

Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah's Educational Reforms

“1. It was customary then for the examinees of all Examinations held under the University, to write down their names on the answer scripts. Many believed that it gave birth to discrimination among the Hindu and the Muslim students. The Muslim students of Dhaka University could easily become first, second or third whereas they hardly got a first class degree in Calcutta University. Communal discrimination was behind the fact, some believed. However, I gathered information from all the universities in India; at no place, there was the provision of writing down the examinee's name on the answer scripts; only roll number was used. I pressed my demand, drummed up support and was able to draw the attention of some of the members to it. The opponent group argued that it could lead to mistake if only roll number was used. I countered that there were only a few students in Honours and Masters courses therefore, we might start using roll numbers tentatively. After much debate, the affair was settled. It created no problem; rather some Muslim students could secure the highest positions.

I dispensed with the rule of writing down the examinee's names on the answer scripts in I. A. and B. A. examinations. But most members disagreed with the proposal when I was trying to apply the same to the matriculation examination. They said that the number of the students at this level was too many and the roll number could easily lead to mistakes; the tabulators would slip into mistakes seeing two almost similar roll numbers and it might create a misplacement of successful students.

We resolved that if the system did not prove wrong in I. A. and B. A. examinations, it would be introduced in the matriculation. But unfortunately, the system was not introduced for long. I changed the rule for many other examinations, but my successors dared not enter the controversy. They paid a short shrift to the matter even though some of the Vice Chancellors who graced the chair of the Syndicate were Muslims.

2. Students coming from high and intermediate madrassahs could not be enrolled into colleges. I raised the standards of madrassah education in the face of much opposition. Thereafter, many madrassah educated students could study for masters degree at university and the Muslim students showed equal acumen in English, mathematics and philosophy, as in Arabic and Persian, along with the Hindu students.

3. Earlier Urdu was not considered among the classical languages; and it created problems for the Urdu-speaking students of the West Bengal. After much effort, with

the help of minister Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury, Urdu was placed at par with Sanskrit.

4. Some schools and colleges did not have any provision for the post of maulvis; gradually the provision was made for all the educational institutions. Earlier, there was a big gap between the salary of a pundit and that of a maulvi. This was set at naught.

5. When the draft bill of the University of Dhaka was placed before the Senate, there was a big furore and a special committee was formed to consider the proposal. I was a member on the committee and supported the necessity of the university.

6. There was a proposal for a separate college for the Muslim students. I agreed to the proposal. But the Hindu community raised a strong opposition. My argument was that if there was any necessity of a Sanskrit college, there should be the necessity of a Muslim college; and there should be no objection to it because the government would bear the expenses. The proposed Muslim college will impart education on Arabic, Persian and Urdu. It would also teach Islamic tradition, Islamic culture and should make prayer and Islamic surrounding compulsory. No one then opposed the proposal. But opponents said that until Muslim students were not enough, Hindu students should be admitted to the college. And the proposal was taken. Therefore, very soon, a separate college, Islamia College, was established. Mr Harley, the Principal of Calcutta Madrassah, was appointed the Principal of this college. As soon as the college was opened, Muslim students poured in, leaving no room for the Hindu students to come in.

7. The onus of Muslim education was on me. Therefore, many primary and high madrassahs, Muslim high schools and colleges were established under my supervision. Besides this, I was to appoint Muslim teachers for non-Muslim schools and the appointment of Muslims for other government departments was also on me.

I prepared the curriculum for primary madrassahs and I had textbooks written by the Muslims approved by the government for the Muslim education. Muslims were appointment for the Muslim schools and colleges. Books written by Muslims were included in the curriculum. This faced a little opposition; but I made them understand the necessity of this move for the spread of Muslim education. It gave birth to Muslim libraries like Makhdumi library, Provincial Library and later Islamia Library. For this, Muslim students could come at par with the Hindu ones.

8. A provision was made for scholarships granted to the Muslim students. I was asked for opinion before granting any scholarship.

9. Muslim writers were given the opportunity of writing books. The writers and books looked down upon so far were patronised at the government level. In no time, the number of the Muslim writers and books increased to a great extent.

10. Muslims were included among the examiners. The amount of Muslim scholarship was raised.

11. Baker Hostel, Tellar Hostel, Carmichael Hostel and Muslim Institute were established in Calcutta for the Muslim students.

12. Muslim literature flourished and the Muslim litterateurs were inspired.

13. A provision was made for scholarship for the Muslim students, male and female, who wanted to go abroad for higher studies.

14. Muslims were taken on the textbook committee; and Islami phrases and words were used in Muslim education.

15. New Scheme Madrassahs were established and Arabic came to be taught side by side with English.

16. Arabic came to be considered as a second language at high schools.

17. An increased ratio began to be maintained in granting scholarships for the Muslim students and poor Muslim students were imparted education free in an increasing number.

18. The sessions of Muslim educational conference were held at many places and the government began to do everything to better Muslim education according to the recommendations put forth by the conference.

19. I was accordingly instructed to visit the school, colleges and madrassahs in the mufassil areas of the country and I brought the inadequancies and sorry plight of Muslim education to the notice of the government department; steps were taken to improve the situation.

20. The number of Muslim members on the university senate was raised.

21. The number of Muslim inspectors was introduced.

22. The number of Muslim teachers was also increased at the training college.
23. Special schools and colleges were established for Muslim female students.
24. A special Board was formed for the New Scheme Madrassahs.
25. Muslims were more included among the examiners at all levels.
26. A minimum quota was maintained for the Muslims on the school and college managing committees.
27. Muslim women were imparted education in a widespread move.
28. The necessity of appointing Muslim officers at university was recognised.

I was closely associated with the Muslim education for five years. I was all the more engaged in spreading Muslim education during this time and therefore more Muslims came to be included in the education department. I am thankful to God for the chances He gave me to improve the condition of the Muslims. Education meant for earning money does not do any good to the soul. Man needs spiritual learning. Only with this, humanity can be served better. Educated people are coming out of the university, but how many of them are educated in the real sense?"

(Source: *Amar Jibandhara (My Life)* by Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah, Dhaka: Ahsania Mission, pp82-86, 2000)