Aligarh session of All India Muslim Educational Conference 1891, once again resolution was passed to provide education for the women of Muslim community. The resolution reads as follows:

“The Conference feels that according to the conditions prevailing, Muslim should work for the education of women side by side with men, because the advancement of the community depends on this. The education should be such that it advances the religious, literary and cultural life of women, so that with their education, the future generation would stand to gain”.²¹

All these debates are centered on the issue of imparting education to the women. But Sir Syed’s perception of female education was not totally against it and he knew the significance of women education.

To conclude we can say that the Muslim community was not far behind from the other communities in relation to the upliftment of the women during 19th century. Under the able leadership of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, many intellectuals, associates and modern reformers came forward not to only raise the issue of women’s rights but also to take up the cause of providing modern education to them. Thus Aligarh Movement served in the best way to carry forward the thought of Sir Syed and his associates who later took up the issue of women’s education and women’s rights in their socio, cultural, and educational programme of reforming the Muslim society. In the beginning of the 20th century more concrete and practical steps were taken by Shaikh

³¹ Resolution No. 17 from the Third Annual Meeting of the Mohammadan Educational Conference, Lahore, 1888.
Muhammad Abdullah who was the true product of the Aligarh Movement, his aims and aspirations were same as his elders and who fulfilled the unfinished task of providing modern education to the Muslim female in the 20th century.

(B) Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah and His Contribution for Muslim Women education in 20th Century

The contribution of Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah, the founder of the Women’s College of Aligarh Muslim University for the development of modern and traditional learning among the Muslim women was a remarkable step and indeed it is a unique phenomenon in the annals of Muslim history in 20th century India. He was among those conscious promoters of change who chose to become publicist and activist for the cause of modern education for Muslim women. As a pioneering figure, he made the subject of women a central topic in his programme of socio-cultural reform. The central concern of his reformist agenda was provisions of higher education for the Muslim women. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah was not only confined himself to provide formal education to Muslim women but his greater concern was also on the women’s rights. He was a man of action and to realize his dreams into practical reality he established a tiny Girls School at Aligarh in 1906 which later became Women’s College and further it was attached to the Aligarh Muslim University.

Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah was as true product of Aligarh Movement and thus his aims and aspirations were those as espoused and propagated by the luminaries of the movement. In his own life he sought to achieve the same high goals as were set by pioneer reformers – formal education of Muslim women – which he thought was an unfulfilled aspect of the historic Aligarh movement.

(1) Biographical Sketch of Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah

Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah the visionary philanthropist, lawyer and educationist was a Kashmiri Brahmin, born as Thakur Das on June 21, 1874 at Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir. His father was Mehta Gurmukh Singh. He received his early education at a Maktab in Poonch (Jammu and Kashmir
and there he got the attention of Hakim Nuruddin, court Physician to the Maharaja of Kashmir, where he came to treat a member of the royal family. The Hakim offered to take back Thakur Das to Jammu and to train him in the Unani medicine by assuring his future livelihood, and Thakur Das’s family agreed to that. Under the guidance of Hakim Nuruddin he converted to the Ahmadiya sect and took the name Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah. Hakim helped him for his secondary education and he matriculated from Lahore in 1891 and later came to Aligarh to receive higher education. He acquired degree in LL.B and became the leading advocate of the Civil Court, also became was the President of the Bar Association, Aligarh. At Aligarh Shaikh Abdullah became a Sunni Muslim and also became independent from his patron as he was no more a follower of Ahmedia sect to which his patron had converted him earlier. Shaikh Abdullah was a Kashmiri Brahman, a high caste born and Persian knowing person he was easily adopted in the Ashraf culture of Aligarh community and he got his real substitute family at Aligarh College. He became a member of the Duty Society, founded by his fellow students, Sahabzada Aftab Ahmed Khan, who represented a select group of Aligarh undergraduates. The Society helped in raising money for the College also embodied the ideas of social services and community leadership which was dear to Sir Syed. The brotherhood of Aligarh students and alumni provided Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah with a network of friends, allies and persons, the support system normally provided by one’s extended kin and thus Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah fully merged in the Aligarh’s College family. Upon taking his Law degree, he remained in Aligarh and became active in Old Boys Association and

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3. Aftab Ahmed Khan (1867-1930) - He was an alumni of the M.A.O. who was admitted to the M.A.O. college in 1878; joined Christ’s College, Cambridge and entered Inner Temple London for Bar at Law, 1994; Trustee MAO College, member of almost every committee: a very prominent educationist and administrator, member of Council of India of the Secretary of the State, 1917; represented Indian Muslims at the Paris Conference along with Agha Khan and Abdullah Yusuf Ali. He was the Vice Chancellor of AMU in 1924-25.

the *Muhammadan Educational Conference*. The Shaikh, a convert, was accepted by his peers and elders in their society and thus he became an active member of the Aligarh community and played a significant role in Aligarh Movement.

(2) Movement for Modern Education for Muslim Women

It is the well-known fact that the movement for imparting modern education to the Muslim women began much later than the similar movements aimed to educate the women belonging to other communities. For example, the pioneering efforts for women’s education given impetus by Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savetri Bai and later they laid the foundation of a school for lower caste women in Pune in 1848. It was a school first of its kind established to educate the women of lower caste. In Bombay Presidency, Parsi communities were ahead in educating women of their community and under the leadership of Cursetjee Nurservanjee Cama and Sir Jamshetjee Jeejeebhoy, they founded Bombay’s earliest girls School and later on D.K. Karve established the first Women’s University in Bombay in 1896. In upper caste Hindu families of Maharashtra who used to taught their daughters, sisters and wives at home to expose them to the outside world and even they used to give instruction to them in sacred text. as we had an example of Ananta Shastri, a Brahmin who educated his daughter in the sacred Sanskrit texts. Later the learned Brahmins of Calcutta gave her the letters of Pandita and Saraswati.

In Delhi serious efforts were made by the various denominations of missionaries to impart English learning to girls. The *Victoria Boarding School* for Christian girls was established in 1876 with the efforts of some philanthropists of Delhi and later
Annie Besant established *Inderprastha College* for girls in Delhi in 1904. But in Muslim community, Badruddin Tyabji was the first in Bombay to send his daughters to a girl’s school, set up by the *Zenana Bible Medical Mission* in 1876.

But serious and pragmatic efforts to impart modern as well as traditional learning to Muslim women started in the discourses of Alligarh Movement. In this direction practical step was taken by Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah of Aligarh in 20th century. As an Aligarh student, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah was in favour of Muslim women’s education in the late 19th century as he was part of the current of the opinion to impart education to Muslim female at Aligarh. In 1884, a resolution in favour of female education was voted down in the *Union Club* of Aligarh M.A.O. College but very soon opinion of *Student’s Debating Society* was changed and Aligarh students became increasingly concerned to find an educated wife. Debates continued over women education by the students of M.A.O. College in late 19th century. Ghulam-us-Saqlain, an alumni of Aligarh who published articles in the 1890s favoured education for Muslim women and criticized purdah restriction. Another alumnus of Aligarh was Sayyid Sajjad Hyder Hussain who was also in favour of Muslim women education. Ghulam-us-Saqlain and Sayyid Sajjad Hyder had been active in taking parts in debates in Union Club at M.A.O. College when they were students, as they were also eloquent proponents of enlightenment from within Islamic tradition as opposed to Westernization.

Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah was not far behind from these debates among the students of M.A.O. College over the issue of female education and as a student of M.A.O. College, he was very much influenced by Syed Karamat

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29 See Ibid., p. 11-17.
30 See Ibid.
31 The resolution that was defeated was proposed by Khawaja Sajjad Husain, the son of Altaf Husain Hali. see Lelyveld, *Aligarh’s Aligarh’s First Generation Muslim Solidarity in British India*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978. p. 223.
32 Ghulam us Saqlain belonged to hometown of Meerut, but settled down at Lucknow. He passed his B.A. from Aligarh MAO College, was a lawyer and journalist, associated with V iqarul Mulk; advocated for the formation of Muslim political association.
33 Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, op.cit., p. 231.
Hussain’s¹¹ views who favoured to provide education to Muslim women. Syed Karamat Hussain was a Law professor at M.A.O. College and Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah was his disciple. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah also impressed by Khwaja Ghulam-us-Saqlain who was a relative of Maulana Hali. He was well educated in the field of Urdu journalism and was the founder of Ikhwanus Safa (Brothers of Purity). Ghulam-us-Saqlain was a friend and hostel mate of Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah and was described by him as “a true supporter of female education”.³⁵

Two other prominent figures mentioned as supporters of female education by Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah were Syed Amir Ali⁵⁶, judge High Court, and Badruddin Tyabji³⁷, judge Bombay High Court.³⁸ Moreover Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah enjoyed the rare privilege of a close interaction with most of the great luminaries of the Aligarh Movement was Sahabzada Aftab Ahmed Khan, the Secretary of Sir Syed Memorial Fund and leader of the Aligarh Old Boy Association. About him Shaikh mentioned “a true promoter of female education”.³⁹ Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah also specifically mentioned literary critic and historian Shibli Nomani⁴⁰ who through his moving speeches

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¹¹ Saiyyad Karmat Hussain (1854-1917) was an early champion of women’s education in North India. He was instrumental in establishing the women’s section of the Muhammadan Educational Conference in 1896. He also established a school for girls in Allahabad as well as the Muslim Girls’s College in Lucknow that bears his name. See for details, Gail Minault, Secluded Scholars, op.cit.


⁵₆ Syed Amir Ali (1849-192X) was born at Chinsura and educated at Hoogly College and England. He practiced law at Calcutta and was elected as fellow of Calcutta University (1871). He founded Central Muhammadan Association (1876) and was its Secretary during 1876-1904. He served as Presidency Magistrate (1871-81) and was a member of the Imperial Legislative council (1883-85) and retired as the High Court Judge (1890-04).

Ibid. p. 16.

⁶⁰ Shibli Nomani (1857-1914), born at Azamgarh and educated at Azamgarh, Ghazipur, Rampur and Lahore. He served as a Professor of Persian and Arabic at M.A.O. College 1882-1892 and Education Department at Hyderabad (1899-1904). He was a founder member of Nadwatul Ulama at Lucknow.
delivered in his characteristic rhetoric eloquence awakened his compatriots to the need for the improvement in the condition of women. The other Muslim intellectuals of 20\textsuperscript{th} century with whom Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah was impressed was Maulvi Zakaullah (1832-1910) a Delhi born historian and biographer, and novelist and administrator and Maulvi Nazir Ahmed Delhavi a great Urdu novelist (1830-1912) who had personal acquaintances with him. Many of the ideas of the above mentioned intellectuals filtered down to Abdullah through their writings. The ideas of poet, writer and biographer of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. Khwaja Altaf Hussain Hali (1837-1914), also exercised a lasting influence on contemporary thinking about the female education. He recollects that the unparallel poetry of Sham ul Ulama Maulana Hali provided substance to the mission of educating women. The incomparable poetical composition of the poet-philosopher, Hali's *Chup Ki Dad*, composed at the personal request of Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah which provided an efficient instrument for a revolutionary change in the attitudes of the educated Muslim towards women as did his epic poem, the immortal *Musadelas; Madd-o-Jazr-i-Islam* (The Ebb and Flow of Islam, 1879) affect the entire Weltanschauung of the Indo-Muslim community. But after the marriage of Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah to Wahid Jahan Begum who was having some traditional education provided him stimulation for his plan of educating women and Shaikh

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\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 45.

\textsuperscript{12} Maulvi Zakaullah (1832-1910). Zakaullah of Delhi, son of Hafiz Sanaullah. was born in 1932, in a family noted for scholarship and piety. His ancestors brought into India the noble traditions of learning which savoured of Baghdad and Bukhara. In Delhi they enjoyed the privilege of being royal tutors imparting sacred knowledge to the Mughal princes and that position passed on from father to son. Zakaullah got his early education from his grandfather, Maulana Baqaullah and enrolled him as a regular student of Delhi College and got chance to serve at Muir College Allahabad and remained there for 37 years. He came close to Sir Syed and worked for as his Lieutenant and collected funds for his Aligarh movement.

\textsuperscript{13} Maulvi Nazir Ahmed Delhavi (183-1912). He was a younger contemporary of Sir Syed. Born into a family of Islamic scholars in Bijnaur district, he received his early education in Arabic and Persian from his father. Later he went to Delhi with his father and studied under Maulvi Abdul Khaliq. He also received higher education from Delhi College where he studied Arabic, Mathematics through the medium of Urdu. He served as a teacher in Punjab and later as Deputy Inspector of Schools at Allahabad. He also learnt English and later served to the Government of Nizam. He becomes a great urdu novelist.

\textsuperscript{14} Khan, *Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah*, op cit., p. 46.
Muhammad Abdullah gave his plans a practical shape and devised concrete ways to educate the Muslim women of 20th century.\textsuperscript{45}

But before Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah’s efforts to start his campaign for educating Muslim women and to provide them school education, in late 19th and early 20th century India we also find some women discourses in the intellectual circles of Aligarh community regarding Muslim women’s education. \textit{Aligarh Institute Gazette} published articles on Government policy encouraging female education and in 1867, the establishment of a Muslim Girls School in Bangalore solely by indigenous efforts was highly acclaimed with great pleasure in a write up entitled ‘\textit{Muhammadan Female Education}’ that appeared in \textit{Aligarh Institute Gazette} vol. II. of 1867.\textsuperscript{46} In 1869 and in the subsequent years we find articles in the \textit{Aligarh Institute Gazette} on the importance of female education and its spread as the chief means for the general spread of education.\textsuperscript{47} But there are indication of a reversal in Syed Ahmed Khan’s thinking with respect to female education for 1880 onwards. An early instance of such an attitude can be found in his answers to the questions put up by the \textit{Indian Education Commission} of 1882.\textsuperscript{48} In his answer he emphasizes that the general idea held that “Muhammadan ladies of respectable families” are ignorant, is wrong. In fact he claimed that a sort of indigenous education of a moderate degree provided among them and they studied religious and moral books in Urdu, Persian and in Arabic. In short, his opinion was that providing modern education to female education is wastage of money and energy. He held that those who thought that women should be ‘educated and learned’ prior to men were generally mistaken. The fact, he said, was not satisfactory: education should be provided for Muslim women until a large number of Muslim men received the said education.

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\textsuperscript{45} David Lelyveld, \textit{Aligarh’s First Generation} op.cit., pp. 250-1.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Aligarh Institute Gazette}, (hereafter AIG) 1867, vol. II; NO. 40.
\textsuperscript{47} AIG, 1869, No. 45; vol. IV.
\textsuperscript{48} Evidence of Sir Syed to the \textit{Education Commission of 1882} as given in the Appendix to the \textit{Education Commission Report 1884} (Central Provinces), see also AIG, NO.62; vol. XVI.
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In spite of such kind of views held by Sir Syed about women’s education that did not favour school education for them but with the passage of time there emerged a distinct tendency within the Aligarh Community to impart education and they favoured the ideas of encouraging the spread of education among Muslim women. This tendency became particularly manifest from 1888 onwards. In the third *Mohammedan Annual Conference* held at Lahore in 1888, a resolution was passed to the effect which says:

“The Mohammedan Education Conference unanimously agrees to the proposal that Muslims should establish schools for the education of Muslim girls. These schools should be in accordance with Islam and the ways of the Sharif sections of the Muslims”.

This resolution was particularly opposed by Syed Ahmed, who was strictly opposed to the establishment of school for women. In his speech, he argued that the teaching of religion and morals to girls at home on traditional lines was sufficient and the teachings of secular subjects like History, Geography, Trigonometry and Algebra to women was useless.

It is remarkable that such a resolution was passed in spite of Sir Syed still opposition. But the real development in the field of Muslim female education speeded up after the death of Sir Syed. Though Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and a number of his close associates like Bashiruddin and Maulana Nazir Ahmed opposed the spread of modern education among Muslim women, it failed to dampen the spirit of the men convinced of the need of schools for Muslim women and they continued to make effort in that direction. As already noticed the first move in the direction was made in the *Mohammedan Education Conference* in 1888 in which a resolution was passed to establish schools for girls. The resolution was proposed by Shaikh Khairuddin and seconded by Khalifa Imaduddin, District Inspector of Schools. District

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Ibid.
Muzaffarnagar. During the year 1889 and 1890, nothing else was done for Muslim women’s education and it seems that the resolution which was drawn up in 1888 was not acted upon as there is no mention of the opening of any new school in the reports of the Educational Conference. Again in 1891, a resolution was proposed by Maulvi Karamat Hussain and was seconded by Ghulamus Saqlain. The resolution reads as follows:

“The Conference feels that according to the conditions prevailing, Muslim should work for the education of women side by side with men because the advancement of the community depends on this. The education should be such that it advances their religious, literary and cultural life of women, so that with their education, the future generation would stand to gain”.

Gulam-us-Saqlain and Syed Karamat Hussain proposed the resolution to provide education to Muslim women, and thus they brought intense debate over the same issue. To quote the speech of Gulam-us-Saqlain:

“Gentleman, the service of community is an essential duty of every member of our society.......today the foremost and the important issue is to impart the education to the Muslim women because without their education the prosperity and the improvement of the nation is impossible.....if you are not ready to provide education to the women just because of the wrong perception of that women, would spoil their character after acquiring it. For the perception of which you do not want to give education to the women as it will ruin them, for the same perception we want to give education to them for their development.

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The viewpoint of Gulam-us-Saqlain was approved and seconded by Syed Karamat Hussain who strongly favoured the notion of providing education to women. To quote Karamat Hussain:

“My dear and able friend Gulam-us-Saqlain had nicely addressed his speech in favour of women education to which I support strongly....(which method will the Muslim community favour for the education of Muslim women....) it is said education to women means breaking of the pardeh. I support that system of education that will respect pardeh, customs and traditions and the rules and regulations that had been going on since time immemorial in the society.”

Therefore Syed Karamat Hussain supported in providing education to the women through school based system in which all existing norms of the society, like strict pardeh could be also taken into consideration.

On the other hand, Maulvi Bashir-ud-din of Etawah strongly opposed the ideas of Sayyid Karamat Hussain. He preferred the old pattern of education which comprises of traditional learning like providing religious instruction in Quran and Hadith, moral lessons etc. should be given to the women. He extended his views that women should be given religious instructions and they should learn Quran by heart. Maulvi Bashir-ud-Din was joined by Maulvi Mohammad Ishaq
who first supported that child education is more important than the women education.\(^5\)

Debate over the question of women education continued till the last decade of 19\(^{th}\) century and during 1899 session of All India Muslim Educational Conference, a similar proposal was passed for the establishment of girl’s school according to the norms of the elite family of the community. The resolution was proposed by Mirza Sujat Ali Baig and seconded by Nawab Mohsinul Mulk. The president of the Conference Syed Amir Ali strongly supported the proposal in his presidential address. To quote Syed Amir Ali:

"I recommend and favour the proposal of the establishment of schools for the women and in this respect I am ready to help the good cause of the community. I consider it the religious duty of mine and those who would stand against it; he could not be an honest man."\(^6\)

It was the period of 1896, in which the decision to establish a *Female Education Section* of the *Muhammadan Educational Conference* was taken and the same was created for the educational advancement of the Muslim women and it become a very significant event in the history of education for Muslim women. The members of the *Female Education Section* were: (1) Aftab Ahmed, (2) Sultan Ahmed Khan, (3) Haji Muhammad Ismail Khan, (4) Mohsinul Mulk, (5) Muhammad Bahadur Ali, (6) Muhammad Syed Mumtaz Ahmed. The *Muhammadan Educational Conference* when established its women section it resolved to provide modern education to Muslim women and also focused its chief function to found a *Normal School* for Muslim women. To carry out the programmes and the aims of the *Female Education Section* ahead and Syed Mumtaz Ali was appointed its first Secretary but his preoccupations with his publishing ventures: he was unable to pay much attention to establish a *Normal School* in Lahore as it was the original goals of the *Female Education*

\(^5\) See the Speech of Maulavi Ishaq, Ibid
\(^6\) See the speech of Syed Amir Ali in the 1899 session All India Muslim Educational Conference
Section which therefore languished. In 1902 therefore, the Secretaryship of the Female Education Section was handed over to Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah who was a man of an activist, and was an intellectual with full of youthful enthusiasm and had the ability to get things done. He noted that

"Mohammadan Educational Conference’s Resolution in favour of women’s education was all well and good but little of a practical nature had yet been accomplished. Many Sharif gentlemen made arrangements for their own daughters to be educated but efforts to found schools, which would be of greater general benefit were still lacking".\(^{57}\)

He vowed to work relentlessly to found a Normal School for girls and he asked the Muslim noblemen to contribute immensely for the establishment of Normal School.\(^{58}\) Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah and his wife also founded a journal Khatun in 1904 to get the opinions of the Muslim community about the women education and also to report on educational achievements by and for women. And they started their efforts to establish a school for girls at Aligarh to provide modern education to them.

As the Lahore Normal School as professed in 1896 in the Mohammadan Educational Conference was never materialized and because of the stiff opposition was given by Mumtaz Ali to Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah’s efforts to establish Normal School at Aligarh on the pretext that it is being established so close to M.A.O. College which would spoil the reputation of the College. Therefore, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah and his wife began to consider the possibility of starting a small school at Aligarh of this kind and for this they needed financial resources and the project of Normal School and Teacher Training classes was clearly out of question because of the non-availability of women educated teacher for this purpose. Therefore Begum Abdullah suggested him that they could start a primary school for the daughters of their neighbours and friends. They could hire a teacher if they could find one and her sister could also instruct the girls. They also thought to make appropriate arrangements for purdah, both at school and while transporting the students.

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\(^{57}\) See, 16th Annual Mohammadan Educational Conference, Delhi, 1902.

\(^{58}\) See, 16th Annual Meeting of the Mohammadan Educational Conference. See Shan Mohammad ed. All India Educational Conference. A.M.U., Aligarh.
from home to School. Begum Abdullah discussed the idea among her friends and as part of this campaign Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah started the Urdu journal *Khatun* in 1904. He did not yet specify Aligarh as the locale for the realization of his plan. There were many obstacles to overcome. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah also needed patronage of both kind, a private or Government for financing to hire a teaching staff, a building and transport. Even more, they needed students to start their plan of school those who were willing to send their daughters to proposed school, and then they would start a primary school for them.\(^59\)

Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah approached Sultan Jahan, Begum of Bhopal, who had started a girl’s school in her own State. To her, he revealed his intention to start a primary school at Aligarh in spite of the opposition to such a move. With her moral and financial support, he said, much opposition would be silenced. His wife was prepared to supervise the school to assure proper purdah arrangements and maternal guidance for the students. The Begum liked the idea and promised a grant of Rs. 100 per month to the Aligarh Girl’s School. The Educational Conference in 1904 resolved in favour of starting a School in Aligarh.\(^60\) In spite of this victory Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah still had much to do in the fund raising and to mobilize the Muslim community’s opinion for his plan. In around 1905 a deputation of Aligarh College Boys who favoured Girl’s education journeyed to Bombay and collected Rs. 4000 from prosperous Muslims, and they got support from the Muslims of Bombay particularly from Justice Badruddin Tyabjee and other members of his family.\(^61\) Among the most active supporters were Zohra and Atiya Fyzee, and they also helped Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah and his wife to organize an exhibition of women’s crafts at a meeting of Muslim Women to coincidence with 1905 *Muhammadan Educational Conference* in Aligarh. The

\(^{59}\) *Khatun*, 3, 1 (Jan. 1906): pp. 12-14. *Khatoon* was an Urdu monthly, the Journal of the Women’s Educational Section of All India Muslim Educational Conference, it was edited by Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah from Aligarh.

\(^{60}\) See the Proceedings of All India Muslim Educational Conference, 1904.

exhibition was a huge success. Zohar and Atiya Fyzee came all the way from Bombay and attended the Conference meeting and where the women delegates passed resolutions praising Abdullah’s efforts and favouring the founding of a Girl’s School at Aligarh. In 1905 the Mohommadan Educational Conference at Aligarh attended forty women and for the first time purdah observing women came from different parts of India had come to meet and to discuss the problems of women education. Though there was much criticism of this meeting of the Women’s Section of the Conference. On the other hand, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah with the generous grant of Sultan Jahan and to get the some kind of support from British Government he wrote to the Lieutenant of U. P. Sir James La Touch asking for permission to bring a Deputation to Lucknow to meet him and discuss the matter of Muslim female education and the possibility of a generous grant-in-aid for the same purpose. Though Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah was not able to reach with all the members of the Deputation as planned by him but with three members he went to La Touch and he was given assurance and encouraging words from the Governor and he was also given a promise to get a grant if he could start a school. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah went back to Aligarh, elated and started looking for the teacher. And with the help of the relatives of his wife in Delhi they knew about a woman who was interested to teach in proposed Abdullah’s school. Shaikh Abdullah and his wife went Delhi and interviewed the women who agreed to go Aligarh to teach if she could take her whole family along. They agreed to the terms and conditions and thus they took the women and her family to Aligarh and hired a house in Aligarh town which served both as the school and as living quarters for the women teacher. In this way a milestone was achieved in October 1906, when ‘Aligarh Zannan Madarsa’ (Aligarh Girl’s School) opened its door in that rented house at Aligarh. Seventeen students were enrolled and teaching started with efforts of Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah and

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his wife. The curriculum of Zanana School included, Urdu reading and writing, basic arithmetic, needle work and the reading of the Quran. Three closed palanquins (daulis) were hired to carry the girls to school and purdah was strictly observed school though building itself was walled on all sides so that purdah could be properly observed. With the Government grants and other grants received from Begum of Bhopal, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah managed to shift the school to a place known as Nanak Raika Bagh, about a mile and half from Aligarh College. And by the end of 1913 School had a building with hostels and class rooms. And in February 1914 the Begum of Bhopal came to Aligarh for a gala inaugural ceremony for the opening of a new Residential Hall and it was also occasion for a considerably expanded version of the 1905 women meeting of Female Education section and thus the All Indian Muslim Women Conference was founded and even resolutions were also passed to encourage the education for Muslim women here.

With the passage of the time the Girl’s School became Undergraduate College in 1925 and started Degree classes in 1937, at which point there were some 250 students. A second hostel was built in early 1930s, to accommodate additional students. Teachers Training classes were also offered and later on this College attached to the Aligarh Muslim University.

The achievement of the Girls school was enormous as it produced graduates who after acquiring their degrees in higher education worked for spread of women’s education and also started their own schools and some of the products of this school also served as Governess Inspectors and some of them also taught at the College level. Some of the earliest Aligarh Girl Students, including Abdullah’s elder daughter, Rasheed Jahan, went on for Medical degree and Mumtaz Jahan went to Isabella Thoburn College and received her M.A. from Lucknow University, and Khatun Jahan went to England for M.A. and each served as Principal of Aligarh Girl’s College.

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Thus with efforts of Government grants and private donations and helped received by his associates and his wife, Waheed Jahan Begum, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah able to achieved what he had visualized for women of his Muslim community in 20th century and in this direction he made a great contribution for the education of Muslim women which is a unique phenomenon in the annals of the Muslim education in South Asia.

(3) Women Discourses in the Writings of Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah

Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah was not only confined to provide modern education to Muslim women but his writings reflects a wide range of discourses on the different issues of women concerned and through innumerable essays, pamphlets and articles, apart from his well-known biographical reminiscences. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah articulated his ideas on the women discourses with greater variety of issues, relating to the gender relationship.

Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah’s expose on women was heavily embedded in the contemporary socio-intellectual milieu. The re-examination of traditionalist conception of women and her rights was part of the reformist agenda of the thinkers associated with the modernizing and westernizing programme of Syed Ahmed Khan, later termed as the Aligarh Movement. The late nineteenth century reformers had already articulated an ideology of social and educational reforms. It was left for the next generation to translate these ideas in practical reality. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah’s ideas on status of women in Islam and the gender relations also echoed the views of these social and educational reformers mostly associated with the Aligarh movement.

However, in his autobiographical reminiscences compiled in the post-independence India, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah sought to persuade his readers that providing modern education for Muslim women was uniquely his
Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah alleged that Syed Ahmed’s thinking on this crucial issue was strictly traditional despite his thorough knowledge of Islam. He was overwhelmed with respect for traditions (qadamatparasti) and adherence to customs (riwajparasti). Syed Ahmed was not in favour of modern education for women and he disapproved the very idea of opening modern western style Colleges for them. Like a conservative Syed Ahmed supported traditional home education (Zenana Talim) for women. He was also a firm supporter of Pardah.

Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah belonged to what the historian Lelyveld called “Aligarh’s First Generation”. Shaikh was a prolific writer; his contribution to the cause of women is comprehensive and wide ranging. His public career synchronized with the rise and strengthening of the forces of anti-imperialism; nationalism, separatism; and communalization of Indian politics to which he was an eye witness and an active participant.

His concern with the women’s rights centred on the issue of provisions for formal education but his discourses encompassed other aspects such as the Pardah (veiling) or seclusion, polygamy nature of relationship between the spouses and above all the legal rights of Muslim women.

On the issue of modern education for the Muslim women, he believed that formal education of women on modern lines was crucial for socio-economic advancement of the Indian Muslim community. He sought to convince his literate readership that without the light of knowledge and reason, brightening
the minds of almost half of the population of the country, the nation could not progress and emerge into the modern era of science and reason.\textsuperscript{72}

Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah stressed the point that women bear the responsibility for the welfare of the family and play crucial roles in the character building of their children. Thus he believed that the major task of education was improvement of character and therefore good education should lead to character building. It should promote social values, of justice, liberty and equity. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah’s ideas presented a new vision of ideal Muslim womanhood. He sought to produce a new woman who was literate and educated. Education would grow her to be a better wife, better companion to her husband, and a better home maker and she would be a better mother who would raise her children to be healthy, disciplined and good citizens of India. Thus she would become a role model for other woman.\textsuperscript{73}

In conformity with the reformers of the Aligarh Movement, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah maintained that illiteracy and ignorance among woman was an important factor for the backwardness of Muslims. Muslims denied their women their right to seek knowledge, contrary to the spirits of the Prophetic traditions. For a better future, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah urged to Muslims to have recourse to education, to self-help and self-determination, the keys to individual and natural progress. God has decreed that He does not change the condition of any community (quam) until they change themselves. He quoted Quranic verses to support his view point. “Verily never will Allah change the condition of people until they change what is in themselves”\textsuperscript{74}
The other verses quoted were: “That man can have nothing but what he strives for.”\textsuperscript{75}

Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah’s discourses also focused on the cultural and technological changes in the West and he suggested ways to meet these

\textsuperscript{72} Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah, Islam mein Aurat Ka darja, Aligarh: Khidmat Press, n.d.

\textsuperscript{73} Ghulam Hussain Khan, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah: The Founder Speaks, Aligarh Muslim Gazette, vol 43 No.12, Dec. 2006

\textsuperscript{74} Holy Quran, (S. 13: 11)

\textsuperscript{75} Holy Quran (S.52: 39)
challenges of the West as he believed that new knowledge was essential to meet the economic and political challenges of the twentieth century. He stressed that Western culture as manifested under British rule, represented an inter-civilization clash. It was therefore a compelling necessity to adjust and accommodate with new forces of social change. Modern educational institutions had become essential to help and adjust with the scientific and technological advancements of the period which had redefined the very nature of cultural discourse. Western civilization had different concepts of progress. It had changed the very pace of programme. Inventions like, railways, telegraph and dissemination of printing presses had revolutionized the entire level of human action. What was earlier expected to be accomplished in hundreds of years, now with the help of modern techniques could be achieved within years.

Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah was aware of the European critique of the status of women in Islam. In a review article of an early English feminist writer Lucy Garnet’s book, ‘The women of Turkey and their Folklore’ (1890) published in *Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College Magazine*, he commented upon the British feminist writings apprehensive of legal rights of women granted under the Islamic law and also her observation of *purdah* as practiced in Turkey. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah noted various developments in favour of women in other countries and appreciated that women were now being educated in other Islamic countries to the benefit of religion and country. In Egypt he noted that women had founded their Associations (Anjumans) and a number of journals were edited by them. He frequently cited the example of Turkey to awaken his fellow Muslims to the urgency of educating women. The Turks who until recently were looked down and demarcated as the ‘sickman’ by European, had succeeded in achieving 100% female literacy. Turkish

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MWI, op. cit., p. 217

women participated in nation building, equal partners in every walk of life but when he compared them to India; he found the situation in India was quite disappointing. Hardly two out of one hundred women were able to read and write.79 Nevertheless Shaikh optimistically looked forward to a day when at least 25% of female literacy would be achieved in India.80

On the question of the position of women’s right and dignity, he sought the example of Islamic law and he firmly held that Islam gave many rights to women but these have not been realized because Muslims have not followed the teaching of the Prophet to educate their womenfolk. Without education, women would not know their rights granted to them under Islamic law. Therefore, by educating their girls, Muslims would be rendering a great service to their community and to the nation. Further he acted upon his firmly held conviction that in Islam, acquisition of knowledge was an essential for every believing Muslim man and woman and for this he cited many Hadiths.

Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah was also a Co-founder of Anjumun-e-Khawatin (All India Muslim Women’s Association) which was devoted to the cause of education of Indian Muslim women. As it was established under the presidency of Begam of Bhopal, Sultan Jahan Begam (1858-1930), some of the prominent non-Muslim participants were Sarla Devi Chaudhrian founder of “Bharat Shree Mahamandal” and other was a niece of poet Tagore, the poetess and nationalist leader, Sarojni Naidu.81

From this platform of All India Muslim Women’s Association. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah sought to sensitize the cause of higher education for women82 and raised his voice against the Punjab and U.P. Tenancy Acts, which denied Muslim women a share in agricultural property.83

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1. Appeal Baniyan Musalmanan Hind, op.cit., p. 5-6.
2. Ibid., p. 6.
The Association introduced the ideas of women’s autonomy and women’s formal education across geographic and sectarian boundaries and served as a forum of debate on issues such as the purdah, age of marriage, childcare, health, polygamy and others related women’s questions.\textsuperscript{84}

Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah laid great emphasis on the legal rights of Muslim women as enshrined in the Islamic law, being a legal practitioner himself. He sought to highlight that among all the world religions, Islam is unique in its emphasis on acquisition of knowledge and an egalitarian approach (Masawat) concerning the rights of women.\textsuperscript{85} It is the first among all the religious systems which treated woman as a legal personality by granting to her right of inheritance and disposal of property.\textsuperscript{86} Women seem to have played no significant role in the ancient civilization of Rome, Iran and Egypt.\textsuperscript{87} Hinduism seems to have had denied even the basic rights to women as seen from the Manusmriti (the Law Book of Hinduism) Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah contended that women enjoyed no similar legal rights even in culturally advanced societies of Europe and America. It was only in recent times that laws were passed in favour of women in the West. The British Parliament took the lead in this respect and passed the Married Women’s Property Act in 1882. This change in the position of women in the west seems to have occurred under the impact of Islamic Shariat Laws. “In this respect the Christians of Europe and America initiated (taqlid) Islam”.\textsuperscript{88}

Nonetheless, he accepted that many Muslims did not follow Quranic writs strictly and excluded female heir from the right of inheritance and it is not followed in western Punjab, Baluchistan, Sindh etc. Even Shaikh also cited the example of Muslim communities of Gujrat and Bombay who followed customs and traditions and refused to grant their daughters a share in the family’s

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{84} Khan, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah, op.cit., p. 46.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah, Islam Mein Aurat Ka darza, op.cit., p. 1-3.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Ibid., pp. 1-3.
\item \textsuperscript{87} See MWT, p. 208.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Islam mein Aurat ka darza, op.cit., p. 3.
\end{footnotes}
proper. He remonstrated that such an adherence to illegal customs was unIslamic practice and an explicit infringement of the Quranic injunctions. On the institution of Purdah Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah had an open minded attitude, he said:

‘My views about Purdah underwent a complete change... based upon my understanding of the teachings of the holy Quran; and direct recourse to the teaching of Islam... led me to discard the customary veiling [rasmipurdah] of India as an innovation (biddat)... I put forth arguments against the customary purdah. The pages of Resala Khatoon had been testimony to my statement”.

He argued that the sort of seclusion proclaimed in India was restrictive as well as excessive. Women were deprived from fresh air and sunshine. Secluding women behind the veil or walls of the Zenana was not the purdah prescribed in Islam. It was symbolic of social status and prestige of upper classes than of religious identity. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah was contrary with Sir Syed’s views on purdah. While Sir Syed favoured purdah for Muslim women as he thought that women should be confined to the home sphere in order to protect their modesty. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah further argued that Muslim jurists agreed that women could move outside their homes and while going out they could keep their faces and hands exposed. He further says the true spirit of the law of God, Sharia lies in the fact that modesty was obligatory on both men and women. Men too, should lower their gaze in presence of women.

On the issue of polygamy, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah criticized it strongly. He argued:

“The Holy Quran allows polygamy but supports monogamy; but if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then marry only one”.

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89. Ibid., p. 4.
90. See SAB, p. 16.
92. See SAB, p. 19.
Sheikh Abdullah delightedly noted the social legislation that was passed in Turkey and which ended polygamy there. And thus he realized immense relief after passing of this social legislation, which indeed polygamy in Turkey.  

Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah also focused some lights on the role of women in the public sphere and he envisioned the integration of women in the public sphere. After passing of Government of India Act of 1935 which granted women to a limited franchise in the Provincial and Federal Assemblies, Shaikh encouraged women to participate in national politics and he also encouraged to College graduates to contest for seats in representative councils. They should develop their speaking skills to articulate their views on issues of concern for the community in the legislative councils of India he argued. On the occasion of the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the College, Sheikh Abdullah addressed to the students:

"I would like to convey my message to the young ladies and gents of this nation that it is now the time that they should be ready to shoulder the enormous responsibilities of carrying forward the torch of progress and advancement .... If they would be prepared for self-help, no power, no authority would be able to deprive them from their rights. They would be equal partners in the heritage of their mother land (Mather-e-Hind). They would be entitled to their shares in the property of inheritance, and would be co-sharer in Government services. They would be able to claim their share in all those positions which had been the exclusive prerogatives of men".  

In this way Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah had the vision and mission for the empowerment of women not only in the field of modern education but also in the field of public life. He was a true promoter of the emancipation of women through the vehicle of modern education and he was a great visionary of 20th century Muslim reformer who advocated for the cause of women's development. And thus he gave a new direction to the Aligarh Movement which not only provided educational socio-religious and cultural advancement of the Muslim community of India but it also focused the development of Muslim women in the field of socio-cultural, educational and public life as

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91. See SAB, p. 19.
93. See Khan Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah, op.cit., p. 55.
Khatoon

The monthly magazine started by Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah for the cause of Muslim Women Education
Zenana School founded by Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah
Established in 1906, at Aligarh

Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah and his wife Waheed Jahan Begum
(Pioneer of modern education for Muslim women)
Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah propagated and worked hard for their advancement through the weapon of modern education. He was awarded the degree of LL.D. in 1950 by the AMU for his services, and even the Government of India also conferred on him the Padma Bhushan in 1964 for his contribution in the field of literature and education.

(4) Curriculum and Co-curricular activities at Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah and Begum Abdullah’s Girls School at Aligarh

The Delhi Session of the All India Muhammadan Educational Conference which held in 1902, and the appointment of Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah as the Secretary of Women’s Education Section witnessed a revolutionary change for the emancipation of Muslim women in 20th century. In the Lucknow session of the Educational Conference in 1904, a resolution was passed in favour of opening a Girl’s school at Aligarh and Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah with his full enthusiasm and firm determination; he devoted his entire energy to this worthy cause. And by the efforts of well-wishers of female education and particularly the cooperation extended by his devoted wife, Wahid Jahan Begum’s, effort to the cause of female education, a primary school called the Aligarh Zanana Madarsa (Aligarh Girl’s School) was opened, in October 1906 with seventeen students on rolls and six months later there were fifty-six students on the rolls. By 1909, the school had approximately a hundred students. In 1914, a Boarding House was formally inaugurated by Sultan Jahan Begum, the queen of princely State of Bhopal, and an ardent supporter of female education. A female teacher named Akhtari was appointed to teach the students the Holy Quran, while instructions in reading and writing in Urdu and teaching of elementary Persian was undertaken by Wahid Jahan Begum and her sister Sikadar Jahan Begum. Over the years the school grew into Women’s College of Aligarh Muslim University.95

All these development for the causes of Muslim female education was enthusiastically taken ahead by the indefatigable endeavour of Shaikh

95 See Gulshan Khan, Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah: Founder Speaks. Aligarh Muslim University Gazette, vol. 43, No. 12, December 2006 (Hereafter Founder Speaks).
Muhammad Abdullah (1874-1965), a pioneer of modern education among Indian Muslim women and his equally dedicated wife Wahid Jahn Begum (1886-1939) in the 20th century India. But the other achievement of this school was its curriculum framework and co-curricular activities which develop in due course of time in Aligarh. When this tiny school was opened in 1906, its curriculum was comprised of Urdu reading and writing, basic Arithmetic, needle work and the reading of the Holy Quran. Purdah was an important part of the curriculum to maintain the status of Sharif culture. To ensure the strict observation of Purdah three closed palanquins (daulas) were hired to carry the girls to school, thus purdah was maintained strictly.  

Begum Abdullah (wife of Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah) personally used to supervise the students every day. She regarded the students as her own daughters and when she found that some of the poor girls could not bring their own food, she shared her tiffin with them, often going without food herself. She and her sister also helped students in giving instruction to them. With the supervision of Begum Abdullah, Sharif families of Aligarh were also impressed and they were contended to send their daughters to school when they saw that purdah was properly observed, religious instruction offered and sharafat preserved. In months that followed, several Amen ceremonies in which students of the school, having completed their study of the Quran, gave Quranic readings, offered prayers and received blessings, all these religious activities which were part of the curriculum of school were reported in the magazine Khatun. The other co-curricular activities of the school were reflected in the Annual Conference meetings which continued to feature exhibitions of women’s handwork prepared by the students of the Zanana Madarsa. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah’s efforts to give the shape of school into a boarding school became necessary, because parents did not want their daughters to continue going out to school once they had passed puberty.

Khatun, III. 10 (October 1906), p. 481-83.
See Gail Minault, Seccluded Scholar, op.cit., p. 222.
age and became of marriageable age.\textsuperscript{99} As Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah and his colleagues thought for the starting of a Boarding School because with the boarding arrangements, girls would not have to leave home each day, but could stay at the school, thus ensuring stricter purdah even after the dangerous age of puberty.\textsuperscript{100} As Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah said:

"Indeed purdah restriction in a boarding facility would be even stricter than at the girl’s home. At home girls are permitted to see few male relatives, even cousins to whom they might be married, whereas at school, the society would be totally female under the watchful eye of Begum Abdullah. The observance of prayers and other religious rituals would be required; there would be playing fields to ensure the health of the girls, and upright personal example of sharif women. Begum Abdullah and her sisters would be constantly present before the girls."\textsuperscript{101}

In November 1911, Lady Porter, wife of acting Lieutenant Governor of U.P. came to Aligarh to lay the corner stone of the Muslim Girls School hostel, and construction began with donation from noble people and also the help received from the British Government and the Muslims. The buildings were completed in late 1913 and in February 1914, the Begam of Bhopal came to Aligarh for a gala inaugural ceremony of the Hostel, and it was attended by Fyzee sisters from Bombay of Justice Badruddin Tayabji’s family, and even Abru Begam, sister of Abul Kalam Azad. Begam Shafi from Lahore and her daughter Begam Shahnawaj and other elite women from Lucknow, Punjab, Bombay and Hyderabad came to meet and witness the celebration of a Boarding School for girls at Aligarh. The meeting was held in an elaborate Shamiana set up in the quadrangle of the new girls’ school, and purdah arrangements were stringent. The women arrived from the Aligarh station in curtained carriages to the homes of local purdah-observing families.\textsuperscript{102}

After opening of the Residential Hall for the Girls in 1914, there were less students enrolled as boarders at Aligarh Girls School but soon it extended

\textsuperscript{99} MWI, op. cit., pp. 234-36.
\textsuperscript{102} Khatun, IX, 2-3 (February-March 1914), pp. 26-32.
to 25 of whom sixteen were boarders. This was the result of the Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah and Begam Abdullah’s constant efforts to gain the confidence of Muslim parents by portraying the girls’ school as an extension of the girl’s families and their own.

Begam Abdullah was fondly known as “Ala Bi” and Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah was called “Papa Mian” by the students. The daily routine of the school included early rising, lessons in the morning, more lessons plus study and rest times in the afternoon, time for exercise or games, and the five time daily prayers are strictly followed and every border were asked to follow these learning on traditional lines. In addition to it the regular curriculum of Urdu reading and writing, the reading Quran, the Girls had the classes in embroidery and cooking once or twice a week. Even students were given instructions to learn English for an hour a day and they were also taught to read some Indian history, geography and Islamic theology. But the major focus was on to observe Purdah system which was a part of curriculum and it was strictly followed in Girls school.

Fortress like walls kept all unauthorized persons and curtained carriages transported the students an outings or to the station. Only close relatives could visit the students even the mail was watched. Begam Abdullah had specimens of the hand writing of family members. and she checked the writing every time. Begam Abdullah’s supervisionary duties included all those of an Ashraf women, head of a household, and instruction in house-keeping and laundry arrangements were given under the watchful eyes of Begum Abdullah. Even she used to taste each dish cooked for the girls\textsuperscript{103} and thus under the able guidance of Begum Abdullah curriculum at Aligarh school developed and dealt for the overall development of the personality of girls student.

In this way the curriculum which included, religious, secular subjects, modern education as well as the household learning, including the Purdah became an important and an integral part of Muslim culture was maintained in

the Girls School at Aligarh strict *purdah* observed as a part of school discipline, besides the girls were given instruction in religious obligation also. *Milad* ceremonies and five time daily prayers were made compulsory to train the girls to fulfil the religious duties and obligation bestowed on all Muslims by Almighty Allah. These things had become an integral part of the hostel life of the girls and even they were carefully instructed in personal hygiene and cleanliness. Therefore curriculum which developed over the years at Aligarh suited to the need of Muslim Ashraf family’s daughters.