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MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCES IN TAMIL COUNTRY

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ABSTRACT:

Education is an important aspect of human civilization. It was increasingly realized in the modern world. The British were the first to impart Western education in India. They established universities at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857. Apparently, initially the Muslims strongly opposed Western education on many counts. When other communities took advantage out of the Western education, Muslims slowly began to learn. Even after the establishment of the University of Madras, a Muslim graduate was produced only in 1871. No doubt, Muslim societies and their Educational conferences helped much for the advancement of the Muslim higher education.



KEYWORDS: MEASI, Muslim, Vellore, Madras, H.T. Boddam.

INTRODUCTION

To place the Muslims on the road of educational development an organizational effort was felt much. In this regard Muslim Educational Association of Southern India was founded in 1902 and its founder president was Justice H.T.Boddam whose contribution to Muslim education was immense.¹ Educated men are more sociable and aspired for association with other others. They are prompted to form social unions to achieve common ends. These societies illustrated the collective wisdom, joint work and symbol of unity. In this

respect, the educated Muslims of Madras formed the *Anjuman-i-Islamia* in 1879. The Muhammadan Literary Society was founded in 1896. The Muhammadan Educational Association of Salem and the *Anjuman-i-Ahlae* Islam of North Arcot were the other societies which worked for the Muslims were founded outside Madras region at the tail end of the Nineteenth Century. These societies worked hard for the educational growth of Muslims within their available resources. However, there was no co-ordination among the early Muslims societies and they were functioning in an isolated way. They could not work for the total well being of their Muslim

community people living in the Madras Presidency. Lack of leadership further aggravated their disunity and they were unable to work for a common cause. Traders, merchants and urban intellectuals comprised the members of these societies, where the common man was not represented. These societies emerged in areas where Urdu speaking Muslims were in large numbers. Hence the activities of these societies did not cover a vast majority of Muslims who were not much influenced by the developments which took place around them. Further these societies failed to spread the importance of Western education among the Muslims. Due to the shortage of funds, absence of

required leisure, and non-availability of strong leadership no educational movement emerged among the Muslims in Tamil Nadu in the Nineteenth Century.

MUSLIM ASSOCIATIONS-EARLY PHASE

In spite of some drawbacks, there prevailed a favourable situation to launch an educational movement in Madras. A good understanding began to prevail between the Muslims and the British Government. The foundation of the *Madrassa-i-Azam* in 1849 by the Carnatic Nawab Gulam Mohamed Ghouse Khan also known as Azam and the subsequent takeover of the organisation by the Government opened a genuine approach of the British Government towards the Muslims of the Madras Province. The Nizam of Hyderabad came forward to lend his moral and material support to any activity concerning the educational cause of Muslims in Madras Presidency. The University of Madras had already produced a good number of scholars to provide leadership to this community. The heterogeneous Muslims of Madras Presidency formed a strong and influential community. All these aspects provided an opportunity for hosting a national level conference at Madras for the educational enhancement of Muslims. As a sequel, the All India Muhammadan Educational Conference (AIMEC), founded by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in 1886, held its Fifteenth session at Madras in 1901. It was chaired by Justice Boddam, a great patron of the Muslim community. He rightly advised them to keep pace and the times and guided them to the progressive path. He did not fail to warn them against sluggishness and indifference and asked them to concentrate on future instead of taking glorious past.²

MEASI AND ITS MISSION

The enlightened Muslims who came under the influence of Western liberal education began to think of the lack absence of an organization to coordinate and express their views and get redressal of their issues. They also thought that Muslim individuals, cannot pressurize on the Government machinery. When such individuals, having similar ideas and aspirations, come under the shelter of an organization, they could voice their demands and achieve them. The Muslims of south India thus realized the need of an organizational setup. Hence in the Madras conference of 1901, it was resolved to change the then existing Madras executive committee of the Muhammadan Educational Conference as the Muhammadan Educational Association of Southern India. As a result, the new Association came into being in 1902. Justice Boddam was elected president of this Association and he remained in this office till 1908.

Due to various practical reasons Muslims, the Muslims made Justice Boddam as President of their Association. As the British were the rulers of this country, the Muslims opted a Britisher to become their organizational head. For them it would be easy to address their grievances to the Government through a Britisher in an effective way. Further, they understood well that if Britishers become office bearers, it would be easier for them to get things done at the Governmental level. This diplomatic approach paid profits to them. This move also indicated that the Muslims were well known their positions and the diplomatic ways in getting the things done. The British support helped the Muslims come out from their shell and join the mainstream by commencing associations and organizing conferences.

Justice Boddam presented a memorandum to the Government on 30th April 1902. It was based on the resolutions passed in the abovesaid conference. It wanted the *Madrassa-i-Azam* and the Hobart Muhammadan Girls' School to be re-organised. It urged to increase the rates of scholarships to the Muslim students. Even though these demands were made to get more concessions, it was also a way to draw more Muslim students to higher education.

The memorandum also brought to the attention of the Madras Government about the critical situation faced by Muslim boys studying in the Presidency College, the Christian College, the Law College, the Medical College and the Engineering College for want of a hostel. At that time, about 30 Muslim college students were stayed in different parts of the Madras City and about 16 were accommodated at the Young Men's Christian Association Hostel. Hence the Association emphasized the

Government to allot a hostel for the study of Muslim students in several educational institutions in the Madras City.³

In the meantime, the Government came forward to consider the demand of granting an additional free scholarship in connection with the L.M.S. class in the Medical College. Regarding the hostel, the Government sanctioned a proposal to construct a hostel accommodating to twenty boys, on the premises of Umdah Bagh owned by the Madras-i-Azam on the Mount Road. The Government had purchased Umdah Bagh from the widow of Nawab Azam for Rs.1,50,000 in 1902 for the use of *Madras-i-Azam* which was functioning at Wallajah Road till then.⁴ Justice Boddam's approach worked well in this endeavour.

VELLORE AND MADRAS EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCES

In his attempt to promote the English education among the Muslims, Justice Boddam had to face certain difficulties. An influential section of the *Ulema* (Muslim Clergy) was constantly opposed to Western education. In order to find a solution to this thorny issue, a Provincial Conference of the MEASI was organized at Vellore in July 1906. It chequered a large attendance of the Muslims. Nearly 5000 Muslim representatives of south India participated as delegates in this conference.

The Vellore Conference was declared open by Castle Stuart, I.C.S. official. It was chaired by Shah Ruknuddin Syed Muhammad, high priest of Vellore.⁵ Thus the MEASI was able to gain the support of the *Ulema*. By conducting such a conference, MEASI attempted to secure the presence of both the religious and secular educationists together. The *Bciqiyatus Salihath Madrasa* (seminary) of Vellore, a great seat of religious learning of the Muslims also approved the mission of MEASI. Reporting this conference the *Indian Patriot* commented that it was one of the most remarkable and unprecedented events. This conference greatly awakened the orthodox sections of the community and made them to be liberal in their stand in the coming years.

Similar Provincial Conference of the MEASI was organised in Madras in April 1908. This conference was declared open by A.G. Bourne, the then Director of Public Instruction. Its various sessions were presided over by eminent persons like Justice H.T. Boddam and Abdul Wahab, the learned, founder and Principal of the *Arabic College of Bagiyatus Salthath*. The then Governor of the Madras also attended the conference in one afternoon.⁶ This conference appealed the Government to nominate senior Muslim graduates and prominent Muslims to represent the interests of their community on the University Senate as well as on the Text-Book Committee. It further placed the demand for the nomination of the managers of Muslims schools on the committee which now and then modified the educational rules and the grant-in-aid-code.⁷ Another resolution urged the Government to strictly enforce the half-fee concession, application to Muslim students in all schools and colleges. In order to meet critical financial situation, the conference also demanded the Government to increase the grant-in-aid to the Muslim Management educational institutions.

On the nomination of Muslims on various bodies, the DPI reported to the Education Secretary that in the Senate and on the Text-Book Committee, Muslims were fully represented to the need of the situation. According to him there were four Muslims, namely, Justice Abdur Rahim, Muhammad Raza Khan, Muhammad Aziz ud-din Hussain, Shaik Mirala Vapuchi Marakayar Usman, in the Senate and two, namely, Khaja Khan and T. Sayyid Muhammad, on the Text-Book Committee then. Responding to this, the Government urged to take care of the need for the adequate representation of Muslim interests in connection with the appointment of special committees to consider changes in educational rules and codes.

Regarding half-fee-concession, the Government directed that half the amount of fee income foregone in accordance with rule 102 of the Madras Educational Rule shall be added to the grant ordinarily admissible. The Director was also requested to examine the amendments regarding the grant-in-aid code in order to give effect to the direction.⁸

CONCLUSION

Justice Boddam unified the action of the Muslim bodies which were working in isolation in those days in various parts of the Madras Presidency. The Nuslim Educational Conferences convinced the orthodox section of the Muslim community about the importance of Western education. The purchase of Umdah Bagh, housing of *Madrasa-i-zam* in it, and opening a hostel in connection with the *Madrasa* were the works undertaken by the Government because of the efforts of MEASI. It was on the same *Madrasa* premises that in 1918 the Government started the Muhammadan College for the benefit of Muslims. In short, the early Muslim societies awaken the Muslim population to some extent but MEASI laid a strong foundation for the advancement of higher education among the Muslims.

END NOTES

1. Asaraf Ali, ' Justice H.T. Boddam and Muslim Educational Association of Southern India (MEASI)' in *Proceedings Volume of the Twenty-First Annual Session of South Indian History Congress*, Madurai : South Indian History Congress, p.114
2. Diamond Jubilee Souvenir of the MEASI, Madras, no year,pp.1-4
3. . G.O. No. 645, Education Department, 17 October 1902
4. G.O No. 160 Education Department 19 March 1902.
5. G.O.No.404, Education Department ,10 May 1912.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Asraf Ali, loc.cit, p. 117.