

**Muslims Response to Colonial Education in India (1835-1947)****Muhammad Asif Khan**

Mphil History, History Department

Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad

Email: bestjanab0000@gmail.com**Abstract**

This article examines Muslims response to the colonial education by analyzing the traditionalist and modernist approach to the colonial education. There was a diverse response of the Muslims to the colonial education introduced in 1835. The article discusses the response of Muslims to colonial education which were neither uniform nor simply acceptance or rejection but gradual selective adaptation with the passage of time and a turning point occurred after the revolt of 1857, after which the Muslim reformers realized the importance of modern education such as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who through the Aligarh Movement, changed the mindset of the people and promoted English, science, and modern knowledge while maintaining Muslim religious identity. Moreover, it also examines the traditionalist response to colonial education such as Darul Uloom Deoband and its emphasis on Islamic teaching and preserving Islamic culture. Furthermore, the article discusses Nadwat-ul-Ulama, which became a source of bridge between the traditionalist and modernist school of thought by reconciling with selected aspects of both modern knowledge and Islamic learning. Finally, it also examines the role of Muslim women in British India and their contribution for the advocacy for the modern education. The research was done by using qualitative historical methodology and focusing on primary sources and secondary sources for deeper understanding. The article concludes that Muslim response to the colonial education were initial rejection by resistance, adaptation, selective acceptance and gradual complete acceptance of Western education.

Keywords: Colonial education; British India; Muslim modernism; Aligarh Movement; Deoband; Nadwat-ul-Ulama; Sir Syed Ahmad Khan; Muslim women's education.

Introduction

The colonial education system came into India as a result of Macaulay Minutes of 1835 which transformed the political, social and economic system of India. The purpose of colonial education is to create the class of people who will support the British in administration, not to educate or enlighten the people. The Muslims response to colonial education was varied. There were the traditionalists who considered the colonial education as a threat to their religion and culture. They

opposed the secular content and western ideologies in the colonial education. They considered colonial education as against Islam and Hadith. They preferred madrasah learning to school learning. As a reaction to colonial education, the Deobandi Movement was started and this movement was pro-Islamic education and anti-colonial education. They preferred Arabic and Persian as main educational languages instead of English. Traditionalists believed that learning colonial education will lead to moral decay and erosion of Islamic values. Consequently, the response of traditionalists was one of resistance to colonial education and preservation of Islamic education.

In contrast to traditionalists, modernist Muslim thinkers saw colonial education as an opportunity to progress, modernity and enlightenment. They were impressed by the scientific and liberal advancement of the West. Prominent figures like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan were the advocate and supporter of Western education and for this purpose he established many schools and colleges to promote western education among the Muslims. He advocated for the inclusion of science, mathematics, and philosophy within a reformed Islamic educational framework. He considered education necessary for political, economical and social upliftment for the Muslims in India. Modernists did not reject Islamic values but believed that both are necessary for Muslims, Western education for worldly advancement and Islamic education for salvation in hereafter. They often aimed at uplifting Muslim communities by producing a new class of educated Muslims who could compete in colonial bureaucracies and global society. Modernists reflected a rational and pragmatic approach, hoping to make a place for Muslims in a rapidly changing world while retaining and maintaining basic religious identities, tradition and Islamic values.

Literature Review

The book *The Muslims of British India* (1972), written by Peter Hardy discusses the political, social, and educational transformation of Muslims of British India. The author of the book argues that the decline of Muslim political power after the 1857 mutiny affected their educational development and economic progress as Muslims were suspicious about whether to accept the colonial education or not and many Muslims remained reluctant to adopt English education. The author further argues that the hesitation resulted in their exclusion from government jobs and administrative positions, while, on the other hand, Hindus accepted and benefited from the new colonial educational system. Furthermore, the author argues that Muslims' educational backwardness became one of the major reasons of Muslim socio-economic decline. The book examines the changing relationship between the Muslims and the British and explains how education became central to Muslim political revival. However, his analysis gives little attention to the internal ideological differences among Muslim reformers and their different approach to colonial education.

The book *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (1982) written by Barbara D. Metcalf is one of the most comprehensive studies of Islamic revival of British India and especially the Deoband Movement. The author of the book argues that the establishment of Darul Uloom Deoband was a reaction to colonial education to keep Muslims away from going to school and colleges for learning Western education. According to the author of the book, Ulama of that time wanted to preserve Islamic teaching and Islamic culture by providing an alternative to the Muslims

of British India. The curriculum of Deoband Madaris emphasized the teaching of Qur'an and Sunnah and promoting the culture of Islam in the sub-continent. He further added that Deoband became a central learning institution of Islam and a source of religious identity of Muslims of British India. However, the book paid little attention to the modern Muslims response to colonial education which is indispensable for understanding the traditionalist and modern perspective on colonial education.

The book *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (1978), written by David Lelyveld in which the author analyzes the educational and social reforms initiated by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan through the Aligarh Movement and the impact on the socio-economic development of Muslims of British India. He argues that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was the pioneer of Western education for the Muslims of British India as he wanted to restore Muslim political, economic, and intellectual strength which was declined after 1857. The author of the book explains that the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College was the first college which introduced a modern curriculum combining Western education with Islamic values. The author of the book also discusses that how educational reform contributed to the emergence of Muslim political consciousness in British India. However, the book only focuses on Aligarh Movement and paid little attention to traditionalist response to colonial education, which is essential for understanding the Muslims response in a comprehensive way.

Research Articles

The article "Islamic Education in India: A Historical Overview," (1987), written by Sajida S. Alvi in which she examines the historical evolution of Islamic education from the Mughal period to British rule. She argues that the educational reforms introduced by the British negatively impacted the Islamic education. The British reform replaced the Persian and Arabic language with English language. The author is of the view that the Ulama rejected the colonial education by calling it unislamic and western agenda and established their own education system in the form of Deoband Madaris. She further argue that educational evolution of Muslim education cannot be understood simply as resistance or acceptance but rather as a process of adaptation. However, the article paid little attention in highlighting those individuals who struggle and advocated for the modern education in British India.

The research article "Educational Philosophy of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan," (1976), written by Ziaul Hasan Faruq in which he examines the role of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in the political and educational transformation of the Muslims of British India. He was of the view that Islam and modern science were compatible and that Muslims should adopt Western education without abandoning their religious identity. Sir Syed argue that the Aligarh Movement aims to remove Muslim fears regarding English education and scientific knowledge. He believed that western education is essential to Muslim socio-economic progress in colonial India. However, the article paid little attention to Muslim women response to colonial education.

The research article "Tradition and Modernity: The Aligarh Movement in a Historical Perspective," (1993), written by Mushirul Hasan in which he argues that the Aligarh Movement was the need of the time and Sir Syed approach was a realistic approach for the survival of Muslims of India because at that time Hindus started progress and development by achieving

colonial education but the Muslims were resisting the colonial education and considering it against the Islam.. The writer argue that through Aligarh Movement, Sir Syed tried to reconcile Islamic traditions with Western education to improve Muslim political and educational status. However, the article paid little attention to Ulama response to colonial education.

The research article "The Campaign for Muslim Female Education in the Late Nineteenth Century," (1978), written by Gail Minault in which she examines the role of Muslim women for the acceptance and promotion of western education in colonial India. She was of the view that initially only a few women of Muslim elite family accepted colonial education while majority of the common women were not supporting colonial education either due to family pressure or the narrative of that time that the western education is against Islam or Islamic culture. But slowly and gradually, the Muslim reformers change the mindset of the people and female started getting western education. However, the article did not adequately discussed the female reformers and their contribution in promoting western education.

The research article "The Madrasa at Deoband: A Model for Religious Education in Modern India," (1978), written by Barbara D. Metcalf in which he discusses the curriculum of Darul Uloom Deoband. The writer argue that the Deobandi Madrassah provided a alternative to the Muslims of British India. The purpose of Deobandi Madrassah was to preserve Islamic teaching and Islamic culture. According to writer, the Deobandi madrasa successfully preserved Islamic scholarship while resisting the colonial education because according to them, the colonial education is secular in nature and against Islamic teaching. So the Ulama of that time wanted to protect and preserve the Muslim identity against Western cultural influence. However, the article did not comprehensively analyzes the modernist and traditionalist approach to the colonial education.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How did the Muslims of British India responded to the British modern education?
2. How did the modernist responded to the colonial education introduced by British?
3. How did the traditionalist responded to the British colonial education and what was their cause of suspicion?
4. Why the traditionalist rejected the colonial education?
5. How did the event of 1857 mutiny changed the mindset of the Muslim reformers towards the modern education?
6. How did Sir Syed Ahmad Khan responded to the colonial education?
7. How did the Deobandi Movement respond to colonial education, and how it was different from Aligarh movement?
8. How did the Nadwat-ul-Ulama worked as a bridge between Modernist and Traditionalist?
9. What was the response of Muslim women to colonial education?
10. How the Muslims response evolved from resistance to adaptation with the passage of time?

Methodology

A qualitative historical research methodology is used for the research to examine the Muslims Modernist and Traditional response to colonial education in British India. The historical texts and educational records is analyzed and interpreted to deeply understand the pattern of responses from different school of thought of the society. The study covers the period from 1835, when the British introduced the colonial education, to 1947 and follows the major developments in Muslim educational thought and institutions during the colonial period. Primary and the secondary sources are the used for the research such as in primary sources Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education," writings of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, *Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq*, colonial educational reports, documents relating to Muslim educational organizations, and selected writing of Darul Ulum-e-Deoband and Nadwat-ul-Ulama and also Muslim women's writings in support of colonial education. The secondary sources such as scholarly books and journal articles related to colonial education. Muslim modernism, the Aligarh Movement, Deoband, and Nadwat-ul-Ulama. All the sources were comparatively analyzed to identify areas of agreement and disagreement among the different school of thought. The historical and comparative analysis is used to understand the change in Muslim attitude towards the colonial education with the passage of time especially after the revolt of 1857. While the comparative analysis is used to examine the similarities and differences between the modernist approach and traditionalist approach towards the colonial education and the role of Nadwat-ul-Ulama as a bridge between the two extremes. The role of women is also examined in this study for deeply understanding educational transformation.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in its examination of responses by Muslims to colonial education in India between 1835 and 1947. This study helps one understand the impact of colonial education on Indian Muslims' religious, social, and intellectual life. It brings into focus the differences between modernist and traditionalist responses, especially the Aligarh Movement and Darul Uloom Deoband. The study further explores Nadwat-ul-Ulama as an attempt at synthesizing traditional Islamic education with certain elements of modern education. Moreover, the study brings into focus changes in the status of Muslim women in modern education and social reforms. It shows that the Muslim response was not homogeneous and went from opposition to selective acceptance and adaptation. Therefore, the study has implications for understanding of the connections between educational reform, social development, and intellectual progress.

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations of this study. First of all, it is limited geographically to the area of British India and chronologically to the time period of 1835-1947. It concentrates mostly on the reactions of Muslims towards colonial education, and more specifically, on the Aligarh Movement, Deoband, Nadwat-ul-Ulama, and female Muslim education. This study does not give an account of the developments in the educational sphere for each individual Muslim community or institution in British India. The developments in Muslim education after 1947 are also not covered in this study. The study mostly relies on the available historical primary and secondary sources and the accounts of ordinary Muslims are not as well-documented as the ones about

reformers and educational institutions. The political, economical and social issues are not adequately addressed and only related to Muslims response.

Initial Muslim Opposition to Colonial Education (1835–1857)

The colonial education led to the decline of traditional Islamic education by replacing Arabic and Persian with English as the primary medium of instruction. They also replaced the madrassah system with English-medium schools. The Muslims considered this policy an attack on their cultural and religious identity. They viewed the colonial curriculum as secular and anti-Islamic. Consequently, the Traditionalist and religious scholars (Ulama) strongly discouraged Muslim participation in British-run schools. As a reaction, they started opposing and discouraging colonial education and promoting traditional Islamic education like madrassas for preserving Islamic teachings. This rejection of colonial education led to an educational gap and social and intellectual decline among Muslims. This rejection of colonial education further isolated the Muslim community from the emerging socio-political order.¹

Moreover, Muslims saw learning in colonial institutions as a betrayal of their faith due to the secular content of the curriculum. Consequently, Muslims missed out on the economic and bureaucratic opportunities that English education provided. This lack of engagement meant fewer job opportunities and less influence in governance compared to Hindus.²

Shift After the 1857 war of independence

The war of independence of 1857 marked a turning point in Muslim history. The uprising led to the formal end of the Mughal Empire, with the last emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, deposed and exiled to Rangoon and his two sons were shot dead by the British. Muslims were blamed for the rebellion, as before British, it were Muslims who were ruling the India and also many prominent leaders and soldiers in the uprising were of Muslim origin. As a result, harsh punitive measures were enacted against the Muslims, including executions, property seizures, and widespread discrimination. This discrimination against the Muslims deprive the Muslims of the opportunities in education, government jobs, and legal professions.. The defeat in the war of independence also triggered a moment of introspection, forcing Muslim thinkers to re-evaluate their stance on colonialism and modernity. The Muslims realized that rejection and isolation would only worsen their condition. In these harsh condition reformers emerged in response to these challenges and one of the most influential reformer among them was Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who started struggle for Muslim education in India.³

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was of the view that the future of Muslims in India depended on acquiring western education .He was disturbed by the backwardness and ignorance of Muslims, he argued

¹ Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 29–33.

² David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 12–15.

³ William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006), 345–52.

that, it is not in the interest of Muslims to reject Western education and science. He believed that learning Western education was not a betrayal of Islam but a necessity for survival and progress. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan argued that rationality and scientific learning were compatible with Islamic teachings, pointing out that the Quran itself encouraged reflection and the pursuit of knowledge. He started conveying his message through pamphlets, essays, and speeches, and promoted reconciliation with the British and encouraged Muslims to get education and to seek opportunities within the colonial framework. He founded scientific society and other educational institutions, most notably the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh with the help of British which later became Aligarh Muslim University. His purpose was to debunk the notion that modern education was inherently anti-Islamic. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan laid the intellectual foundation for a reformist movement that balanced religious identity with the demands of a changing world. His efforts inspired a new generation to engage with science, politics, and social reform. His legacy marked a significant shift in Muslim attitudes, opening the path to modernity without abandoning faith.⁴

Modernist Response to Colonial Education

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan played an important role in the educational awakening of Muslims of India during British rule. Advocating for English education, he stated, "We cannot succeed unless we adopt modern education and align ourselves with the British system." He founded the Scientific Society in 1864 to translate Western works and ideologies into Urdu for intellectual exchange. In 1875, he founded the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, which would later evolve into Aligarh Muslim University in 1920, and will become a leading institution for modern education among Indian Muslims. He supported and advocated for the adoption of English-language education and Western sciences, believing these to be the source and opportunity for the progress of Muslims in India. At a time when most of the Muslim community were against the British rule and preferring the traditional learning, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan urged cooperation with the British rather than resistance to achieve social, political and economic gain. Emphasizing cooperation with colonial rulers, he argued that loyalty to the British government and the adoption of Western knowledge is the only way for Muslims to survive and progress.⁵

His views were controversial and met with opposition from conservative Ulema and traditionalists who viewed his approach as a threat to Islamic values. Despite the criticism, he remained firm in his belief that rationalism and liberalism were compatible with Islamic thought and they can be coexisting. He was of the view that there should be reinterpretation of Islamic teachings to align with modern science and rational realities. For this educational mission, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan also established a network of modern schools that emphasized science, logic, and English instruction along with Islamic teachings. He also asserted that Without modern knowledge, Muslims cannot compete with other communities. The purpose of these reforms is

⁴ Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 131–35.

⁵ David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 45–48.

to equip Muslim youth with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in a rapidly modernizing world.⁶

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan purpose of reform was beyond education to political and economic empowerment. He argued that it is only through modern education Muslims could regain their lost status and compete with other communities in colonial India. He warned against religious orthodoxy blocking progress. He argue as long as Muslims remain dependent on old methods of education, they will continue to decline. Due to his efforts a new class of educated Muslims were emerged who were loyal to the British Empire and participated actively in politics. By this way he reduced the gap between British and Muslims which was widened after the War of Independence. He also encouraged Indian Muslims to pursue careers in the Indian Civil Services and other government sectors, aiming to ensure Muslim representation in administrative affairs. To propagate his reformist ideas, he launched influential publications like *Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq*, which promoted modernism and enlightenment ideas within the Muslim community. His efforts laid the foundation for a broader Muslim socio-political movement and it will eventually contribute in the struggle movement for Pakistan. By giving importance to knowledge, progress, and cooperation, Sir Syed reshaped the educational and political landscape for the Indian Muslims.⁷

Justice Syed Mahmood (1850–1903)

Justice Syed Mahmood was the son of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, was a prominent figure in the sub-continent legal and educational history. Justice Syed Mahmood was the first Indian Muslim to serve as a judge at the Allahabad High Court setting new norm in the Muslim history of India. He was the strong believer and supporter of Western education. He saw legal reform as essential to the progress of the Muslim community and worked toward reforming the legal system for the benefit of Muslims. He was of the view that there should be the integration of Western-style academic educational institutions. He was a secular and rational person and often criticizes the orthodox scholars. Moreover, he tried to harmonize Islamic values with modern legal principles. His work foster rationality in the legal as well as educational aspects among Indian Muslims and inspired future generations to participate in public service by getting colonial education. He will be remembered for his advocacy for reform, rationality and support to colonial education.⁸

Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk (1837–1907)

Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk was the supporter of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and played an important role in advancing the Aligarh Movement for the modern education for the Muslims in India. He was working hard to raise the funds for the growth of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental (MAO)

⁶ Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), 125–30.

⁷ Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 20–22.

⁸ Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 18–22.

College, which later became Aligarh Muslim University. He argued that Muslim could only be liberated from socio-political and economical miseries by getting modern education. His efforts contributed to the intellectual growth of the society. As he was also involved in politics, where he talk about Muslim rights and Muslim representation in legislative bodies. He was of the view that Muslim should get the education not only for his personal gain but also to get influence in socio-political life. He did not out rightly reject tradition instead considers modern education as necessity of the time. He unites the Muslims in British India and remains an influential personality in the Muslim history of India.⁹

Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk (1841–1917)

Nawab Viqar-ul-Mulk was a supporter of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and his Aligarh Movement to promote the western education among the Muslims of India. He argued that Muslims could only achieve progress is through knowledge, awareness, and Western education. As a supporter of modern education, he emphasized the importance of English as the medium of instruction for Muslims to compete the Hindus effectively. As he was also involved in politics so his political insight helped him understand that education is the only source for Muslims salvation from the marginalization from the society. Many Muslims took inspiration from him and started taking part in social and political life. He worked day and night and strengthened the Aligarh Movement.¹⁰

Syed Ameer Ali (1849–1928)

He was a jurist, political leader and author of a number of books. He promoted modern education for the Muslims of India. He was also the first Indian Muslim appointed to the Privy Council in Britain. He argued that there is a need of reinterpretation of Islamic jurisprudence to remain relevant in contemporary society. He supported the modern education in English language as important source for Muslim empowerment. He wrote many books on Islamic history and challenged Western misconceptions about Islam. He argued that Muslim should learn modern education without abandoning their religious identity and culture. He was also the founder of London Muslim League which promoted Muslim political awareness and educational reform.. His legacy promotes modern education and rationality along with the Islamic values and culture.¹¹

Traditionalist Response to Colonial Education

Deobandi Movement

Traditionalist or conservative thinkers strongly opposed the colonial education fearing they would lead to the erosion of Islamic values and culture. The strong resistance came from the Deoband Seminary established in 1866. The purpose of the institution is to preserve the orthodox Sunni Islam and to resist the colonial education both intellectually and educationally. They rejected the colonial model of education particularly its secular content and English-language as medium of instruction. Instead, they adhered to the Madrassah curriculum, focusing

⁹ Ibid.,118

¹⁰ Shan Muhammad, *The Aligarh Movement: A Restatement* (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1999), 165–69.

¹¹ M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918–1924* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 25–28.

on Quranic exegesis, hadith, Arabic grammar, logic, and Islamic jurisprudence. Deobandi scholars argued that learning the colonial education would compromise the faith in Islam and weaken its religious foundations. In contrast to Sir Syed's approach of cooperating with the British, Deobandis called for self-reliance and boycott of colonial education. Prominent traditionalist like Maulana Qasim Nanotvi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi want to preserve Islamic tradition through education that remained untouched by Western ideologies. The Deobandi resistance was both ideological and educational, and they challenged the Modernist educational and political views.¹²

Maulana Qasim Nanotvi

Maulana Qasim Nanotvi (1832–1880) was a most prominent and revered personality during British colonial rule in India. In 1866, he with the help of others co-founded Darul Uloom Deoband, that played a crucial role in preserving Islamic learning and culture. He strongly opposed the colonial education especially English-medium and its secular content, which he saw as source for cultural and educational colonization. He was of the view that Western education would alienate Muslims from their religion and culture. To counter colonial education, he introduced the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum, which promotes study of the Quran, Hadith, Fiqh (Islamic law), Arabic grammar, logic, and philosophy. He believed that the revival of Islamic learning was pertinent for the survival of the Muslim community. He emphasized intellectual resistance instead of political rebellion, and considered Islamic education as only source of Muslim empowerment. In his writings, particularly *Tahzir al-Nas*, clarified Islamic doctrines and defended orthodoxy against distortions. He did not support violent opposition to the British, he was a staunch advocate of religious and cultural thought. His legacy inspired the Muslims of not only India but South Asia also and the Deobandi movement spread globally and continues to influence Islamic education. His efforts helped preserve Islamic learning and tradition in a time of colonial secular education. He believed that Islamic education was the most effective way to resist spiritual decay.¹³

Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi

Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi (1863–1943) was also associated with the Deobandi movement. He was a Islamic scholar and spiritual reformer. He feared about the moral and spiritual decline due to secular and Western-style education of colonial rule. He argued that colonial education is a threat to the faith and identity of Muslims due to its secular and liberal content. According to him, colonial education would bring materialism in the society which will further decline our moral and religious values. Although he was the supporter of traditional Islamic knowledge but he never out rightly reject the importance of modern education. He wanted modern education under the umbrella of Islam. He believed that Islam is the complete code of life and Islamic ethics must guide all aspects of life, including education, governance, and social conduct. Many disciples took inspiration from him and his legacy continues through the Deobandi schools.

¹² Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 89–95.

¹³ Ibid., 112–118.

Nadwat-ul-Ulama the bridge between two extremes

As the rivalry continues between Modernist and Traditionalist, a institution was emerged which was more moderate and inclusive called Nadwat-ul-Ulama. It was established in 1894 in Lucknow. The purpose of this institution was to bridge the ideological and educational gap between the two dominant Muslim reform movements of the time. They gave importance to both modern sciences and traditional Islamic knowledge. They made their curriculam to balance these opposing ideologies. This institution retained basic Islamic disciplines like tafsir, hadith, and fiqh, but it also introduced selected modern subjects like science, math etc and placed greater emphasis on Arabic language and literature. This institution produced scholars like Moulana Shibli Nomani who advocated for a balanced approach that respected Islamic learning while engaging with contemporary intellectual and political challenges. Nadwa did not entirely accept colonial education Instead it tried to produce such peoples and scholars who could interact with both religious and modern thought responsibly and encourage debates and writings on issues like history, philosophy, and comparative religion. It criticized both the blind acceptance of British rule seen in some of Modernist circles and the total isolationism from British and modern education promoted by Deoband. By advocating and promoting a culture of dialogue and scholarly debates, Nadwa helped in shaping a more pluralistic and inclusive discourse within Islam. This middle-ground and balanced approach made it a unique and influential force in the shaping of Muslim identity in colonial India.¹⁴

Muslim Women and Colonial Education

Muslim women initially resisted the colonial education and only elite women wanted to get colonial education. The fear of traditional Muslim families was that they consider western education as un-Islamic and secular. They also considered western education as unnecessary and dangerous to their religion and culture. Patriarchal society allowed only to receive informal religious education at home rather than attend formal schools. This culture was enforced by conservative ulema and community leaders who stressed that women's primary roles were domestic, not public or intellectual. Consequently, the early decades after 1835 saw very limited participation of Muslim women in formal colonial education. Even the Muslim reformer like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan initially prioritized male education and took a cautious approach toward female schooling, fearing backlash from traditionalists.¹⁵

With the passage of time, Muslim women began to participate in colonial education especially when reformist ideas spread in India. Muslim families started to see education as a tool not only for personal economical and social development but also for empowering women to contribute to the progress of the entire Muslim community. The establishment of schools for girls and madrasahs that gave both religious and western education eased cultural concerns. For example, institutions for girls like the **Aligarh Zenana Madrasah** provided an environment and security

¹⁴ Ibid.,186-194.

¹⁵ Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 82.

where girls could study within purdah system. Famous and Influential women such as **Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain** (Bengali feminist, thinker and writer) advocated strongly for women's education. She was of the view that education is the most important precondition for women's liberation. For this purpose, she established school in Kolkata for Muslim girls. She gone from house to house to convince the parents to sent their daughter to school. She argued that ignorance was the root cause of social backwardness. Through writings, lectures, and schools like her 'Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School, She encouraged Muslim women to get knowledge while maintaining their cultural and religious identity. This was a turning point from resistance to acceptance. Now Muslim women saw education as a means of self-respect, source of empowerment and a way to progress and development.¹⁶

During freedom struggle against British, educated women took part in politics by breaking the cultural norms. Many women began actively participating in socio-political reform movements, using their education as a platform to advocate for women's rights, legal reforms, and basic rights. Organizations were formed such as **Anjuman-e-Khawateen-e-Islam** and the **All-India Muslim Ladies Conference** provided forums for Muslim women to debate and promote education and social reforms. Muslim women emerged as a leader like **Rasheed Jahan** and **Hamida Salim**(first women to graduate from Aligarh University) . They challenged patriarchal norms and encouraged women participation in intellectual and political spheres. In conclusion, Muslim women's responses to colonial education in India evolved from suspicion and rejection toward acceptance, reform, and political activism, increasing their role in all spheres of life.¹⁷

Rokaya Sakhawat Hussain

She was a Muslim educationist and reformer who supported colonial education for Muslim women in India. She was of the view that colonial education can create socio-political opportunities for Muslim women. She considered both Islamic and Western education as necessary for the betterment of society. She criticized the orthodox and conservative scholars who were against women education. She considered ignorance as a greater threat to Islam and culture than modern knowledge. She established the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School in Kolkata in 1911 which provide both secular and religious education. She wrote *Sultana's Dream*, which reflected her belief that education has the power which can transform women's life. She became the role model for future generations of Muslim women in South Asia. Her legacy will be remembered for her commitment and struggle for the modern education for Muslims of India.¹⁸

Rashid Jahan

Rashid Jahan was a feminist, communist, doctor, and social reformer of India who advocated for modern education for women in India. By using the platform of leftist Progressive Writers'

¹⁶ Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 89.

¹⁷ Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 121–35.

¹⁸ Roushan Jahan, ed., *The Oxford India Rokeya: Writings of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 15–35.

Movement, she challenged the conservative social norms and advocate for reform. She was of the view that modern education can liberate the women from patriarchy and ignorance. She questioned and challenged the patriarchy of both Hindus and Muslim society. She did not reject the Islamic education and culture outright but adopted a balanced and moderate approach. She wrote a short story called *Angarey*, which exposed the bitter realities faced by women and encouraged them to seek modern knowledge. Extremist elements in the society harshly criticized her and even death threats were given to her but she continued her mission of women education.¹⁹

Hamida Salim

She was a prominent writer, economist, and educationist who strongly supported the Western education for women, particularly Muslim women in India. She was one of the first Muslim women to be graduated from Aligarh Muslim University. She believed that Western education offered critical thinking, logic, science and rationality. She raised her voice for women's access to higher education which was traditionally dominated by men. At the same time, she maintained a cultural and religious identity to balance tradition with progress. She was considered as a role model for women in India for her commitment and struggle for Women's education.²⁰

Conclusion

The Muslim response to colonial education was not uniform as there were two approaches the Muslims of British India had adopted, the modernist and the traditionalist approach. They had different approaches due to their different school of thought. When the colonial education was introduced in British India, it was initially rejected by all segments of Muslim society due to the secular nature of colonial education. The Muslims of British India were considering the colonial education as against Islam and Sunnah. The situation turned after the revolt of 1857, when the British blamed Muslims for the revolt and started sidelining the Muslims from the government positions, the lack of western education became the cause of the downfall of Muslims of British India. The cause of Muslim suspicion of British education was the replacing of Persian and Arabic languages by the British. However, the situation turned when the people like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan started advocating for the Western education as he argued the progress and development of Muslims of British India depends on western education and according to Sir Syed Islam and science are compatible and it is the need of the time to acquire western education. Through the Aligarh Movement, Sir Syed revolutionized the Muslim education system and changed the mindset of people towards western education. He supported both Islamic and western education as according to him, both were compatible. By following Sir Syed, many Muslim reformers started advocating for western education including the Muslim female, who also advocated for modern education and this approach is called modernist response to colonial education. On the contrary, there were also the Muslims traditionalist response like the Darul Uloom Deoband and Nadwatul Ulama who were still resisting to colonial education and considering it against the Islam and their culture while maintaining commitment to classical

¹⁹ Rakhshanda Jalil, ed., *Angarey: Nine Stories and a Play* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2014), xiii–xxvii.

²⁰ Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 126.

Islamic knowledge. The curriculum of Madaris contained the teaching of Quran and Sunnah Hadith, Fiqh, and moral values while remaining skeptical of Western influence. As a result, the Muslim community developed a dual approach to colonial education: one promoting modern secular education, and the other preserving religious orthodoxy. Muslim women also contributed in promoting the western education and changed the mindset of the society. At the same time, it is pertinent to mention that the resistance or acceptance to colonial education was for the welfare of the Muslims of British India. The Muslim response was evolved from rejection to selective adaptation producing multiple educational strategies for the betterment of the Muslims of British India.

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