



THE RISE OF MUSLIM POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN COLONIAL INDIA: A STUDY OF REFORM AND ORGANIZATION

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Abstract:

This paper examines the emergence, objectives, activities, and achievements of these organizations and reform movements, highlighting their contribution to the social, educational, and political awakening of Indian Muslims during the late nineteenth century. It also examines the role played by these associations and reform movements in the regeneration of Indian Muslims during the late nineteenth century and assesses their contribution to the emergence of modern Muslim political and social consciousness.

Key Words: Mohammedan Association, Mohammedan Literary Society of Bengal, Dar-ul-Ulum Deoband, Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam, Nadwat-ul-Ulama

Introduction:

The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed a significant transformation in the social, educational, and political life of Indian Muslims. Following the Revolt of 1857, the Muslim community suffered severe economic decline, political marginalization, and educational backwardness. Many Muslims were excluded from government employment and remained reluctant to embrace Western education, which further widened the gap between them and other communities. In response to these challenges, a number of Muslim intellectuals and reformers-initiated efforts aimed at the regeneration of Muslim society. These efforts took organizational, educational, and religious forms and sought to restore the confidence, status, and progress of the community.

Among the earliest initiatives were the establishment of the Mohammedan Association (1856), the Mohammedan Literary Society of Bengal (1865), and the Central National Mohammedan Association (1877). These organizations aimed to represent Muslim interests before the colonial government, promote modern education, and create political awareness among Muslims. Simultaneously, reformers such as Nawab Abdul Latif, Syed Ameer Ali, Maulvi Chirag Ali, and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan attempted to reconcile Islamic traditions with modern ideas and institutions. The emergence of organizations such as the Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam, Nadwat-ul-Ulama, and Dar-ul-Ulum Deoband further reflected the diversity of Muslim responses to modernity and colonial rule.

The Mohammedan Association (1856):

The Mohammedan Association, established in Calcutta in 1856 under the leadership of Fazloor Rahman and Mohammad Muzher, was the first organized political body of Indian Muslims. The Association remained loyal to the British during the Revolt of 1857 and even congratulated Queen Victoria after the suppression of the uprising. Although short-lived, it represented an early attempt by Muslims to organize politically and communicate their concerns to the colonial administration.

The Central National Mohammedan Association (1877):

Establishment:

This Association was probably the first powerful Muslim Association, formed in the year 1877 by Ameer Ali for hectic social and political/activities. At that time, it was the principal Muslim Organization which represented again and again the grievances of the Muslims to the Governor General. Ameer Ali remained the Secretary of the Association for a quarter of a century. He was the only Muslim of note who tried to put the Muslim case before Britain.) He was very influential among the Mohammedans in Bengal.

The Aims and Objectives:

The Association was formed with the object of promoting by all legitimate and constitutional means the wellbeing of the Mussalmans of India. It was founded essentially upon the principle of strict and loyal adherence to the British Crown.

Delving its inspiration from the noble tradition of the past it proposed to work in harmony with the western culture and the progressive tendencies of the age. It aimed at the political regeneration of the Indian Mohammedans by the moral revival and by constant endeavours to obtain from Government a recognition of their just and reasonable claims.

In 1882, the Association claimed that before its establishment, there their hopes and aspirations, In order to obviate the difficulties under existed no political body among the Indian Mohammedans to represent for the protection and conservation of the general interests of the which the Mohammedans had laboured", " the Association was instituted community.

Activities In the first few years, the Association concerned itself with petty social affairs, but by 1882, it developed the ambition of becoming the champion of Muslim interest in a larger sphere.

Ameer Ali, unlike Sir Syed, travelled far and wide disseminating the aims of his Association, opening its branches and exhorting Muslims to unite. He travelled all the way from Calcutta to Karachi and by personal visits and correspondence had as

many as 53 branches of the Association opened in Bengal, Bombay, Madras, the Punjab, the U.P. and Bihar. In the course of time the activities of the Association were extended as far west as Karachi and as far south as Bangalore. Ameer Ali's mission in life became agitation for a share of Muslims in Government services. Though, overshadowed by fame of Sir Syed, Ameer Ali's contribution to Muslim politics is more important and more powerful. His Association in fact was one of the organisers of the first Indian Congress. But it withdrew its support from the second Congress and never returned to any in future, the reason being the fear of political extinction of the Mohammedans, or their absolute effacement as a community in this country. The Association, therefore, had to acquire a cautious attitude towards the Muslims attending the Congress.

Mohammedan Literary Society of Bengal (1865):

Another important Association of the Mohammedans which was functioning since more than a decade earlier than the Central National Mohammedan Association was the Literary Society of Bengal.

The Muslims could not remain completely unaffected by the political currents and crosscurrents in the country. Though neither could they organize themselves properly nor had they the desire to be entangled with the Hindus in political agitation, the complexities of which were beyond their comprehension, yet they knew well regarding the price they had paid for their participation in the upsurge of 1857. They were too poor and frightened at that time to run further risks. But as English education spread among them, their interest in politics also increased. The first attempt in this direction was made as early as in 1865.

Establishment:

Nagab Abdul Latif, the foremost Muslim leader of Bengal founded in April, 1865, the Mohammedan Literary Society. It met once every month at the Nawab's residence at No. 16, Toltollah Lane in Calcutta and brought together well-to-do Muslims for academic discussions on political and social matters.

The Aims and Objectives:

The object of the society was "to impart useful information to the higher and educated classes of the Mohammedan community by means of lectures, addresses and discourses on various subjects in Literature, Science and Society". These lectures were delivered in Urdu or in English, sometimes even in Persian or Arabic.

Activities:

The Nawab and his colleagues were much influenced by the West; they showed almost a blind adherence to English ideas. The society managed to create some interest in current problems among the Muslims, particularly of Bengal and its meetings often used to be very well attended. It claimed more than 500 members drawn from leading Muslim families all over India; it had its Patron, the Lt. Governor of Bengal.

Politically the Society was loyalist to the core; within its portals no criticism of the Government, however mild or constructive, was allowed. Its basis was unwavering fidelity to British rule, which it often tried to justify even on theological grounds. It did not hesitate to condemn the critics and opponents of British rule within the Islamic fold as traitors to Islam: a thesis which the society sanctified by securing fat was from some leading Ulama.

One of the chief features of its activities was the presentation of addresses on behalf of the Muslim community to the outgoing and in-coming Lt. Governors and Governor Generals expressing in most eloquent and picturesque phrases the loyalty of the Muslims to the British crown."

Once a year the Society held a conversazione at the Town Hall of Calcutta to which some prominent Europeans and Hindus were also invited and a Scientific Exhibition dealing in particular with Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Physics and Electricity was held. It used to be organized not only to interest the Muslims in scientific studies but also to bring them into contact with the leading members of the European and Hindu communities of Bengal.

Achievements:

In creating political consciousness among the Muslims, the society did not play any significant part; but in acquainting them with some of those aspects of British culture which were influencing life in India, its achievements were considerable. For instance, it rendered valuable service in spreading among the Muslims the study of English language and literature and successfully strived in introducing these subjects first in the Calcutta Madrasah and then in other centres of education in Bengal.

Its Secretary, Nawab Abdul Latif, at the time pointed out that the Muslims were not "disposed to accept hastily [sic] proposals however well-meant which have a tendency to revolutionise time-honoured institutions and to bring about changes which they consider unsuited to the exigencies of the India-of-today and the various conflicting interests in it",

This attitude is in keeping with the other leaders of the Muslim community who advocated complete faith in and support to the British Government. They did not pay heed to the few reform movements directed towards the welfare of the Muslim community.

Muslim Reform Movements:

The regeneration of Indian Muslims was also shaped by a number of reform movements.

Maulvi Chirag Ali:

Chirag Ali advocated social reform and modernization within Muslim society. He supported monogamy, improved status for women, and greater Muslim participation in government services. Through his writings, he sought to harmonize Islamic principles with modern social realities (p. 279).

Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam:

Founded in Lahore in 1885, the Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam sought to improve the social, intellectual, and moral condition of Muslims. It emphasized modern education while maintaining a strong commitment to Islamic religious instruction.

Nadwat-ul-Ulama:

Established in Lucknow in 1894, Nadwat-ul-Ulama aimed at social reform and the welfare of Muslims. It brought together scholars from different schools of Islamic thought and attempted to bridge the gap between traditional religious learning and contemporary needs

Dar-ul-Ulum Deoband:

Founded in 1863 by Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi, Dar-ul-Ulum Deoband became the most prominent center of Islamic learning in India. The institution sought to revive Islamic scholarship after the setback caused by the Revolt of 1857 and later played an important role in India's freedom movement

Conclusion:

The regeneration of Indian Muslims during the late nineteenth century was a multifaceted process involving political organizations, educational institutions, and religious reform movements. Organizations such as the Mohammedan Association, the Central National Mohammedan Association, and the Mohammedan Literary Society sought to address Muslim backwardness by promoting political representation, educational advancement, and social awareness. At the same time, reformers like Ameer Ali, Abdul Latif, Chirag Ali, and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan attempted to reconcile Islamic traditions with modernity and prepare Muslims for changing political and social realities.

These initiatives laid the foundations of modern Muslim political consciousness and educational reform in India. While many of these organizations remained loyal to British rule, their efforts contributed significantly to the upliftment of the Muslim community and shaped the trajectory of Muslim politics in the twentieth century. The regeneration movements of the nineteenth century thus constitute an important chapter in the history of Indian Muslim social and political development.

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