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Educating the Nation's Mothers: The Gendered Vision and Educational Legacy of Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam Lahore in Colonial Punjab (1884–1947)

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Abstract

This Paper examines the inspirational model of Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam Lahore (AHIL)in the education and empowerment of Muslim Women in Colonial Punjab between 1884and1947. Although Colonialism and missionary activities had brought in new models of female education, AHIL presented an Islamic and nationalist alternative to the exclusion of Muslim women from education. This research explores how AHIL deliberately established schools, colleges, orphanages, and vocational institutions to educate women intellectually, spiritually, and economically. Based on historical facts and institutional achievements, the article places AHIL's work in larger reformist and anti-colonial currents and contends its transformative function in reshaping Muslim womanhood in British India. This article suggests that the Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam (AHIL) in the colonial period revolutionized Muslim womanhood and education in Punjab. It set up Muslim girl orphanages, colleges, vocational training centers, and schools, acknowledging Muslim women as future mothers and guardians of Islamic values despite sociopolitical marginalization.

Key Words

Muslim Reform Movements, British Punjab, Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam, Muslim Women's Education, Female Empowerment

Introduction

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in British India witnessed intensified efforts by both colonial authorities and Indian reformers to redefine the role of women through education. In this setting, the Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam emerged as one of the most effective Muslim reformist organizations promoting the cause of women's education. Christian missionary schools like St. Mary, Sacred Heart, and Kinnaird College dominated the landscape, but their curriculum and missionary agenda tended to alienate conservative Muslims. AHIL, established in 1884 in Lahore, reacted to these concerns by developing a system of Islamic education that maintained cultural and religious values as well as promoting female literacy. While in a time when Muslim women were taught only Islamic studies,

AHIL's move to establish neighborhood schools for girls was visionary. The schools were resisted by society, especially by conservative sections who considered public education for purdah-practicing ladies as unsuitable. But AHIL continued, believing firmly that an educated mother was the cornerstone of a reformed Muslim society. By making Muslim women not outside but part of the experience of modernity during colonialism, AHIL created a gendered reform avenue that was deeply anchored in Islamic traditions. Despite increased academic focus on Muslim reform movements in colonial India, the gender dynamics of such efforts—i.e., women's education—are still not fully known. The Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam Lahore was a key but understudied force in restructuring Muslim society in its efforts aimed at women's well-being and education.

Whereas previous historiography has been inclined to concentrate on Anjuman's work in male education, political agitations, and reformist Islam, not enough emphasis has been given to how the organization planned and established Muslim women's education within the social-religious and colonial context of the time. The ideal of "educating the nation's mothers" discloses a quintessentially gendered vision that equates the education of women with wider nationalist and reforming aspirations. Yet little is known about how this vision was realized in concrete education institutions, vocational training, and social elevation of Muslim women. This lacuna in scholarship calls for a critical analysis of Anjuman's women's education policies, curriculum construction, and women's welfare activities to actualize its role in transforming gender roles and empowering Muslim women in colonial Punjab. This article tries to:

• To investigate the gendered imagination of the Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam for Muslim women's education during colonial Punjab.

• To examine the development and impact of the Anjuman's educational and welfare institutions for women from 1884 to 1947.

• To evaluate how the efforts of the Anjuman facilitated Muslim women's empowerment in the socio-religious and colonial context.

For these purposes, this research addresses the following research questions:

1. How did the Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam think about and advance women's education as part of its vision of reform for colonial Punjab?

2. Which institutions and projects did the Anjuman institute facilitate the education and well-being of Muslim women from 1884 to 1947?

3. How did the Anjuman's educational work affect the status, roles, and empowerment of Muslim women during the British colonial period?

This article contends that the Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam, in its gendered reform strategy, strategically advocated Muslim women's education as a tool of nation-building in colonial Punjab, and its founding of girls' schools, colleges, vocational schools, and welfare programs played a revolutionary role in re-fashioning the social and intellectual status of Muslim women during British colonialism.

Literature Review

Research on Muslim reform movements in colonial India has attracted significant scholarly attention, especially regarding how religious, educational, and social institutions reacted to the challenge of British colonial rule. Historians like Gail Minault,[1] Francis Robinson,[2] and Barbara Metcalf[3] have emphasized the significance of education in Muslim attempts at redefining community identity, restoring religious authority, and challenging colonial stereotypes of decline. Education, in this framework, was also a survival strategy and a means of intellectual and moral rebirth. While these scholars have illuminated the centrality of institutions such as the Aligarh Movement and the Deoband School in such processes of change, the gendered politics of reform, such as the involvement of Muslim women in educational modernization, are largely unexamined.

The Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam (AHIL), established in Lahore in 1884, became a central institution of Punjabi Muslim reformist action. Its aim of promoting Muslim interests by education, welfare, and religious reform was characteristic of wider reformist purposes but was locally conditioned by the context of Punjab. Maria-Magdalena Fuchs[4]'s new institutional history of the Anjuman offers a close examination of its structural development, its response to colonial education policy, and its tango of Islamic tradition and modern school. Her book locates the Anjuman in the wider context of debates on Islamic modernism and religious authority during colonial South Asia. But in acknowledging the Anjuman's work towards girls' education, Fuchs's treatment is still largely focused on male leadership, male institutions, and public religious controversy, with none at all to the Anjuman's sustained dedication to women's welfare and empowerment as a field. Previous histories of the past—especially those in Urdu or written by colonial administrators—usually describe AHIL's work in glowing terms but without a critical, gendered framework in which to assess the meaning of its system of education for Muslim women.

Concurrently, scholarship on gender, respectability, and education in colonial India has also foregrounded the ideological limits within which women's reformist projects were envisioned. Scholars like Siobhan Lambert-Hurley[5], Margrit Pernau[6],

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[1]Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

[2] Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces Muslims, 1860–1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

[3]Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982)

[4]Maria-Magdalena Fuchs, *Islamic Modernism in Colonial Punjab: The Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam, 1884–1923* (Princeton University, 2019).

[5]Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, *Muslim Women, Reform and Princely Patronage: Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal* (London: Routledge, 2007).

[6] Margrit Pernau, *The Ashraf and the State: Social Change in North India 1770–1870* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

and Barbara Metcalf [7]have examined how women's education was envisioned through imagined Islamic morality, domestic virtue, and the making of the "respectable" Muslim woman (sharīfa). These histories are in line with the argument that reformist groups promoted women's education not as a violation of patriarchal ethics, but as a validation of moral and motherly duties. However, such debates are generally abstractions or encapsulated in reformist publications by elite men intellectuals, and not about how exactly these ideologies took effect on the ground. Women's education's institutional history, especially in the story of regional formations such as the Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam, is even inadequately documented and critically examined.

This essay situates itself in this historiographical landscape by examining the gendered vision and education track record of the Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam. It contends that the Anjuman forged an instrumental and theology-based model for women's education that attempted to synthesize Islamic tradition with modern pedagogical thought. By opening girls' schools, women's colleges, vocational training institutes, and female orphanages, the Anjuman not only increased educational opportunities for Muslim women but also redefined their roles in society as moral guides, guardians, and future educators of the Muslim community. By emphasizing this dimension of Anjuman's activity, this article provides a more integrated vision of Muslim reform in colonial Punjab and underscores the enduring impact of AHIL's work in shaping South Asian discourses on women, education, and modernity.

Research Methodology

This research follows a historical qualitative research method, combining archival analysis, textual analysis, and historiographical criticism to explore the role of Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam in the construction of gender pedagogy and the reconstruction of Muslim womanhood during colonial Punjab. The research methodology includes the following: Archival Research: Primary sources are crucial to comprehending Anjuman's gender pedagogy and socio-religious reform approaches. The research employs: Institutional Reports: Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam's yearbooks, educational policy, and meeting records. Newspapers and Periodicals: The Civil and Military Gazette, Paisa Akhbar, and political periodicals in Urdu with an outlook supporting the political orientation of the Anjuman to follow public debate regarding women's education and reform. Historiographical Approach: Close examination of existing historical research, e.g., Maria-Magdalena Fuchs's work on Islamic modernism in colonial Punjab, assists in placing Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam in the context of broader discourses of gender, education, and Muslim identity formation in British India.

Thematic Analysis. Archival and textual outcomes are organized under the following themes.

[7]Barbara, Metcalf Daly. *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press,1982.

2. The Reformist Impulse and Gendered Priorities

The intellectual leadership of the British Indian Muslim reform movements was such that they accepted Western education but did not accord formal education for women a priority. Its vision was preoccupied with improving Muslim men and envisioning them as the vanguard of the socio-political rejuvenation movement.[8]AHIL broke away from this male model by incorporating women into its agenda of reform.[9] The wider socio-political environment was replete with fears of decline and identity. The Rebellion of 1857 had ushered in direct British rule, giving rise to institutionalized discrimination against Muslims in education, the administration, and commerce. It also left behind a string of Muslim reformist movements to restore the community. Most such initiatives, however, like the Aligarh Movement, were still lopsided on patriarchal lines. They were custodians of values in the household but not provided with equal access to the technologies of modernity, in this case, education.[10]

AHIL envisioned women not as passive reform recipients but as dynamic agents of community creation. Education was hence not a philanthropic pursuit but a strategic intervention. In the mid-1880s, AHIL started opening schools for Muslim girls in Lahore with a focus on religious instruction, reading, and management of the household. These schools were learning preserves within the purdah, hence minimizing resistance from conservative elements. The curriculum was framed to integrate modern and traditional subjects, and women teachers were hired to ensure purdah-friendly learning spaces.[11] The ideal that motivated AHIL's work was that of an intellectually prepared, socially conscious, and morally upright Muslim woman—their own term "mother of the nation." More in the 20th century than ever before, this ideal arose when AHIL came to see that unless girls were educated, the wider task of Muslim reform could never be achieved.[12]

Institutional Infrastructure and Curricular Innovations

Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam's educational endeavors were not episodic and ad hoc sporadic efforts but a well-entrenched infrastructure that was concerned with promoting long-term female educational progress. From elementary religious instruction to higher secular education, AHIL offered a coherent and complete system of education for Muslim girls and women. This section describes the growth of AHIL's schools and its innovative approach of curriculum building that attempted to bring Islamic values into harmony with modern knowledge.

Islamia High School for Girls (1936)

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[8] Dr. Naila Maqsood, "Colonial Rule and Muslim Women," *Journal of Arts & Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2022).

[9] *Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam*, March-April, 1914, 32.

[10]Dr. Ishtiaq Hussain, *Revisiting a Fractured Legacy: Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Muslim Women Education*, Rashhat-e-Qalam (2022), https://doi.org/10.56765/rq.v2i2.74. .

[11] Hayat, *Mukhtsar Tawarikh Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam Lahore*, 20.

[11] *Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam*, March-April, 1914, 32.

[12] ibid

The Anjuman organized institutions to educate and empower Muslim women in Punjab with the help of five schools initiated in 1885.[13] Initially, the schools taught religious studies, with compulsory education in the holy Qur'an. One of the schools was upgraded to a middle school level in 1925 and then to a secondary school level in 1932. Education in English was also started, and by 1932, it was upgraded to a secondary-level school.[14] Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam founded the Islamia High School for Girls in 1936 in Lahore. The growth of Islamia High School for Girls was a milestone in the History of Muslim women's education in Punjab. The school, which had started as a small middle school, grew significantly in 1936 as a result of the tremendous demand for space from the Muslim community. This was not just an infrastructural growth but also a pedagogical shift. [15]Under the patronage of Lady Abdul Qadir and the headship of Latifi Begum, the headmistress, the school had a variety of courses in addition to the conventional curriculum. Till 1941, the number of students in this high school was more than 800.[16] In February 1940, the workers of Anjuman showed interest and efforts, and the middle school was recognized as Islamia Girls High School. The government first gave a grant of Rs. 750.[17] The school possessed an enormous library containing 1500 books, well-equipped classrooms, and a specially built prayer ground. Arabic, English, Mathematics, Science, and Urdu were provided in addition to Islamic theology, and one hour of classes was reserved daily for religious education. Trained women teachers were employed, some with university qualifications, of high academic quality.[18] The instructor, an Islamic scholar, taught Qur'an and Arabic courses in girls' schools, emphasizing Shariah law and matters. Scholarships and allowances were provided to poor but capable students. Girls' schools possessed trained instructors who received salaries as per government levels and annual salary increments.[19]Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam, a school for women in Lahore, has a provident fund scheme introduced in all its women's schools as per the Punjab Education policy. The scheme demands that staff members be included and deposited in the Central Operative Bank, Lahore. The school also maintains a library containing a dozen books written by the top authors, half of them being in Urdu and the rest in English. Students like reading these books and like reading English and Urdu newspapers and magazines as well.

There are enough playgrounds for girls, a fountain pool for children, and good equipment in the school. Double desks and iron chairs are available for students. There is a well-equipped library in the school, with a fountain pool for the entertainment of children. The provident fund scheme makes sure that the school provides a learning-friendly environment and learning. The dedication of the school to offer quality education and resources is reflected in its achievements.[20] Notably, the school possessed facilities for indoor games, playgrounds, and a fountain for the

[13] ibid

[14] Ibid.

[15] *Mukhtsar, Tawarikh Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam*, 20.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., (1939-40), 95.

[18] ibid

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[20]

students—a fashionably unheard-of feature in girls' schools during colonial times. These attested to AHIL's dream of offering girls a healthy and stimulating setup. It was not merely a matter of classroom education—it was a matter of instilling self-confidence, moral values, and civic consciousness in young Muslim girls.[21]

Islamia College for Women (1939)

The establishment of the Islamia College for Women in 1939 was also a milestone in the history of Muslim women's education in Punjab. It was the first degree-awarding college of the region for Muslim women, which offered intermediate and bachelor's degrees. The college was affiliated with the University of the Punjab and became a center of excellence soon[22]. As the initial classes were conducted within the hostel of the old boys' college, the college was forced to operate on a shoestring budget. However, owing to concerted efforts of AHIL members and public support in the form of a generous grant by the ruler of Bhopal, among others, the institution was shifted to a special campus on Cooper Road, Lahore.[23]The college placed equal emphasis on religious and secular learning. Courses studied were Philosophy, Economics, Political Science, and Islamic Studies, and it had a strong faculty recruited from other significant colleges. Hostels provided outstation students with the ability to study under strictly purdah-satisfying guidance, and scholarships were provided to merit students regardless of caste and class. Student societies like the Debating Club, Islamic Study Circle, and Bazm-e-Iqbal offered scope for mental development and leadership. The students were also involved in intercollegiate activities and achieved many awards in studies and sports, reflecting the width of the institution's educational horizon.[24]

Sir Sikandar Industrial Girls School (1932)

Sensing the limitations of scholastically oriented education in the absence of economic independence, AHIL took to vocational training through the Sir Sikandar Industrial Girls School. The school, which opened in 1932 on the grounds of the female orphanage, instructed pupils in practical skills like embroidery, sewing, cooking, dyeing of cloth, and netting. By the late 1930s, the institute had a campus of its own, equipment, and government accreditation. Student products were marketed locally, and government returns generated from the sale were partially reinvested in the institution. Stipends and education were provided free to poor and widowed students, providing one rare instance of self-financed social enterprise in colonial India.

This initiative was crucial in breaking economic dependence. Most of the graduates moved out to begin their home-based businesses or to educate others, thus creating a ripple effect of empowerment in their communities. In 1888, the Muhammadan Educational Conference annual meeting was held in Lahore. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Sardar Muhammad Hayat Khan Sahib Bahadur CIE bought student-made clothes from madrassas and hired a teacher to teach skills and small

[21] *Annual Performance Report Subcommittee Female Education*, (1935), 51.

[22] *Annual Performance Report of Subcommittee Islamia College for Women* (1940), 10.

[23] ibid

[24] *Register Proceeding of meeting General council* (1944), 64-67.

tasks. The madrasa was subsequently named Sir Sikandar Industrial Girls School Lahore after Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, a prominent personality in Punjab Province. It was registered in the Punjab Government's industrial department in 1936. Female students were not charged any fee, and the machinery necessary for the Anjuman was provided by it. Female students owned fabric and yarn, and preparatory work was also useful. The population of the Gujrat district was thankful to the district's efforts in providing services to the madrassa, who contributed Rs 5144 on the celebration of the Jubilee. The contribution of Khan Bahadur Nawab Fazal Ali Sahib M.B.E, Sir Syed Punjab, for his academic service, was worth praising.

Since the Golden Jubilee, the government has created a fund for national industrial enterprises to benefit other communities. But Muslims have not benefited from this fund yet. Anjuman, through the initiatives of former President Khan Bahadur Nawab Muzaffar Khan, benefited from this fund. From April 1, 1940, the government has been paying the costs of Anjuman's institution, which was solely for Muslim girls.[25] Sir Sikandar Industrial School, sanctioned by the Punjab Government, was turned into a full-fledged school with experienced personnel and without admission fees. Admission was twice a year, pre-summer vacation and post-summer vacation. The students earned a high-grade certificate through periodic tests in four subjects: sewing and embroidery, with two elective subjects such as tala, netting, cooking, washing, and dyeing.[26] The Department of Industries of the Punjab Government gave a monthly allowance of Rs. 7 to intelligent girl students, whereas Begum Nawab Ahmad Yar Khan, honorary secretary of the vocational center, gave scholarships to needy and poor female students. A women's committee ran the vocational school, which received instructions from the General Council and visited institutions twice a month. The committee guided staff members and maintained school discipline.[27]

Conclusion

The Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam (AHIL) was not only a reformist society but also a visionary organization that revolutionized colonial Punjab's cultural, intellectual, and social life. By actively encouraging the education of Muslim girls and the opening of welfare-oriented institutions like orphanages, vocational schools, and women's colleges, the Anjuman built a gendered yet empowering Islamic model of modernism. Its policies drew from an instrumental reading of the sociopolitical climate of British India, where Muslim identity, religious self-governance, and communal betterment became intertwined.

With its all-encompassing education and welfare scheme, AHIL made space for Muslim women in public life within the limits of cultural and religious respectability. It reinterpreted the Muslim woman's image, not as a mere passive receiver of alms or marker of traditionalism, but as an active participant in nation-building and social transformation. The Anjuman's focus on educating "the mothers of the nation" was based on an assumption that future generations would be relying on the education and empowerment of women for their moral and intellectual

[27] *Annual Report Sir Sikander Industrial School Subcommittee*, (1941), 85-86.

instruction. In doing so, AHIL not only reversed colonial discourses that depicted Muslim societies and Muslim women in general as antimodern and backward but also challenged patriarchal establishments within its nation that had walled off access to education and self-governance for women. It fashioned a uniquely indigenous model of gender reform—one that reconciled Islamic values with contemporary educational ideals, and in doing so, set the stage for a more expansive vision of Muslim society.

The legacy of the Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam can be found in the modern nation of Pakistan, where many of the Anjuman institutions remain to perform and operate across the country. More significantly, the issue that the Anjuman struggled so mightily to assuage—touching on issues related to gender, education, religion, and national allegiance—still exists and lingers today. Whereas South Asia is facing challenges from various fronts in the form of struggles over women's rights, religious fundamentalism, and reforming education, AHIL is a model that proposes a critical and empowering framework through which to re-read ways to social change. This history is less a matter of recollection than a call to immerse oneself in present-day struggles for gender equity and educational justice within Muslim culture. By 1947, AHIL had firmly established women's education in Punjab, and other provinces soon followed. Its impact was felt in Muslim communities in Bombay, Madras, and even the princely states. Books written and published by AHIL for women students were utilized throughout British India, and its model of schooling within the purdah inspired Muslim reformers to do the same. Above all, AHIL facilitated the rise of a generation of Muslim women who became professionals, engaged in the freedom struggle, and contributed to post-partition nation-building in Pakistan.

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