

## **From Flame to Ashes: Aligarh Movement's Vision of Progress at Crossroads**

**- Tawseef Ahmad Bhat**

### **Abstract**

*The Valley of Kashmir was a great center of learning since the ancient times and scholars from all parts of India, China and Tibet came here to study literature and philosophy. The Valley was known as "Sharda Peetha" or the great seat of learning especially Sanskrit. Being a centre of oriental learning Kashmir was also known as "Iran-i-Sageer" (miniature Iran) and has produced great Persian poets and scholars. It has been endowed by nature with the bountiful atmosphere of the most educative type. The Kashmiri's have derived full inspiration from their amiable surroundings and the Valley produced a galaxy of scholars, philosophers and chroniclers. The educational backwardness of the Indian Muslims in general and that of the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir in particular was one of the biggest challenges of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Since education is an indispensable instrument for socio economic development, the useful and constructive role of education is widely acknowledged. Aligarh movement took imperative steps in order to improve the conditions of the Muslims. The founder of the Aligarh movement took lot of measures in order to increase literacy rate of the Muslims. He lifted the veil of ignorance from his people and pointed the way to progress through education. Huge efforts were made by his companions and associates in order to make them cent percent literate. In Kashmir the leaders were also influenced by his vision and mission and followed him in every sphere. The results were evident and much improvement was achieved. However, in Kashmir the situation changed to worse before the dream of the Sir Sayyid was fully achieved. In the past three decades education in the beautiful Kashmir valley has been paralyzed in the most adverse manner.*

**Key Words:** *Flame, ashes, progress, Aligarh movement, vision, conflict, crossroads.*

### **Introduction**

Vision and progress are interrelated terms; vision is very important for achieving specific goals without vision a movement cannot succeed or achieve positive results and without vision, cultures, communities and civilizations perish. The vision must be according to the realities and not by sheer dreaming and these can be realized and transformed into realities by hard work and dedication. Progress is a desirable goal with adequate means for attaining it.<sup>1</sup> The concept of progress provides us information how human societies improved over the period of time.

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In intellectual history, the idea of progress is the idea that advances in technology, science and social organization can produce an improvement in the human condition. Long before Malala Yousafzai , the noble laureate, championed the cause of education among Muslims for their progress and development and her advocacy has grown into an international movement with the vision like “*One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.*”<sup>ii</sup> Sir Syed Ahmad Khan long back championed the cause of education among South Asian Muslims and his vision and mission of his educational movement played a significant role in putting the Muslims on the track of progress. The Muslims of the state of Jammu and Kashmir were significantly influenced by his movement; they achieved considerable success in different fields, but before the dream of the movement, the progress of Muslims was fulfilled, the tool of Muslim progress that is modern education became a victim of an unending violence.

### **Aligarh movement’s vision of progress**

The Aligarh movement had complete faith in education and believed that the progress of Muslims depends on education alone as it is a source of progress; it dispels the darkness of ignorance and social vices like pauperism, poverty and crime that was rampant among the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Muslim society in South Asia.<sup>iii</sup> The founder of the Aligarh movement realized that the pathetic and deplorable conditions of Muslims were due to the lack of modern education and wanted the Muslims to discard their prejudice against the modern education. The movement played incredible role in the progress of Muslims throughout the sub continent and inspired the coming generations of Muslims to establish schools and colleges. Sir Syed emphasized that it is only education that can minimize the sufferings of Muslims. In order to improve the conditions of the Muslims he started the Aligarh movement, to remove weaknesses of Muslims in the new environment. He adopted the policy of providing them modern education, so that they could improve their lot in the new atmosphere. In the continuation of its mission (Aligarh Movement) for the welfare of Indians, particularly Muslims, he organized the All-India Mohammedan Educational Conference (AIMEC) in 1886, earlier it was known as All-India Mohammedan Educational Congress. It propagated the message of importance of education, particularly modern education, for the upliftment of the community. This conference worked efficiently and almost unflinching met annually in different cities of the country in order to provide a common platform for the encouragement of modern education among the Muslims. It regularly passed resolutions and tried to

overcome the social and educational problems of the community. It disseminated the message and mission of movement in other parts of the country.<sup>iv</sup> The movement's revolutionary efforts gave rise to a new generation of Muslims who dominated the different spheres of social life in our country. Aligarh movement created favorable conditions for the upliftment of poor people and scholarships were instituted for the education of their children. Muhsin-ul-Mulk extended the activities of the movement to different parts of India and students came not only from different parts of India but from distant countries like Burma and Somaliland. For the education of poor students, primary schools were opened at different places and they were all affiliated to the M. A. O. College.<sup>v</sup> The Movement played significant role in bringing about an intellectual revolution among the Indian Muslims and the modern education became the pivot of this movement for the regeneration of the Indian Muslims, which brought a complete orientation in their lives. The movement transformed Muslim minds from medieval outlook to a modern one. Sir Sayyid founded M.A.O School which developed into a residential College on 24 May 1875.<sup>vi</sup> The foundation of the educational institution at Aligarh gave that beacon of light to the Indian Muslim with a synthesis of Islamic values and western knowledge which produced such young men who developed those traits of character which build empires. Thus the movement's vision of progress through education played important role in the rise of Muslims from various social, political and economic issues.

### **Education in ruins**

No doubt the Valley of Kashmir was a great center of learning in the ancient and medieval times but with the decline of the Mughal Empire and the occupation of the Valley by the Afghan Kings like Ahmad Shah Abdali, learning and literature received a severe setback. The tyrannical rule of the Pathans threw the people into depths of misery and ignorance, the Sikh rule was also no better. The despotic rulers were little concerned with learning and literature. At the time of Maharaja Gulab Sigh's assumption of the administration of Kashmir, literacy among the people was almost nil except for a few communities like the Kashmiri Pandits and the village Mullahs, no one could read or write. Kashmiri pundits gave much heed to education as compared to other castes and classes; they worked as clerks, accountants and teachers. The Maharaja like his predecessors, Sikhs and Afghans did not consider education in any way a concern of the State. Most of his time was spent in consolidating his territories and he evinced no interest in the field of education.<sup>vii</sup>

During 1881- 92 out of a population of 52,576, 1,627 Hindus were receiving state education, while out of 757,433 Muslims, only 233 received state education. The figures show that though the Hindus formed less than 7 percent of the population, they monopolized over 83 percent of the education bestowed by the state. The British were not interested in the expansion of modern education in the state and were more concerned with securing control of the state's administration, meager sum was spent on the development of education and the progress of education was slow. As per 1901 census the numbers of total schools in the state were 36.<sup>viii</sup> Though the British government was not concerned about educating the people of Kashmir, The process of modern education in the Valley was started by the British missionaries. The first modern school in Kashmir was founded in 1880 by "J Hinton Knowles" in the premises of Missionary Hospital in Srinagar, founded as the "Church Mission Society Boys School" it is now called as "Tyndale Biscoe School" named after "Cecil Earle Tyndale Biscoe" a British missionary who became the school's principle in 1891, he is often attributed with founding the modern education in Kashmir.<sup>ix</sup> All the students in the school were Brahmin Hindus. In 1890 ten schools were functioning in the state on modern lines with an exception of Muslim students. Girl's education was also a big challenge; in the 1890's a girl's school was started in Kashmir by one of the women from the British Church Mission. The effort to educate Kashmiri girls gained prominence in 1912, when a Church Mission Society Girls School opened with 17 students. The principal of this school noticed in 1914 that not one trained Kashmiri women teacher was to be found in Srinagar.<sup>x</sup> Though the year 1906 was a landmark in the progress of education in Kashmir with the establishment of Sri Pratap Hindu College, the Muslims were practically excluded from the state colleges though they formed 85% of the population of Kashmir. Kashmiri Pandits were the dominant literary community in the state. Knowledge of Persian that prevailed so much in the length and breadth of Kashmir Valley during the Muslim Period had declined, and the worst of it was that nothing had come in even as a substitute for it. It was again Kashmiri Pandits - 569 in every 10,000 who were literate in English.<sup>xi</sup> Hindus took advantage of Mission Schools and they acquired an advantage over Muslims, thus they were able to occupy the posts of importance in administration. Although their population did not exceed 6% they had obtained 90% government posts of the State. The Muslims were either tillers of land or artisans; they had little interest in education.<sup>xii</sup> The 1901 Census data also shows that the enrollment of Muslims in higher schools and colleges were very less like 4 in Colleges and 413 in high Schools. In 1911 Census it was found that 0.1 percent of the female

population was literate. In 1911 out of 24,441 population 8,727 Muslim males and 52 females were literate. The people were highly conservative regarding the purdah system and the problem of girl's education was more of a social question.<sup>xiii</sup>

### **Kindling the flame of Education**

After a long drawn of discrimination, social stagnation, educational dispossession along with economic backwardness a new era began. In order to educate the Muslims of Kashmir Aligarh movement through its specialized agency "All India Muslim Educational Conference" sent a deputation headed by Sahibzada Aftab Ahmad Khan to Kashmir in 1913. The deputation presented a memorandum to the Maharaja of Kashmir requesting him to take care of the educational interests of Muslims of Kashmir.<sup>xiv</sup> Mr. H. Sharp also made certain recommendations in order to improve the Muslim Education in general and that of the state of Jammu and Kashmir in particular. However all the recommendations of Sharp Commission were not implemented in the state.<sup>xv</sup> The credit for creating the atmosphere of educational reform in Kashmir goes to Mirwaiz dynasty. Ghulam Rasool Shah imbued the modern ideas of Sir Sayyid in Kashmir and was a true follower of Sir Sayyid, like Sir Sayyid he was stirred into action by the backwardness of his community. Even today he is popularly called as *Sir Sayyid-i-Kashmir* by the Kashmiri Muslims. He believed that a good education on western lines, supported by wise religious teachings of the Holy Quran would produce young Muslims of capacity and Character.<sup>xvi</sup> Mirwaiz, Ghulam Rasool Shah started the educational movement by establishing the first private school at *Rajveri-Kadal*, Srinagar in 1899. This school was raised to the level of a High school in 1908. The school played important role in the course of social change in Kashmir.<sup>xvii</sup> After Sixteen years, in 1905, Ghulam Rasool Shah founded *Anjuman-i-Nasrut-ul-Islam* an association on the patterns of Aligarh associations for spreading his education and socio religious reform. *Anjuman-i-Nasrut-ul-Islam* played important role in the socio religious development of the people of Kashmir in general and that of education in particular. The Anjuman had spread its wings over a considerable area in the field of Muslim education. It had produced a good number of educated young men to play their role in the welfare of the Muslim community; the leaders of the *anjuman* remained busy in taking up with the government the issues related to educational welfare of the Kashmiri Muslims. Their representation in government services, disputes over religious places, share in law making bodies and the economic backwardness was notable. Thus the *anjuman* played important role in the reconstruction of the Muslim society of

Kashmir.<sup>xviii</sup> A significant development was achieved in the field of education before the formation of Muslim Conference. The Muslim Conference fully realized the importance of education and worked for its dissemination among the people of the state in general and those of the Muslims in particular. They also give due attention to female education.<sup>xix</sup> The dawn of freedom brought a revolution in the sphere of education in Kashmir. The restructuring, reconstructing and rejuvenating task has already begun in 1905. At the time of Partition, there were 2,158 educational institutes in the State and the education budget was seven percent of State's revenue. University of Kashmir was founded in 1948; it was founded to sustain and enrich the tradition of learning in Kashmir. In the field of literacy drives, the decade, 1961-71 shows remarkable advancement and records the percentage of increase as 65-91, which was the highest record for any other state in country.<sup>xx</sup> The literacy rate in 1981 among the males reached up to 26.67 percent and among females it reached up to 15.88 percent. The enrollment rate which was 1.036 Lakhs in 1950-51 reached up to 10.292 Lakhs in 1985-86 with the increased number of students in collages (20089), Universities (4139), Engineering collages (2784), Medical collages (1110), Agricultural sciences (312) etc.<sup>xxi</sup> Thus the flame of education kindled by the leaders influenced by the Aligarh movement played significant role in educating the Muslim masses in Kashmir.

### **Education in ashes**

Before the dream of Aligarh movement was fully achieved, the Valley was engulfed in an unending violence between Indian forces and the militants. More than 500,000 troops are stationed in the Muslim-majority region who are fighting with the armed groups. Beginning in 1989, the violence has claimed numerous lives and has affected the society and economy of the state in a very miserable manner. In this era of violence more than 94,000 Kashmiris were killed, 105,000 structures were destroyed, 22,000 women were widowed, 105,000 children were orphaned and more than 10,000 women were raped and molested in Kashmir since 1989.<sup>xxii</sup> While not a single Kashmiri has remained unaffected by the bloodshed and violence, yet the fact remains that education was a major casualty of the conflict in Kashmir valley in the past three decades of armed insurgency, the cycle of violence has affected the education sector in a significant way. Beginning in 1989, education on all stages (primary, secondary and higher) was critically influenced by the turbulence, the forces were called in from various parts of the country and there was no accommodation provided for them and they occupied most of the educational institutions. The education

sector was badly affected as most of the schools were gutted because they were occupied by the Army, Border Security Forces and Central Reserve Police Forces during the advent of insurgency. The schools were also burned because they were treated as symbols of the imposition of an alien rule opposed by the people, they were also attacked in revenge for civilian and militant killings.<sup>xxiii</sup> The education system of the valley is also devastated by the strikes popularly known as “hartals” and has reduced the academic calendar significantly in the year 1991 to 50-60 days between 1989-2001 Kashmir observed 1302 days as strike (which means three and a half years) and in 2016 it was between 110-130 days. Innumerable curfews and strikes gave a death blow to the education system in the Kashmir. Though the state government was committed to vacate forces from educational institutions (there were at least 97 of these occupied by security forces in Jammu and Kashmir till two years ago), there were still many buildings with them. The education sector bears the brunt of damage and destruction of school buildings as well as the occupation of school compounds by security forces and militants. The state government’s data show that during the period of militancy, at least 828 educational institutions were gutted, besides extensive damage done to laboratory equipment, furniture and libraries. Of these, about 596 buildings were gutted in Kashmir Valley and 233 institutions in the Jammu division. Of the 596 school buildings destroyed in the Kashmiri region, about 276 were primary schools, 146 middle schools and 129 high schools and 45 higher secondary schools. In the Jammu region, 119 primary schools, 62 middle schools, 43 high schools and eight higher secondary schools were damaged.<sup>xxiv</sup> Although the incidents of burning of schools were meager in the first decade of the twentieth century, the incidents increased in the second decade. The year 2016 marked a new beginning in the rise of such type of incidents; when the armed forces killed the militant leader Burhan Wani; arsonists set alight more than 36 buildings in southern reaches of the valley, ostensibly to counter the State administration's efforts at stabilising those regions that were restive following Wani's death, they were also burned on the pretext that these schools served as election counting centres and polling stations, and housed security forces. The winter chill arrested the arsonists’ progress somewhat, but with the thaw setting in, and Kashmir going to by-elections early in April, the flames mounted once more.<sup>xxv</sup> The gutting or damaging of school buildings devastated the education system and the students were forced to sit at home.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The educational deprivation of the Muslims in Kashmir as compared to other states is already dangerous,<sup>xxvii</sup> the State of Jammu and Kashmir ranks 30<sup>th</sup> in terms of literacy among the States of India, with a 68.74 per cent literacy rate.

Rank Persons	India/State/Union Territory	Literacy rate
1	Kerala	93.9
2	Lakshadweep	92.28
3	Mizoram	91.58
4	Tripura	87.75
5	Goa	87.40
6	Daman And Diu	87.07
7	Puduchery	86.55
8	Chandigarh	86.43
9	NCT Of Delhi	86.34
10	Andaman And Nicobar Islands	86.27
11	Himachal Pradesh	83.78
12	Maharashtra	82.91
13	Sikkim	82.20
14	Tamil Nadu	80.33
15	Nagaland	80.11
16	Manipur	79.85
17	Utrakhand	79.63
18	Gujarat	79.31
19	Dadra and Nager Haveli	77.65
20	West Bengal	77.08
21	Punjab	76.68
22	Haryana	76.64
23	Karnataka	75.60
24	Meghalaya	75.48
25	Orissa	73.45
26	Assam	73.18
27	Chhattisgarh	71.04
28	Madhya Pradesh	70.63
29	Utter Pradesh	69.72
30	Jammu and Kashmir	68.74
31	Andhra Pradesh	67.66
32	Jharkhand	67.63
33	Rajasthan	67.06
34	Arunachal Pradesh	66.95
35	Bihar	63.82

Source: Census of 2011



Educated people of the Valley believe that those who are burning the Schools are against the freedom, enlightenment and independence of the valley. Those criminal elements that burn the schools should be identified and put behind bars. Those masterminds who create violence by burning centers of learning that too of government built through scarce public funds and meant for poor students who no more afford private education are against the progress of Muslims<sup>xxviii</sup> since lack of crucial infrastructure is already a matter of concern for the people of the valley. The fires are burning the future of children, burning of schools means digging our own graves as the arisen in the centers of learning amounts to cutting roots of human civilization and such type of acts are against the enlightenment, progress and advancement of Muslim society. There is need to keep the education side away from the Kashmir issue, Just see Palestine or the recent happenings in Aleppo, Syria. Their schools are never shut even if there are bombings, killings and full-fledged war. They know that education is the key of progress and in no way they can stop education. In Kashmir too we faced unfortunate deaths for which all of us are heartbroken and pained but for saving the future generation education has to go on.<sup>xxix</sup> Thus the Aligarh Movement's vision of achieving progress through education in Kashmir is at crossroads in the atmosphere of turbulence, violence, strikes and burning of schools.

### **Conclusion:**

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that Aligarh movement's vision of progress through education in Kashmir is at crossroads and the position of education in the Valley of Kashmir reflects a pathetic condition. The level of education is low as compared to the other states of India and is a matter of serious concern and problem for the entire state as it affects every individual of the society. The barbaric and mindless incidents of burning schools cannot solve the problems faced by the people of Kashmir and there is need to find better ways of expressing grievances, instead of burning the schools into ashes. Today, despite education being free from the primary to the higher secondary level, the state is lagging behind in the literacy rate and considered one of the educationally backward states of the country. Even though school uniforms and text books are free at the primary level in the vast network of schools, the literacy rate is just 68 per cent. The burning of educational institutions cannot solve the challenges on the contrary, it will further complicate the existing problems within the community, both India and Pakistan should show their commitment to ensuring all students can learn in peace by endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration, an

international political commitment that outlines common-sense steps that governments can take to better protect students and schools in such tense situations. Since the role of education in facilitating social and economic progress is well accepted, it is time to burn the flame of education kindled long ago by the founder of the Aligarh movement again and rise from the ashes and set an example in front of the world through education.

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- xviii Anjuman played dynamic role in the spread of modern education among Muslims both men as well as women in Kashmir among its reformative objectives the main was to equip the youth with modern education along with Islamic teachings and to create a balance between modern education and religion. The main icons of the Anjuman were Mirwaiz Ghulam Rasool Shah (President), Khawaja Hassan Shah Naqeshbandi (vice president), Moulvi Atiqullah (General Secretary), Munshi Kamal (Joint Secretary) etc Muhammad Yusuf Ganai, *Kashmir's Struggle for Independence: 1931-1939*, Mohsin Publishers, Srinagar, 2003, pp.85-88
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- xxv The worst of it is that no one knows who is behind this. The perpetrators have not even been identified let alone stopped in their malicious intents as they go along merrily in a spree of arson in the state. The government blames the separatists. With no one having claimed responsibility for the arson and the police refusing to reveal details of their investigation, understanding who may be behind the attacks has been left to

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speculation Nirmal Singh, the deputy chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, told local reporters that pro-independence leaders were "encouraging ... elements to burn schools". But pro-independence leaders deny that they are responsible. Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, a pro-independence leader of a faction of the Hurriyat party, a coalition of pro-independence parties, said in a statement that the attacks were "mischievous acts [that] are part of the diversionary plan to shift the focus from dealing with the actual issue on the ground and [to] further harass and distress people". The separatists say they are perplexed as well and that those attacking schools must not go unpunished. Azad Essa, *Who is burning down Kashmir's Schools?* Al Jazeera, November 11, 2016

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