

Contribution of *Nadwat-ul-Ulama* to Education

Majida Noorani

Abstract

The Islamic east had maintained over the centuries, a social, cultural, economic and moral equilibrium based on eternal values drawn from the Qur'an and Sunnah. During the eighteenth century, political ascendancy of the west which gradually enveloped the entire world of Islam not only paved the way for conflict within the social fabric of Islam but also encouraged the disintegration of its intellectual and creative energies by its undue emphasis on the material view of life. Now Religion began to be looked down as something of a private concern and so the scholars of religion were relegated to the background. The Islamic Millat was passing through these highly critical times all over the world. In India too, Muslims were divided into two groups – modern and traditional. The former group developed a blind faith towards western science and civilizations. The latter group responded in implicit faith in the infallibility of the way of earlier ulama. The danger of this situation was realized by some sincere and far sighted scholars. Thus the challenge of western education and culture during the eighteenth century was responded by Muslims by establishing Darul-Uloom Deoband in 1867 and M.A.O College in 1875. The two institutions stood opposed to each other as Deoband was too conservative to give any allowance to secular sciences and English language, and Aligarh was progressive enough to give position of privilege to these secular studies. This led to the establishment of one more institution namely Darul-Uloom Nadwat-ul-Ulama of Lucknow. The aim of this paper is to throw light on the significant role played by Nadwat-ul-Ulama which strived to bridge the gap between traditional and secular education.

Majida Noorani, Ph.D Scholar, Shah-i- Hamdaan Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar.

Email: majidanoorani@gmail.com

Introduction

No sooner did the European colonialism set its foot in the eastern world, the western influence was forcibly imposed upon the world of Islam especially during the eighteenth century. It created a schism between the spiritual and material domains of the community's life. Religion began to be looked down as something of a private concern having nothing to do with the affairs of world. Islam, like Christianity, was divided into the church and the state. On the one side, there was the sovereignty of God and on the other that of the Caesar. As a result of it, the scholars of religion were relegated to the background and the leadership of political and cultural movements passed on into the hands of those who were shorn of all Islamic values. The state was deprived of honest and conscious rulers, of dedicated workers and devoted administrators and, religion of its watchman and the defenders. The isolation of religion from practical life and its problems made the doctors of religion indifferent to the affairs of the contemporary world and even if they tried to interfere in these matters, they were ridiculed because of their unfamiliarity with the modern thought and story of knowledge. The western nations launched an unrelenting attack on Islam from all directions- Philosophy, History, Literature, Science, Politics and Culture. The strategy of modern west called for new weapons to defeat it and it was the *Ulama* alone who could forge them. As a consequence Muslim *Millat* was divided between modern and traditional groups where the former group followed western science and civilization blindly and later group followed the way of earlier *Ulama*. This group held the syllabi of instructions laid down by them as to be absolute and final and the slightest alteration amounted to apostasy and perversion. Religion and religious sciences had fallen a prey to these excesses. Moderateness had become extinct. The dangers of the situation were realized by some sincere and far-sighted religious scholars. It was in response to all these challenges posed by western culture and education that the *Darul-Uloom Deoband* was established in 1867 and M.A.O College in 1875. But the two institutions were the two extreme shores of a river in their ideologies where *Deoband* was, in all respects, an anti-thesis of *Aligarh*. In education and politics they had taken different stands. *Deoband* was too conservative to give any allowance to liberal arts, modern sciences and English language. *Aligarh* was progressive enough to give position of privilege to secular studies. So these two institutions stood opposite to each other, providing reference points for the establishment of Muslim educational institutions in future. The institutions that were to follow not only took their cue from them but there were some which tried to strike some sort of balance between the two.

Darul-Uloom Nadwat-ul-Ulama of Lucknow was the first of its kind. Evidently it should have developed as a theological seminary like that of *Deoband*, but it proved different in many ways. Its urban milieu, its commitment to reform, and its initial Pro-British approach brought it nearer to *Aligarh* and made it a *Madrasah* different from those which were despised by Sir-Sayyid as is quoted by Syed Mahmood:

“Nadwat-ul-Ulama does not seem to have any political stimulus in its origin. It was established in the last decade of the nineteenth century at Lucknow. It was a theological seminary, standing between the secular Aligarh and the conservative Deoband. Aligarh stood for the restoration of a place of honor for the Muslims in Indian society; Nadwa stood for the restoration of a place of honor for Ulama in the Muslim society, Nadwa was nearer to Aligarh than Deoband in more than one way”.ⁱ

In the Ninth Mohammadan Educational Conference held in 1894, Mohsinul Mulk said about the *Nadwat-ul-Ulama* that “the very things which Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his friends were trying to reform for a quarter of a century had been admitted by those revered persons to be not quite satisfactory, and they were worthy of their considerations. They had resolved that the usual mode of instruction adopted in the numerous Arabic and Persian schools and *Madrasahs*, and the course of studies taught in them had not produced such men as are required in the modern days.”ⁱⁱ

Aims and Objectives of the *Nadwat-ul-Ulama*

Aligarh College had fully established itself when a number of *Ulama*, on the occasion of annual convocation (*Dastarbandi*) of *Madrasah Faid-i-Aam* Kanpur in 1892, decided to form an organization for the twin purpose of reforming the old educational system, and bringing about unity among *Ulama*, holding different views on religious matters. The first organizer (*Nazim*) was Mawlana Mohammad Ali Manghori (1846-1927) who may be rightly called the real founder of the movement. Mawlana Mohammad Ali deputed Mawlana Mushtak Ali Naginavi, a teacher of *Madrasah-i-Islamia* Faizabad to acquaint the people especially the *Ulama* with the aims and the objectives of the *Nadwat-ul-Ulama*. The gist of the letter of Mawlana Mohammad Ali Manghori is as follows:

“Madrasahs are only ignorant of the ways of the world, and so dependent of others, but are also ignorant of the religious knowledge essential for modern times. This organization, therefore, wants to reorganize the system of education in a manner so that the students may be educated on proper lines. Further, the organization will try to bring the *Ulama* closer to each

other, as the differences between them serve no useful purpose and humiliate Islam in the eyes of its foes.’ⁱⁱⁱ

The two aims mentioned above were later worked out into six specific objectives. These six objectives were as follows:

- 1) Progress of education;
- 2) Reform in the system of education;
- 3) Moral regeneration;
- 4) Propagation of Islam;
- 5) Removal of mutual differences;
- 6) Knowledge of the welfare of the followers of Islam.^{iv}

The point-wise explanation of the above mentioned objectives was given by the executive council of *Nadwa*. The substance of explanation is as follows:

The greatest objective of the *Nadwat-ul-Ulama* is to help *Ulama* establish rapport among themselves. If the *Ulama* are aware of each other’s activities they may come closer, work in unison, increase their collective strength and work for construction of Islam and its followers. The second objective is the removal of differences between the religious groups of Muslims. The third objective is to reframe the course of studies prevalent in Arabic Madrasas. This reframing of courses should be done in the light of demands of modern times. A new *Ilm-i-Kalaam* is needed to meet the criticism of modern atheists. The fourth objective is to establish a Madrasa wherein high quality education will be given to students, so that they may excel in their area of knowledge. The fifth objective is the propagation of Islam in foreign countries. The *Nadwa* will bear the expenses of those who will visit foreign countries. Naturally, such men will have to learn the language of the country where they will go for propagation. The sixth objective is to give *Fatwa* i.e. legal opinion on worldly or religious issues. A *Darul-Ifta* will be established by *Nadwa* simply for the convenience of the public, otherwise any Muslim jurist can give legal opinion on issues of general or specific interests.^v

Thus with these aims and objectives in view, the *Nadwat-ul-ulama* (Association of Muslim *Ulama*) Lucknow was founded in 1894 A.D by some forward looking *Ulama* at the time of *Dastarbandi* (convocation) in *Madrasah Fa'id-i-Aamin* Kanpur.^{vi} The first session of *Nadwat-ul-Ulama* was held under the presidentship of Mawlana Lutfullah of *Aligarh*. The association held its subsequent annual sessions in the various towns and cities of India and in every meeting it emphasized upon the need of a type of education which might not only give

the Muslims a thorough grounding in religious matters but equip them with western ideas to face the new situation.

It was in the Khatoon Manzil Lucknow that the *Madrasah Nadwat-ul-Ulama* started functioning on September 26, 1898. The ceremonial inauguration of the *Madrasah* took place in October, 1898. In the first annual meeting of the *Nadwat-ul-Ulama*, all the four resolutions passed, were for bringing about reform in the courses of studies and organization of Arabic *Madrasahs*. It is evident from the deliberations of the meeting that the courses of studies framed some two hundred years by the Mulla Nizamuddin had lost much of their usefulness in the changed Indian conditions. It hardly equipped the students with knowledge that could either be used to satisfy the modern educated Muslims or provide with arguments that might silence the criticism of non-Muslims against Islam.

Courses of Studies

The *Ulama* were not acquainted with the nature and content of new knowledge, as the knowledge could be acquired through English language only and so they were not familiar even with the problems of the day, what to say about their solution. The Arabic *Madrasahs* had fortified themselves and would not allow any change in the content of their syllabi or method of teaching. Consequently, a kind of stagnation had set in. English was the language of the British who had snatched the scepter of power from the Muslims, and so there could be a reason to ignore it. But History, Geography and Economics also failed to find any place in the courses of studies in Arabic *Madrasahs*.

The advent of western knowledge and culture posed a very serious challenge for *Ulama*. Western knowledge and culture had started influencing the Muslim elite class, and mere rhetoric from them could not keep away this tone-setting class from being unduly influenced by foreign ideas verging on atheism. Moreover Christian missionaries equipped with English language and western knowledge made successful attacks on Islam and their followers, particularly *Ulama*. It was, therefore, essential that the *Ulama* should come out from their isolation, equip themselves with the language and knowledge essential to influence their own brethren, and join issues with their adversaries.

But the *Madrasah* education instead of producing students who could meet the new challenges, produced such *Ulama* who fought among themselves about flimsy issues. It was therefore, considered necessary that the position of *Ulama* as leaders of their community should be restored by bringing about a change in their education. And since the most

important element of education was considered to be the courses of studies so a sustained effort was made by the founders of *Nadwat-ul-Ulama* to reframe the courses of studies prevalent in Arabic *Madrasahs*.

Mawlana Shibli was of the opinion that present syllabus of *Madrasahs* was loaded with books on *Maqulat* (rational sciences). Issues related to *Ilahiyat*(Dogmatics) need not be mixed up with *Mantik* (logic). More books on Arabic literature should be included in the syllabus. And the *Quran* with related sciences be given a central place in the modified syllabus. besides, teaching method also needed change. Instead of teaching the texts of prescribed books, acquisition of art be aimed at.

Modern subjects in the syllabuses of Arabic *Madrasahs* were also carried out. In 1896 mawlana Mohammad Ali Manghori submitted a draft syllabus entitled “*Musavada-i-Nisab-i-Arabi*”. There were twenty subjects in all the proposed course of studies, of which all except six subjects were those which were already taught in Arabic *Madrasahs*. The six new subjects were: *tarikh* (history), *Usul-i-Lughat* (grammar), *Tajvid, Urud* (prosody), *SulukwaTahdhib-i-Nafs* (*Tassawuf*), *Asrar-i-Ahkam*. Books were given under subject titles in the proposed course of studies.

In the annual meeting of *Nadwat-ul-Ulama* held in Madras 1904, another committee for framing a course of studies was constituted. The new course of studies was much different from the old one in respect of books and areas of emphasis. The books were as follows:

- 1: Arabic literature and *fan-i-balaghat* were more emphasized.
- 2: besides fifteen chapters of *Tafsir-I Baidawi*, an Egyptian publication, *Al-Siratul-Mustaqim* was included and was concerned with the Qur’anic interpretation of *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), *kalam*(dogmatics) and *akhlaq*(morals).
- 3: *Aqa'id* (beliefs) were taught through *kashful Aula* of Ibn Rushd and *iqtisad* of Imam Ghazali.
- 4: *Sharh-I-Hikmatul-‘ Ain* and *Sharh-i-hikmatul-ishraq* were included in the course of *Falsafah*(philosophy).
- 5: *Hujjatullaahil-Balighah* of Shah Waliullah was included in the course of *Asrar-i-Shariat*.
- 6: *Durus-Awliyya* was included in the course of *Falsaf-i-jadid* (modern philosophy). The book contained problems faced by the society due to the emergence of science.

The above mentioned course of studies with the provision of compulsory teaching of English language was approved by the members of *Nadwatul- ullaama* in 1904. But the

implementations of the course could not take place earlier than 1905. Maulana Mohammad Ali Mangori and Maulana Shibli both were in favor of teaching English to prospective *ulama* in order that they might extend their proselytization activities to the English speaking world.^{vii} When Maulana Shibli was appointed *Mutamad-i-talim*, its study was made compulsory. With the approval of executive council on June 30, 1909, *Nadwat-ul-Ulama* introduced specialization in branches of Islamic learning. Till then the Arabic *madrasas* used to impart religious education of a general nature.

The total period of *Madrassa* education was decided to be ten years. These ten years were divided into three years for primary stage, five years for middle stage i.e, *fadiliyat* and then two years for higher stage i.e, *takmil*, the successful end of which would entitle a scholar to be called *Mufasssir, Faqih, Adib* or *Muhaddith*.

In 1908 another significant addition to the course of studies was the teaching of Hindi and Sanskrit. This was done primarily to equip students with the language and literature in order to enable them to defend Islam from the criticism of *Arya Samajis*. Hindi is taught in the last four of the six classes of the primary stage. English on the other hand, starts from class 4 of the primary stage and continues for five years including the two years of middle stage.

The present courses of studies offered by *Nadwat-ul-Ulama* are as follows:

1. The ten years course leading to the school terminal examination, known as *thanawi* and
 2. The four year course which can be joined after the successful completion of *thanawi* stage.
- These courses are in (a) *Shariat and usul-i-Din* (Shariat and Theology) (b) *Lughatul Arabiyah wa Adabiyyah* (Arabic language and literature)(c) *Dawat-o-fikr-i-islami* (Islamic thought and mission). The first two courses are offered by the faculties of the same name, and the third courses offered by the higher institute of Islamic thought and mission. It may be here that *Darul Uloom* has now adopted the faculty structure. Each of the above mentioned three courses lead to the *sanad-i-Alimiyat*, which in Arabic is called *Lisan*, and is supposed to be equivalent to B.A. of other universities. After becoming *Alim*, a student can take admission in *Fadiliyat* courses, which, again are offered by two faculties and the higher institute of Islamic thought and mission. The successful completion of two years in any faculty entitles a student to the award of *Sanad-i-fadiliyat* and is supposed to be equivalent to M.A. of other universities.^{viii}

Characteristics of Darul Ulum Nadwatul Ulama

- *Nadwat-ul-ulama* aimed at the removal of differences between the groups and individual Muslims in general and between the *ulama* of differing opinions in particular and the reform of the system of education especially the courses of studies prevalent in Arabic Madrasas.
- The course of studies engaged the attention of the founders of Nadwa so much that some 21 syllabi were prepared by the almost as many *ulama*, but none could be put into practice before 1905. The knowledge of geography in the present course of studies of the *Darul Ulum* is confined to the geographical features of Muslim countries and Arabian Peninsula. Similarly the study of history in the Nadwa is confined to Islamic history and culture. The present courses in economics, political science and general knowledge too, confirm to the principle observed in the selection and organization of facts of history and geography.
- The inclusion of English language in the courses of studies at Nadwa was one of the main concerns. Men like Mawlana Shibli were convinced that for propagation of Islam in Europe and for its effective defense from European critics, the knowledge of English language was essential for a modern *Aalim* and in the present course of studies for secondary stage English is taught from class fourth to class tenth.
- The regular courses of studies in Arabic Madrasas normally constitute three broad areas of knowledge. The first area is composed of those books which are related to theology. The second area consists of books related literature, especially Arabic literature. The third sets of books are those which are related to rational sciences i.e, *falsafa* and *mantiq*.^{ix}
- Emphasis on Arabic literature has, augmented the competence of the students in written and spoken Arabic.
- *Nadwa*, endeavored to frame a course of studies which might represent sufficient elements of the new education in it. These new elements were essential for a better understanding of the modern world and also for devising a strategy for the defense of Islam especially against the European critics.
- The *Nadwat-ul-ulama* was therefore more conscious than other Arabic *Madrasah* including the *Darul- Uloom Deoband* about devising a defense offence strategy and was more seriously involved in academic activities.
- One more notable feature of *Nadwa* is the publication of two Arabic Magazines which are issued monthly and fortnightly and most of the contributors are students who are having sufficient training in the art of journalism in modern Arabic and thus its graduates are noted for their proficiency in Modern Arabic.^x

Conclusion

Nadwat-ul-ulama thus achieved a great success in its objective of producing the scholars of great repute who were known all over the world especially for their knowledge of Arabic language. In brief, it has tried to produce such broad minded scholars who could effectively discharge the duty of propagation of Islam in the modern world, who could expand the eternal nature of the divine message, the distinguishing features of the Islamic shariah and the way of life envisaged by it in such an attractive manner and easy and simple language as might appeal to the modern mind and serve as a sought of confluence of the old and the new.

End notes

ⁱ Syed Mahmood 1895: 124, *History of English Education in India*, M.A.O. college, Aligarh.

ⁱⁱ Shan Mohammad 1978: 849, *Aligarh Movement*, Vol. 3, MeenakshiPrakashan, Meerut.

ⁱⁱⁱ Report of the *Nadwat-ul-Ulama*, part 1, 1894, Intizar press, Kanpur, N.D, pp.23-24.

^{iv} *Dasturul-AmalNadwat-ul-Ulama*, Article 4, 1915, Report of the *Nadwat-ul-Ulama*, Shahi Press, Lucknow, N.D, p.2.

^v Arakan-i-Intizamia, *DawabitNadwat-ul-ulma*, Islami press, Kanpur, N.D., PP.2-7.

^{vi} A.S.Bazmee Ansari 1965: 132, Dar-ul-ulum, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Leiden, Vol. 2.

^{vii} *Hayat-i-Shibli*, pp.415-416 and *SiratMaulana Mohammad Ali Monghyri*, p.194.

^{viii} *Nisab-i-ta'lim*, Ibtidai, Mutwasit, thanavi, Darul "ulum nadwatul ulama, Nizami press, lucknow, 1980.

^{ix} *Ta'mir-i-Hayat*, "Darul 'Ulum Nadwatul ulammeinjari nisab-i-Ta'lim", April 25, 1984.

^x Mohammad Akhlaq Ahmad 1985: 32-33, *"Traditional Education among Muslims"*, D.K. publishers.

