



ARTICLE

‘Cheek by jowl’: education as a bridge between Muslims and the British in colonial India

Sumaira Noreen

Department of History, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan
Email: sumaira.noreen@lcwu.edu.pk

Abstract

Muslims’ education in British India is treated in the literature as something encompassing resistance, reaction, and hence emancipation from putatively exploitative British policies. This article focuses on the patterns of Muslims’ emergent knowledge traditions in British India in response to the British government’s involvement in the educational matters of the Indian subcontinent. Data findings reveal that Indian Muslims’ responses to the growing trend towards ‘modern’ education in the Indian subcontinent evolved gradually through discursive interactions leading to divergent reformist tendencies in favour of or against adopting Western education. The British government’s decision to make ‘special’ arrangements for Muslims’ educational uplift had left legacies of mutual admiration, fear, and sometimes resentment between Muslims and the British government in the subcontinent. Amid ambivalent relations between the British and Muslims, it was not difficult to find apt illustrations of what Francis Robinson calls a ‘cheek by jowl’ relationship.

Keywords: ‘Cheek by jowl’; Muslim education; colonial India; Anglo-Vernacular

Muslims and Christians have lived ‘cheek by jowl’, ‘rubbing up against each other, penetrating each other, borrowing from each other, learning from each other, despising each other, fighting each other, and fantasizing about each other’.¹

The above quote from Francis Robinson is taken from his exploration of how Muslim and Christian civilisations have influenced each other over the past 14 centuries during their ‘long and not always harmonious relationship’.² In medieval and early modern times, Europe borrowed aspects of the established knowledge forms of the Muslim world for the sake of its own development.³ Indeed, since the twelfth century onwards there has arguably been no important aspect of the development of Western civilisation in which the decisive impact of Islamic culture has not been distinctly noticeable.⁴ Likewise, the study of the early Muslim world also reveals instances of how it developed its wealth of knowledge through mingling with Semitic, Hellenistic, Iranian, and Indian cultures

¹ F. Robinson, ‘The Muslims and the Christian world: shapers of each other’, in *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*, (ed.) F. Robinson (Oxford, 2003), p. 28.

² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³ Robinson, ‘The Muslims and the Christian world’, pp. 33–37.

⁴ M. Nakosteen, *History of Islamic Origins of Western Education A.D. 800–1350: With an Introduction to Medieval Muslim Education* (Colorado, 1964), p. viii.

and knowledge traditions.⁵ Francis Robinson believes that this knowledge-sharing is particularly interesting due to its legacies of mutual admiration, fear, and sometimes resentment.⁶ While the introductory quote from Francis Robinson refers to a wide arc of history over 14 centuries, rather than being a reference to a particular South Asian context, this contribution to the *Festschrift* in honour of Francis Robinson explores the scope of such a relationship, with a focus on the evolving knowledge traditions in education during British rule in Indian subcontinent—the place that is explored so productively in much of Robinson’s scholarship.

Theoretical underpinnings

Analysing the impact of Western influence in South Asia, it has been argued that British education policy for Indian subcontinent was neither ‘culture-neutral’,⁷ nor was it intended for the masses.⁸ Some historians argue that it was introduced ‘for their own vested interests’ which contributed to education having a controversial status among different groups and sections of Indian society.⁹ Some other scholars explain that British educational reform served as a ‘vehicle for the formation of Muslim subjectivities’ in the Indian subcontinent.¹⁰ Similarly, those supporting a Max Weberian emphasis tend to maintain that pre-colonial Indian politics and the economy were ‘stagnant and backward’, which provided a justification for British intervention in the socio-political economic affairs of the subcontinent.¹¹ Others move a step further by suggesting that colonial rule not only revolutionised economic systems but also about brought change in social relations.¹² Such writings tend to demand some caution against radical claims that ‘the centre of early modern world economy was Asia rather than Europe’.¹³ However, others explain that even before the onset of British rule in the Indian subcontinent, schooling had offered scientific learning, which covered a mix of *manqūlāt* (transmitted sciences) and *ma’qūlāt* (rational sciences). These knowledge traditions were extended during Mughal rule in the subcontinent through the encouragement of scholars teaching sciences, including astrology, medicine, philosophy, and chemistry in madrasas.¹⁴

Robinson maintains that, during the eighteenth century, *ma’qūlāt* gained strength in places such as Awadh where Muslim scholars like Mullah Qutbuddin drove efforts to enable the growth of the rational sciences.¹⁵ The addition of a new emphasis on logic and philosophy as well as strands of Iranian and Central Asian knowledge traditions by Mullah Qutbuddin’s son Mullah Nizamuddin introduced ‘a new balance of subjects’ into

⁵ F. Robinson, ‘Knowledge, its transmission and the making of Muslim societies’, in *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, (ed.) F. Robinson (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 208–249, p. 209.

⁶ Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*, pp. 28–43.

⁷ P. Acharya, ‘Education and communal politics in Bengal: a case study’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 24 (1989), pp. 81–90, p. 81.

⁸ H. B. Wood, ‘Secondary education in India’, *The School Review* 62 (1954), pp. 399–408, p. 404.

⁹ A. Ara, ‘Madrasas and making of Muslim identity in India’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 39 (2004), pp. 34–38, p. 35.

¹⁰ M. Saif, ‘The subject of education and edification: Manāzīr Aḥsan Gīlānī’s proposal for a unified system of Muslim education in British India’, *Islamic Studies* 54 (2015), pp. 169–184, p. 170.

¹¹ T. Roy, ‘Economic history and modern India: redefining the link’, *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 16 (2002), pp. 109–130, p. 111.

¹² J. Malik, ‘The making of a council: the Nadwat al-Ulama’, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 144 (1994), pp. 60–91 p. 64.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Z. Haque, ‘Muslim religious education in Indo-Pakistan’, *Islamic Studies* 14 (1975), pp. 271–292, p. 278.

¹⁵ F. Robinson, *Jamal Mian: The Life of Maulana Jamaluddin Abdul Wahab of Farangi Mahall, 1919–2012* (Karachi, 2017), pp. 12–13.

the Farangi Mahall through a *dars-i nizāmī* curriculum.¹⁶ The popularity of its curriculum drew students from different geographic areas to Farangi Mahall.¹⁷ Hence, in later Mughal times, Muslim education comprising the two streams of knowledge—*manqūlāt* and *ma'qūlāt*—had prepared students for other-worldly and this-worldly affairs respectively. Saying this, eighteenth-century developments also signified the need for 'a prolonged and increasingly deeply felt process of renewal' in South Asian Muslim societies in response to emergent challenges from the West.¹⁸ Hence, with the rising influence of the British, initially through the East India Company (EIC) and later through their direct rule of the Indian subcontinent, things were set to change. Under the British administration, anything considered 'modern' was to come through or with the help of Western knowledge.

To Arjumand Ara, the introduction of Western education in the subcontinent during British rule had a drastic effect on the existing education systems but also opened the door to a 'massive transformation' to be acquired through the medium of the English language.¹⁹ The new arrangements found their appeal among those willing to support British rule, for those who aspired to have a better living, and for those who believed that understanding natural sciences was necessary for progress.²⁰ Francis Robinson's take on the matter is that, with the growing 'trends of modern state, the introduction of new systems of knowledge, the expansion of capitalist modes of production, and the spread of communications of all forms', new identities at different levels emerged. To him, Muslim identity was one of the identities that emerged 'most strikingly' in response to the socio-political and economic changes introduced in colonial India.²¹ The emergent Muslim identity was the product of the processes of reformism, Islamism, and Islamic modernism at work in the Muslim world, as Francis Robinson explains.

Historians like Aziz Ahmad have described the phenomenon of Islamic modernism in the subcontinent with reference to the occidentalist and loyalist approach of the Aligarh movement; the speculative modernist approach of Muslim influentials like Chiragh Ali, Muhsin ul Mulk, and Mumtaz Ali; the traditionalist revivalist approach followed by *Ahl-i Hadīth*; the speculative neo-modernist approach taken up by Iqbal; and the orthodox fundamentalist approach of Muslim scholars like Maulana Maududi.²² To Mansoor Moaddel, 'Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan was preoccupied mostly with theological issues, Chiragh Ali with legal reforms, Mumtaz Ali with Islamic feminism, and Shibli Numani and Amir Ali with historical Islam and hagiographical studies'.²³ Muslim scholars like Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Amir Ali believed that Islam could be presented as being consistent with modernity and rational sciences.²⁴ Sayyid Ahmad Khan 'led the modernist movement in education, religious thought and Urdu prose', according to Francis Robinson.²⁵

¹⁶ F. Robinson, *The Ulema of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (Delhi, 2001), p. 14.

¹⁷ B. D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (New Jersey; Surrey, 1982), p. 30.

¹⁸ F. Robinson, 'Islamic reform and modernities in South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies* 42.2/3 (2008), pp. 259-281, p. 259.

¹⁹ Ara, 'Madrasas', pp. 34-38, p. 35.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ F. Robinson, 'The British empire and Muslim identity in South Asia', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 8 (1998), pp. 271-289, p. 271.

²² A. Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964* (London; Bombay; Karachi, n.d.).

²³ M. Moaddel, 'Conditions for ideological production: the origins of Islamic modernism in India, Egypt, and Iran', *Theory and Society* 30 (2001), pp. 669-731, p. 679.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 669.

²⁵ Robinson, 'Making of Muslim societies', p. 243.

For Robinson, ‘Islamic modernism’—adopted for building ‘bridges between Islamic understandings and Western knowledge’²⁶—meant restructuring Islamic knowledge as well as bringing Muslims institutions in line with models of Western knowledge.²⁷ This approach also required mastery in ‘the source of Western strength’, namely Western scientific and technological knowledge.²⁸ A further response to Western knowledge was manifested in the form of ‘Islamism’: its particular forms of Islamic understandings led to a relative lessening of the ulema’s traditional influence and favoured a relative increase in the exercise of individual conscience for resolving this-worldly affairs.²⁹ ‘The dissemination of knowledge of God’s word and of the life of His Messenger was at the heart of the reformist effort. Typical vehicles were the Deoband movement founded in north India in 1867’, Robinson explains.³⁰

Islamic modernism worked for political elites in reshaping Islamic knowledge and institutions in light of Western models, while ulema and Sufis favoured reformist movements aiming to reorganise communities and/or reform an individual’s behaviour in line with fundamental religious principles. Robinson explains that reformist ulema utilised the printing press ‘as the means to fashion and to consolidate their constituency outside the bounds of colonial rule’.³¹ The response thus spoke of resilience and/or resistance being upheld by what Francis Robinson calls different ‘brands’—the Deobandi, the Barelvi, the Aligarh, etc.³²—providing a ‘significant answer to the problem of how to be Muslim under British rule’.³³

Early educational ventures of contestation and cooperation

The increasing dominance of the West over Muslim societies contributed to the emergence of revivalist movements around the world.³⁴ In the Indian subcontinent, scores of madrasas (each with their specific objectives) collectively constituted an ‘educational-charitable complex’.³⁵ Religious reforms gained momentum when ulemas, sufis, and other educated leaders increased their commitments towards disseminating Islamic knowledge among Muslims. In this regard, the growing British involvement in India’s educational landscape gave ‘urgency and extra purpose to these movements’.³⁶ An increased sense of urgency for their reformist message can be attributed to their encounter with the missionaries and institutional models, as exemplified in Delhi College. Upgraded from its status as a madrasa to Delhi College, it ‘provided a model for ulama who later turned their efforts to strengthening the organization of religious education’.³⁷ Started with a British principal and expanded with financial endowments from Nawab

²⁶ F. Robinson, *The Muslim World in Modern South Asia: Power, Authority, Knowledge* (Albany, 2020), p. 7.

²⁷ Robinson, ‘Islamic reform and modernities’, p. 259.

²⁸ F. Robinson, *The Muslim World in Modern South Asia: Power, Authority, Knowledge* (Delhi, 2019), p. 49.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 7.

³⁰ Robinson, ‘Making of Muslim societies’, p. 244.

³¹ Robinson, ‘Islamic reform and modernities’, p. 263.

³² F. Robinson, ‘Strategies of authority in Muslim South Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’, *Modern Asian Studies* 47.1 (2013), pp. 1–21, p. 7.

³³ F. Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (Oxford, 2003), p. 78. For additional details, see F. Robinson, ‘Other-worldly and this-worldly Islam and the Islamic revival. A memorial lecture for Wilfred Cantwell Smith’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 14 (2004), pp. 47–58. Robinson, ‘Islamic reform and modernities’, pp. 259–281. Robinson, ‘Making of Muslim societies’.

³⁴ F. Robinson, ‘Introduction’, in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. V, (ed.) F. Robinson (Cambridge, 2011), p. 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

³⁶ Robinson, *Muslim World in Modern South Asia*, p. 23.

³⁷ Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, p. 72.

Itimadud-Daulah in 1828, it had two branches. English language and literature and modern European sciences were taught in the English branch, while Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, geography, history, mathematics, and science were taught in the Oriental branch. Though the College attracted the enthusiasm of both Indians and the British alike, it was closed after the Mutiny of 1857.³⁸

After establishing its rule in the Indian subcontinent, the British government in India initially believed that an education policy with a 'little indigenous foundation' for the Indian population should be adopted—such an educational contrivance was an 'exotic' arrangement for meeting the desired educational standards.³⁹ However, it was soon realised that for the successful implementation of the desired educational change, it was impossible to put an end to the existing indigenous educational set-up.

Initially, the British government's involvement in Indian educational system/s was indirect, that is, through the East India Company (EIC). The EIC established 'credit relations' with both Muslims and Hindu traders, which was made possible through their officers' efforts to understand Indian culture and commerce, and the banking systems of the Indian subcontinent.⁴⁰ This also created opportunities for Indians to learn the English language, and for Muslim and Hindu law officers to be trained to participate in the presidencies' judicial administrations.⁴¹ Likewise, the EIC sustained the government-funded education of Persian-speaking bureaucrats. Examples of this policy were manifested in the setting up of the Calcutta Madrasa in the 1780s and the Benaras Sanskrit College in the 1790s.⁴² Established under the control of Maulvi Muiz-ud-din, Warren Hastings had approved the *dars-i nizāmi* curriculum for the Calcutta Madrasa, which consisted of religion, logic, theology, rhetoric, natural philosophy, arithmetic, geometry, law, astronomy, and grammar.⁴³ By 1850, Arabic, Anglo-Arabic, English, and Bengali departments had been established as well.

The early decades of the nineteenth century showed a clearer strategy for the EIC's support for Indian education. The British reform agenda, which emphasised public instruction 'as the means of civic and religious transformation', picked up pace with the help of the printing press.⁴⁴ The Charter Act of 1813 authorised the governor-general to spend a sum of one lakh rupees per annum for the 'revival and improvement of literature, for the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the promotion of scientific knowledge among the inhabitants of the British territories in India'.⁴⁵ Although the Act claimed that only Western knowledge could preserve 'social good' and curb the 'social evils' of Indian society,⁴⁶ the despatch of 1814 clearly signified that the term 'sciences' referred to Oriental sciences as well.⁴⁷ Hence, the EIC supported Indian vernacular knowledge by creating the Calcutta School Book Society to promote the production of vernacular books, and the Calcutta School Society to improve existing schools and establish new ones.⁴⁸

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ R. Nathan, *Progress of Education in India, 1897–98 to 1901–02* (Calcutta, 1904), p. 94.

⁴⁰ P. Lawson, *The East India Company: A History* (London, 1993), p. 70.

⁴¹ S. N. Mukerji, *Administration of Education in India* (Baroda, 1962), p. 3.

⁴² Robinson, *Muslim World in Modern South Asia*, pp. 244–245. M. C. Izgi, 'A cultural project of control: the foundation of Calcutta madrasa and the Benares Sanskrit College in India', *The Journal of Social and Cultural Studies* (2015), pp. 91–102, pp. 94–95.

⁴³ Izgi, 'Calcutta Madrasa and the Benares Sanskrit College in India', p. 94.

⁴⁴ M. Ogborn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago, 2007), p. 267.

⁴⁵ H. Sharp, *Progress of Education in India 1907–1912, Sixth Quinquennial Review* (Calcutta, 1914), p. 5.

⁴⁶ R. Muir, *The Making of British India 1756–1858* (Lahore, Karachi, Dacca, 1915), p. 279; R. S. Malik, *The System of Education in Pakistan* (Islamabad, 1992), p. 26.

⁴⁷ Sharp, *Education in India 1907–1912*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Beyond official efforts, the indigenous Indian presses of the early 1800s worked in close collaboration with the British for the Sanskritisation of Bengali literature and educational materials.⁴⁹ In 1829, the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge Society established its branch in Calcutta.⁵⁰ However, in 1835, Lord Macaulay, the president of the then General Committee of Public Instruction (GCPI), famously asserted that ‘a single shelf of a good European Library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia’, and that the objective of British education policy in India should be to prepare ‘a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’.⁵¹ Macaulay’s pronouncement provoked an unease among Orientalist British officers as well as Indians. This discomfort was manifested in the formers’ support for vernacular education and the value of ‘Indic literature’.⁵²

In 1836, Lord Auckland, the then governor-general of India, declared that ‘Oriental’ learning institutions would continue, along with those that were working for the dissemination of English learning.⁵³ Such decisions were motivated by practical considerations. While Indian administrative affairs were facilitated through interpreters and records were still kept in Persian, only a few English officials could speak provincial or local languages.⁵⁴ In 1851, Bartle Frere, the chief commissioner of Sindh, made it compulsory for all civil servants there to take a language examination in Sindhi. Similarly, two years later, after the decision of EIC’s Court of Directors in favour of Arabic, local Sindhi scholars developed an alphabet comprising 52 letters that helped in translating textbooks from Persian, Urdu, Marathi, and Gujarati into Arabic.⁵⁵

Clearly, British educational policies could be seen to have considered socio-cultural and/or religious needs. But, perhaps more importantly, these policies had both strategic and economic challenges. In strategic terms, the British government’s support for specific languages in schools created tensions among the Indian classes not only at the provincial level but also at communal levels.⁵⁶ The economic impact was more significant. Because the significance of schooling for many Indians lay in the economic-utilitarian outcomes of providing opportunities in the administrative or judicial occupations, this encouraged competition between Muslims and Hindus.⁵⁷ The growing influence of the British meant that the bureaucratic machinery was expanding, which required more educated Indians to keep the system running smoothly.⁵⁸ This increased pressure on Muslims to accept elements of British education introduced in the subcontinent. Hence the trioka of education, language, and employment would increasingly serve as a litmus test for the success of the desired ‘cheek by jowl’ relationship between Muslims and the British government in India during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

⁴⁹ Ogborn, *Indian Ink*, p. 267.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ C. E. Dobbin, *Basic Documents in the Development of Modern India and Pakistan 1835–1947* (London, New York, Toronto, Melbourne, 1970), pp. 17–18.

⁵² P. Gottschalk, ‘Promoting scientism: institutions for gathering and disseminating knowledge in British Bihar’, in *Knowledge Production, Pedagogy, and Institutions in Colonial India*, (eds) I. Sengupta and D. Ali (New York, 2011), pp. 171–198, p. 183.

⁵³ A. Biswas and S. P. Agrawal, *Development of Education in India: A Historical Survey of Educational Documents Before and After Independence* (New Delhi, 1994), p. 21.

⁵⁴ Because Persian had served as a court language and as the language of the higher social classes, both Muslims and Hindus preferred studying Persian for a long time after the British took control in India. M. P. Kamerkar, ‘Impact of British colonial policy on society relating to education in western India during the 19th century’, *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute* 60/61 (2000–2001), pp. 373–382, p. 373.

⁵⁵ E. H. Aitken, *Gazetteer of the Province of Sind* (Karachi, 1907), p. 474.

⁵⁶ C. R. King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (New Delhi, 1994), p. 88.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Dobbin, *Modern India and Pakistan*, p. 25.

Modernism and emergent knowledge traditions in education

In 1854, in their Wood's Despatch, the British authorities provided 'the lines of a definite policy' for a specific education system in the Indian subcontinent.⁵⁹ The despatch suggested adopting a diversified, utilitarian school curriculum based on what was 'practically useful to the people of India in their different spheres of life'.⁶⁰ In turn, this curriculum promised 'more opportunities' for the Indian people, which hinted at the emergent patterns of credit relations along newer lines. Furthermore, the despatch stressed that for the sake of ensuring 'the systematic promotion of general education', it was necessary to disseminate a European knowledge of philosophy, science, arts, and literature,⁶¹ an objective that could be achieved through teaching in English in higher education institutions and in vernacular languages for the Indian masses. 'Anglo-Vernacular' instruction would combine 'the substance of European knowledge with native forms of thought and sentiment as to render the school books useful and attractive'.⁶² Receiving grants-in-aid, missionary schools were the immediate beneficiaries. The schools were attractive to the British because of their willingness to be inspected by the Company's officials as well as their adoption of the prescribed syllabus of the Department of Public Instruction (DPI).⁶³

Following the uprising of 1857, when the Crown formally took over and the nominal authority of the EIC came to an end, the authorities continued their efforts to turn the indigenous education system into one that would serve British imperial ambitions.⁶⁴ Consequently, it was not difficult to find consistency between the early eighteenth-century emphasis on Britain's 'civilising role' to 'a new projection of imperial values' that could bring legitimacy for British rule in India.⁶⁵ Identifying schools as the most important sites for turning Indians into 'civilised' subjects, colonial rulers aspired to train and hire educated Indians who could serve the colonial administration in India.⁶⁶

Muslim responses to these developments can be seen in two apparently divergent tendencies, namely resistance and reconciliation. For instance, there was a mixed response to the grants-in-aid system introduced by the British to support the existing indigenous education institutions. For instance, in the late 1850s, in Punjab those managing Arabic and Sanskrit schools with a more religious following expressed their aversion to accepting grants from the British government, while those in control of Persian schools were more positive about this assistance.⁶⁷ For the British, the grants helped Muslims to establish 'more schools and more extensive education' which would ensure 'valuable training in managing their own institutions and in learning to look after the educational needs of their community'.⁶⁸ Alongside these efforts, Muslim reform movements tended either to accept or reject the British vision for education.

⁵⁹ Sharp, *Education in India 1907-1912*, p. 5.

⁶⁰ A. Peshkin, 'The shaping of secondary education in Pakistan', *History of Education Quarterly* 3 (1963), pp. 4-18, p. 4; Malik, *Education in Pakistan*, p. 27.

⁶¹ Nathan, *Progress of Education in India*, p. 457.

⁶² Sharp, *Education in India 1907-1912*, p. 6.

⁶³ L. A. Sherwani, 'The fall and rise of Muslims in the post-1857 revolt period', in *Dr. Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi Memorial*, vol. II, (ed.) H. A. Zubairi (Karachi, 1994), pp. 329-345, p. 337.

⁶⁴ K. Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas* (London, 2005), p. 49.

⁶⁵ T. Allender, *Ruling through Education: The Politics of Schooling in the Colonial Punjab* (Elgin, Berkshire, New Delhi, 2006), p. 286.

⁶⁶ Wood, 'Secondary education in India', p. 399.

⁶⁷ Punjab Administration Report, 1859-1860, cited in H. R. Mehta, 'A history of the growth and development of Western education in the Punjab (1846-1884)', in *Punjab Government Record Office Publications*, Monograph no. 5, (ed.) H. L. Garrett (n.p., 1929), p. 36.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Following the teachings of Shah Wali Allah's movement and associated Wahabi traditions, the Deoband *Dār al-ʿulūm* seminary was established in 1867 for the purpose of Islamic revival and to curb the exploitation of Muslims at the hands of the British government in the Indian subcontinent.⁶⁹ Deoband had flourished as a result of the postal services, canals, telegraph facilities, and the railway networks, such as the Northwest Railway, connecting the town with cities of North India.⁷⁰ To Barbara Metcalf, the purpose of pioneering 'a non-governmental style' of Deoband was to 'represent a distinct style, a *maslak*, of Indian Islam that emphasized the diffusion of scripturalist practices and the cultivation of an inner spiritual life', with knowledge being diffused to areas as far away as Chitagong, Madras, and Peshawar.⁷¹ The establishment of the railways had also transformed the development of towns like Kanpur into 'leading British commercial centres'; such trends were being perceived as challenges to the traditionalist living and learning styles offered by local Muslim scholars.⁷² Closely observing the aspects of socio-economic change in Kanpur, the leading Muslim scholars of Nadwatul Ulama decided to build the *Dār al-ʿulūm* of the Nadwat al-Ulama as 'an ideal Islamic world in an otherwise hostile and non-religious environment', which would introduce an up-to-date Islamic curriculum providing learning opportunities in modern sciences, mathematical knowledge, training in vocational skills, and the English language.⁷³ Moreover, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Aligarh movement offered a practical example of promoting Western education alongside religious education in the form of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College. Like other leading Islamic modernists of his times, such as Namik Kamal and Muhammad Abduh in the Middle East, and, in contrast to Deobandi ulema's reformist aims, Sir Sayyid focused on responding to the changing demands of the time.⁷⁴

The last quarter of the nineteenth century also witnessed a more sympathetic British policy for Muslims' education. In 1871, sharing their sorrow about the state of education and employability of Indian Muslims, the British government explained that Muslims—who clearly constituted an important, albeit minority, Indian community—should be educated to ensure their 'active co-operation' with the British government and to upgrade their socio-economic status vis-à-vis Hindus.⁷⁵ This required 'a more systematic encouragement and recognition of Arabic and Persian literature', as well as the right to enter secondary and higher education in the same way that admission into education in the vernaculars was done.⁷⁶ The British government was confident that such support for Muslims would draw more of them to a Western-style education.⁷⁷

A practical example of this commitment could be seen in Dr G. W. Leitner's interest in the promotion of Oriental learning and in attracting the affluent families of Punjab to

⁶⁹ Haque, 'Muslim religious education', p. 282.

⁷⁰ Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, p. 91.

⁷¹ B. Metcalf, 'The madrasa at Deoband: a model for religious education in modern India', *Modern Asian Studies* 22 (1978), pp. 111–134, p. 134.

⁷² Malik, 'The making of a council', p. 65.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 83–85.

⁷⁴ Robinson, *Muslim World in Modern South Asia*, p. 50. Evidence highlighting the positive attitude of Muslim scholars towards aspects of Western education also proves Robinson's views that such ulema have been unduly (mis)interpreted in some Western writings as 'obscurantist and uncreative opponents of progress'. Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*, p. 254.

⁷⁵ Correspondence of 1871–1873 Regarding the Conditions of the Muhammadan Population in India in the Matter of Education: Extract from the Proceedings of the Government of India in the Home Department (Education), No. 300, under Simla, dated 7th August 1871, in Selections from the Records of the Government of India, Home Department, No. CCV. Serial No. 2. *Correspondence on the Subject of the Education of the Muhammadan Community* (Calcutta, 1886), p. 152.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

elements of liberalism and enlightenment. In a meeting held in August 1865, he impressed upon what he called 'Raieses' (the rich, referred to by Francis Robinson as the *Ashraf*) of Lahore:

Enlightenment is progressing all over the world. ... 'Knowledge is power everywhere', but particularly in India. You are looked upon as the leaders of your several nations. It is therefore necessary that you should lead the van of education and progress. ... our honoured and beloved Lieutenant-governor, Mr. Donald McLeod, who loves the people, wishes to perpetuate its ancient sacred languages, to perfect its present vernaculars, and to introduce new knowledge without detriment to old knowledge.⁷⁸

As a scholar of Arabic and Turkish languages, Leitner, the first principal of Lahore Government College, expressed his concern at the indifferent role played by both his own institution and Calcutta University in promoting Oriental learning. And as a remedial measure, in 1865, the Anjuman-i Punjab (Society of Punjab) was established under his patronage. With its centre in Lahore, the Anjuman had a two-fold objective: 'the revival of ancient Oriental learning' and 'the diffusion of useful knowledge among all classes of the native community, through the medium of the vernacular'.⁷⁹ Four years later, in 1869, Leitner's efforts bore fruit in the form of Punjab University College, which he hoped would 'give a new character to the general education of people' of Punjab in the future.⁸⁰ The year 1869–1870 more generally was an important one in the history of educational developments in British Punjab, when the government announced scholarships for Lahore and Delhi colleges, and an entrance examination was instituted as were special examinations in Arabic, Sanskrit, and Persian, and an Oriental School (later Oriental College) was established for those students aiming to perfect their Arabic and Sanskrit.⁸¹

Similarly, the British government proved attentive to educational developments in Bengal. On 13 June 1873, it announced support for the Calcutta and Hooghly madrasas so as to provide Muslims with 'their full share of high class intellectual training and of sound knowledge useful to them in life', though 'any unwelcome abandonment of the old ways of Mahomedan study' was to be avoided as far as possible.⁸² Declaring Muslims' education to be a matter of priority, the government also expressed its hope that 'Muslim gentlemen of wealth and liberality' would sooner or later participate in providing funding to madrasas.⁸³

The number of government-sponsored and/or government-approved madrasas increased with the passage of time. From the platform of the National Muhammadan

⁷⁸ 'Dr. Leitner's Appeal to the Raieses of Lahore at a meeting specially convened by a resolution of the Anjuman-i Punjab, in the first week of August, 1865', in G. W. Leitner, *Indigenous Elements of Self-Government in India: With special reference to the Punjab and more particularly in matters of education (As illustrated by the History of the Punjab University Movement from 1865 to the establishment of a Branch in London in 1884)* (London, 1884), pp. 66–67.

⁷⁹ 'Papers Connected with the History of the University of the Punjab', in *ibid.*, p. 65.

⁸⁰ Mehta, 'Western education in the Punjab (1846–1884)', pp. 47–48.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Letter of A. C. Lyall, Secretary to the Home Department of Government of India to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal Government, No. 248, dated 13th June 1873, on the subject of the re-organization of the Madrasahs at Calcutta and Hooghly, in Selections from the Records of the Government of India, Home Department, No. CCV. Serial No. 2. *Correspondence on the Subject of the Education of the Muhammadan Community*, pp. 229–231, p. 229.

⁸³ Resolution of the Bengal Government, dated 29th July 1873, regarding the extension of educational facilities to Muhammadans, in Selections from the Records of the Government of India, Home Department, No. CCV. Serial No. 2. *Correspondence on the Subject of the Education of the Muhammadan Community*, pp. 231–235, p. 231.

Association (NMA) of Calcutta, Sayyid Ameer Hussain provided the information that since 1873 madrasas in Bengal had been playing a key role in achieving the desired ends of Muslims' education.⁸⁴ Declaring the Government of India's Resolution No. 7 of 1873 as the 'Magna Charter [sic] of Mahomedan education in Bengal', the NMA argued that the efforts of the British government deserved appreciation for several reasons. These included the provision of educational endowments and grants for existing madrasas like Calcutta Madrasa, the establishment of new madrasas in Dacca and Rajshahi, and a fee subsidy of two-thirds for boys attending the Presidency, Hooghly, and Dacca colleges, the collegiate schools, or law classes, etc.⁸⁵ Hence, from the early 1870s onwards a new scheme of studies was adopted, affecting Muslims' education in Bengal madrasas, by increasing enrolments in the Anglo-Persian and English departments versus those dedicated exclusively to Oriental languages.⁸⁶

However, there was still room for improvement when it came to government support for the cause of Muslim education. In the 'Pamphlet on Mahomedan Education in Bengal', Sayyid Ameer Hossein, member of the Bengal Legislative Council, deputy magistrate and Collector, and secretary to the National Mahomedan Association in Calcutta put forward Muslims' demands for the establishment of more English education institutions in Muslim majority areas so that Hindu students could not outnumber Muslims, and that equal educational opportunities could be enjoyed by all Muslims irrespective of their social status.⁸⁷ In this regard, a very important development also took place in Punjab in the early 1880s when Punjab University College (PUC) was upgraded to full university status. PUC was initially established in 1869 to push European sciences through the medium of Punjab's vernacular languages. Under the Government of India Act of 1882, Punjab University was established on the model of the University of London. While it was initially authorised with the power to confer degrees for Oriental Learning and Arts, its usefulness for the people of Punjab and beyond was interpreted in its very first year as 'a satisfactory beginning in the direction of advanced learning' and 'the sure means of progress in Oriental as well as English education'.⁸⁸

As far as the trend of Muslim enrolment in state-run schools was concerned, statistics of the third quarter of the nineteenth century reveal that only half of the total percentage of local Muslims were admitted to schools in their respective provinces, including Madras, Bombay, Bengal and Assam, North-Western Provinces, Oudh, and Punjab.⁸⁹ Provincial administrations were thus urged by the 1882 Education Commission to encourage the teaching of classical and vernacular languages of Muslims in all state-run schools and colleges; to ensure the appointment of qualified Muslim English teachers in Muslim majority districts; and to make certain that grants-in-aid were provided to Muslims intending to establish English medium schools.⁹⁰ But while acknowledging that Muslim performance in education was 'in a more promising condition than in 1832', the Commission remained

⁸⁴ S. A. Hossein, *Pamphlet on Mahomedan Education in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1880).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

⁸⁶ For details, see *ibid.*, pp. 7–19.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁸⁸ Punjab Administration Report, 1883–84, cited in Mehta, 'Western education in the Punjab (1846–1884)', pp. 49–50.

⁸⁹ Proposals of the Education Commission Regarding Muhammadan Education and the Views of Local Governments and Administrations on the Subject: Extract from the Education Commission Report, Chapter IX, Section 2, paragraph 555 to 581, on the Education of Muhammadans viewed as one of the classes requiring special treatment, 354–372, in Selections from the Records of the Government of India, Home Department, No. CCV. Serial No. 2. *Correspondence on the Subject of the Education of the Muhammadan Community*, p. 355.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 355–356.

concerned that the spirit of 'higher English education was [still] not cultivated in any appreciable degree' among Muslims.⁹¹

In 1878, from the NMA's platform, the influential Muslim leader Sayyid Amir Ali urged the British government for 'preferential treatment' of Muslims. In 1882, the NMA in Bengal sent a memorial to the viceroy Lord Ripon complaining that every community other than Muslims had prospered under British administration.⁹² It attributed the decline in the Muslims' position to the replacement of Persian learning with English education. Moreover, because Muslims had stood aloof from the British education system, it was argued that this had provided an opportunity to Hindus who had embraced the English education system to secure coveted government jobs.⁹³ Such competition meant that Muslims could no longer afford to ignore the changed realities. Some duly responded. For instance, in 1883, under the auspices of the NMA, Hasan Ali Effendi laid the foundation of the Sind Muhammadan Association (SMA) which actively worked to improve Muslim representation in the Sindh bureaucracy as well as for the uplift of Muslims in higher education.⁹⁴ Hence, Effendi received great support from SMA members when he established the Sind Madrasatul Islam in 1885, an institution that combined Western knowledge forms with traditional religious instruction.⁹⁵ Mainly supported by local Sindhi *pirs*, the madrasa dedicated itself to serving colonial aims regarding the 'modern' education of Muslims but without taking money from the government.⁹⁶

In October 1884, the then governor-general in Council declared that two classes in India still required special measures for their educational uplift: one was the children of Europeans and Eurasians, and the other, Muslim children.⁹⁷ Certainly there had been an increase in the number of Muslims attending state schools, though their numbers remained low in comparison to Hindu students in those same institutions.⁹⁸ And while some madrasas at the time were accused of being unable to cope with the pressures of preparing students for this-worldly affairs under colonial rule,⁹⁹ Muslim leaders also recognised that they needed to keep pace with wider changes.

Moreover, continuing the efforts of the Aligarh movement, the Muhammadan Educational Conference (MEC), held in 1886, agreed that education alone could serve as a means of promoting national interests and uplifting Muslims from their deplorable state.¹⁰⁰ In 1890, the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* signalled that the MEC's 'declared aims were educational because education was "the passport to political power"'.¹⁰¹ For secondary education, the MEC set itself the goal of getting a large number of Muslim students into schools and suggested the revision of syllabuses in private schools, where required.¹⁰²

⁹¹ Government of India, Home Department, No. CCV. Serial No. 2, 1886, pp. 354–355.

⁹² S. Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India* (Durham, 2007), p. 113.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ S. F. D. Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sind, 1843–1947* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 108.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁹⁶ M. A. Shaikh, 'Challenges and accomplishments of Percy Hide as principal of Sindh Madressatul Islam, Karachi, 1897–1903', *Pakistan Historical Society* 66 (2018), p. 87.

⁹⁷ B. M. Sankhdher, *Encyclopaedia of Education System in India: William Hunter's Commission to 1888* (New Delhi, 1999), pp. 552–558.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 560.

⁹⁹ For the detailed role of madrasas such as the Calcutta Madrasa, madrasa of Deoband, and Nadwatul Ulema, see M. Q. Zaman, 'Religious education and the rhetoric of reform: the madrasa in British India and Pakistan', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41 (1999), pp. 294–323, pp. 300–308.

¹⁰⁰ A. Wasey, *Education of Indian Muslims: A Study of the All-India Muslim Educational Conference 1886–1947* (New Delhi, 1978), pp. 20–21.

¹⁰¹ F. Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of United Province's Muslims 1860–1923* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 125–126.

¹⁰² Wasey, *Education of Indian Muslims*, pp. 32–33.

The networks of Islamia high schools also introduced Muslim students to the new skills that were required for government employment.¹⁰³ Similarly, *Dār al-ʿulūm* Nadwatul Ulema also served as a ‘relatively moderate’ Muslim education institution that added subjects like English language as well as natural and social sciences to their curriculum. In their view, Islam, being an eternal religion, could not be contradicted by the study of rational sciences.¹⁰⁴ Other contemporary Muslim education movements included the Anjuman-ii Himayat-i Islam (AHI). To the AHI, Muslim education required alignment with three broader objectives—the dissemination of Islamic values, the defence of Islam in the wake of propaganda against it, and the promotion of both religious and general education.¹⁰⁵

Taking into account Muslims’ educational preferences and the recommendations of 1882’s Education Commission that Muslim students should be attracted by ‘adequate prominence’ being given to those subjects ‘to which their parents attach importance’, the British authorities were themselves equally aware of the need to avoid any ‘unnecessary widening of the line between Muhammadans and other classes of the community’.¹⁰⁶ In 1891, Sir Alfred Croft, the then vice chancellor of Calcutta University, suggested in a circular that, except in Quranic schools, ‘a certain amount of useful vernacular instruction’ should also be added to the curriculums of *maktabs* (Muslim primary schools) alongside adopting the teaching of Urdu and Persian.¹⁰⁷ In fact, the British believed that ‘traditional’ patterns of Muslim education were incompatible with even ‘the ordinary standards of English education in India’.¹⁰⁸ And to them, it was possible to reform traditional studies in line with the new socio-economic demands, especially when, to an extent, the Muslim bias against English education was fading.¹⁰⁹

In 1898, in a report on the progress of education in the last decade of the nineteenth century, J. S. Cotton referred to the ‘special attention’ that the 1882 Education Commission had paid to the cause of Muslim education; and also accepted that Muslims attending their ‘own institutions’ were no less educated than Hindus.¹¹⁰ However, Muslim enrolment in state-run education institutions of different provinces revealed varied statistics.¹¹¹ J. S. Cotton’s report of 1898 provided a detailed statistical analysis of Muslims’ enrolment in primary institutions, showing a slight increase for the provinces of Bombay, Bengal, North West (N.W.) Province and Oudh, Punjab, Burma, and Assam, and a slight decline for the provinces of Madras, Central Provinces, Coorg, and Berar.¹¹² For secondary schools, a decline was experienced in Muslim enrolment in the provinces of Madras, as well as N.W. Province and Oudh, but a slight improvement had taken place in the provinces of Bombay, Bengal, Punjab, Assam, Coorg, and Berar.¹¹³ Similarly, varied enrolment trends

¹⁰³ I. Talbot, ‘State, society and identity: the British Punjab, 1857–1937’, in *Punjabi Identity: Continuity and Change*, (eds) G. Singh and I. Talbot (New Delhi, 1996), p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ P. Nair, *The State and Madrasas in India, Religions and Development Research Programme* (Birmingham, 2008), p. 14.

¹⁰⁵ Sherwani, ‘The Fall and Rise of Muslims’, p. 340.

¹⁰⁶ W. W. Hornell, *Government of Bengal, Ministry of Education, Third Quinquennial Report on the Review of Education in Bengal for the Years 1901–1902 to 1902–1907* (Calcutta, 1908), p. 159.

¹⁰⁷ Referred in *ibid.*, p. 156. Instances of British government patronage of Urdu and Persian can also be found in Mehta, ‘Western Education in the Punjab (1846–1884)’, p. 17.

¹⁰⁸ Papers relating to reorganisation of the educational service in India from 1891–97, in *Selections from the Records of the Government of India, Home Department, No. CCCLVIII. Serial No. 24, p. 159.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ J. S. Cotton, *Progress of Education in India, 1892–93 to 1896–97, Third Quinquennial Review, presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty* (London, 1898), pp. 335–340.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 340–341.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

in art colleges and professional colleges were also visible in the provinces, with a slight increase or decrease in Muslims' enrolment patterns.

Commenting on developments of the later nineteenth century, Raisur Rahman states that the Aligarh College, St John's College in Agra, and madrasas in Deoband as well as Firangi Mahall had become the 'most sought-after educational institutions'.¹¹⁴ However, owing to some decline in Muslim enrolment in Aligarh College,¹¹⁵ Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and MEC members agreed in 1886 to hold annual meetings for examining statistical information relating to Muslim education institutions in different provinces for the sake of ensuring the educational uplift of Muslims.¹¹⁶ Similarly, in 1893, Theodore Beck, then serving as the principal of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, announced a non-governmental poll—called the Mahomedan Educational Census—to encourage those Muslim parents who had not been sending their sons to schools.¹¹⁷ On another occasion, when reporting on educational progress for the years 1899–1902, A. Pedler, the director of Public Instruction for Bengal, highlighted that Muslim enrolment in arts colleges had increased by 36 per cent, in professional colleges by 26.7 per cent, and in secondary schools by 14.6 per cent, although there was a decline of 4.2 per cent when it came to Muslim enrolment in primary schools.¹¹⁸

Similarly statistical records for Calcutta Madrasa in the year 1901–1902 revealed that although the madrasa had registered as a 'second grade English Arts college', out of 816 students there were 38 students in the College Department (preparing students for Intermediate level exams), 439 in the Anglo-Persian Department (preparing students for the Entrance exam), and 339 in the Arabic Department.¹¹⁹ For the British, next in significance to the Calcutta Madrasa were the madrasas of Dacca and Chittagong which, under governmental management and patronage, had 598 and 523 students respectively. The government had also maintained scores of madrasas under private management where English or Bengali was taught as an optional subject in addition to purely Oriental subjects.¹²⁰ And while Muslim enrolment in private institutions (mainly Quran schools) was decreasing, the authorities declared that this decline was 'not of much moment from an educational point of view'.¹²¹ Rather, they expressed satisfaction over their efforts for Muslims' educational cause by providing scholarships at the lower primary level, granting free tuition, doubling the number of rewards for Muslims in 'reward examinations', and by extending special encouragement through grants-in-aid to *maktab* schools following Western knowledge traditions.¹²²

The situation in Coorg province deserves a mention here, where two special schools for Muslims were maintained with the help of municipal funds; free studentships were also reserved for boys intending to learn English in order to attract Muslims, who were described as otherwise 'utterly apathetic on the subject of English education'.¹²³ In Punjab, Muslim educational institutions were evidently displaying 'progress', whether

¹¹⁴ M. R. Rahman, 'Qasbas as place: a sense of belonging and nostalgia in colonial India', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58.5 (2015), pp. 668–692, p. 50.

¹¹⁵ A. R. Khan, *All India Muslim Educational Conference: Its Contribution to the Cultural Development of the Indian Muslims 1886–1947* (Oxford, 2001), p. 82.

¹¹⁶ Seth, *Subject Lessons*, pp. 117–118.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ A. Pedler, *Review of Education in Bengal by Director of Public Instruction for the years 1899–1902* (Darjeeling, 1902), p. 54.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹²³ Cotton, *Progress of Education in India*, p. 349.

those were maintained by the government or private funds. For instance, the Anglo-Arabic school at Delhi (Division of Punjab) was being maintained by the I'timad-ud-Daula foundation, the Haqqani School at Ludhiana was upgraded to the status of a high school, an Islamiya Middle School was started at Jullundur, the Islamiya School in Lahore under the patronage of Anjuman-i Himayat-i Islam had become one of the largest institutions in Punjab, and new schools were being opened for Muslims in Rawalpindi and Bannu.¹²⁴ In the Central Provinces, the Anjuman-i Islamiya also played a key role in supporting the cause of Muslim education, while in Burma there was an increase in the number of special schools for Muslims between 1892–1897.¹²⁵

Although statistical records depicted an improvement in Muslims' education, the fruits of educational uplift, when associated with employment opportunities, were still not sufficiently ripe for Muslims to enjoy an advantage vis-à-vis Hindus. And because the desired educational standards were closely associated with employment opportunities in government service, communal problems were coming to the surface, as will be shown in the following section.

Communal problems surface

From the 1880s, when competition for government employment had started to gain momentum among Indians, there was increasing evidence of Muslim–Hindu communal rivalry in different parts of India. In Punjab, for instance, some of the newly educated Punjabis preferred to identify themselves 'with a religious community rather than with the Western-educated class as a whole'.¹²⁶ The issue was taken seriously because, due to the absence of educated Punjabis fit for service as sub-deputy inspectors of schools, these posts were filled by people from other areas of the subcontinent who apparently found it difficult to fit into their new surroundings.¹²⁷ The situation was felt with more gravity when the All India National Congress demanded that people be allowed to elect a section of their representatives in the Viceroy's Council. On 28 December 1887, expressing his grief over such a 'dismal' state of affairs, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan stated 'with a sore heart' that 'in the whole nation there is no person who is equal to Hindus in fitness for the work'—and in this case, work in the Viceroy's Council for the sake of public service.¹²⁸

Attending to the ensuing friction between Muslim and Hindu leaders over recruitment practices and Congress's demands for the representation of Indians in the Viceroy's Council, Punjab's Lieutenant Governor James Lyall announced in 1887 that future vacancies would be filled by 'qualified Muslims' until the Hindu-Muslim ratio in jobs was proportionate to their respective populations in the province.¹²⁹ Such measures had a positive impact on Muslim recruitment to teacher training colleges, as well as executive and judicial posts.¹³⁰ The British also increasingly involved Muslims in provincial educational administration with Muslims appointed as assistant and later as deputy inspectors of schools.¹³¹ Furthermore, the employment successes of Muslims in the district inspectorates of schools implied an increase in the number of Muslim pupils. For instance, in

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 348–349.

¹²⁶ N. G. Barrier, 'The Punjab government and communal politics, 1870–1908', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 27 (1968), pp. 523–539, p. 528.

¹²⁷ Mehta, 'Western education in the Punjab (1846–1884)', p. 27.

¹²⁸ Cited in S. Mujahid, *Muslim League Documents 1900–1947. Vol. 1: 1900–1908* (Karachi, 1990), p. 196.

¹²⁹ Barrier, 'Punjab government and communal politics', p. 534.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 535.

¹³¹ A. M. Nash, *Progress of Education in India 1887–88 to 1891–21, Second Quinquennial Review* (Calcutta, 1893), Chapter 11 'Muhammadan education', pp. 315–334, p. 326. Papers relating to reorganisation of the educational

1888–1889, two Muslim assistant inspectors were appointed for Eastern Bengal and Behar, entrusted with the responsibility to ‘ascertain’ and ‘report’ on ‘the special educational wants of Muhammadans’, and to convince influential Muslims to introduce ‘useful secular subjects, such as arithmetic, accounts and the local vernacular’ in madrasas.¹³² However, the outcome of such ventures were reported as being unsatisfactory. Inspectors expressed their concerns that, after graduating from madrasas with qualifications in Muhammadan law and literature, hundreds of Muslim students were unable to earn their living; others after a lengthy training in Arabic and Persian languages were apparently not cognisant of even the simplest facts of geography or history; and those who had learned classical languages were unable to express themselves in grammatically correct Urdu.¹³³

The situation in Punjab was reported to be a little better, as depicted in the report of the inspector of Lahore Circle for the year 1888–1889. Not only had Punjabi Muslims lost their bias against English education, they had risen to ‘positions of trust and responsibility under Government’, and had recognised the ‘value of self-help and private enterprise’ in educational matters.¹³⁴ The establishment of the Anjuman-i Islamiya, the Anjuman-i Himayat-i Islam, and the Muhammadan Association of Amritsar, as well as the deliberations of the third Muhammad Educational Congress (held in 1888), were all reported as significant developments in the educational uplift of Muslims.¹³⁵

To British officers like S. S. Thorburn, the principle of communal representation could support the Muslim claim for posts, and was a method of ensuring the loyalty of western ‘tribes’ in British India.¹³⁶ In 1899, on becoming financial commissioner, Thorburn announced his intention to increase the number of posts for Muslims in executive and judicial positions until these equalled those held by Hindus.¹³⁷ Similarly, in 1905, when proposals for establishing ‘model Maktabas’ and appointing ‘inspecting Maulvis’ (religious scholars) in Bengal were approved, these posts were filled without delay for the districts of Bhagalpur, Patna, Gaya, Shahabad, Muzaffarpur, and Darbhanga.¹³⁸ Here again we see a confidence-building measure aimed at securing the cooperation of Indian Muslims.

In Sindh, however, the situation remained alarming from the perspective of those seeking greater Muslim involvement. Superintendent E. H. Aitken, in charge of Sindh’s *District Gazetteer*, reported that although Muslims had shown some interest in government-sponsored education from the late nineteenth century onwards, they were still unable to cope with the pressure of Hindus outnumbering them with regard to employment opportunities there.¹³⁹ Indeed, British support meant that in some cases Muslims were selected for administrative posts at the district level ‘in preference to more highly qualified Hindu candidates’, which indirectly advanced the cause of Muslims’ education and employability in the British system in the Indian subcontinent.¹⁴⁰ When it came to Muslim employment prospects in Sindh’s Education Department in 1901–1902, five out of six additional deputy inspectors and six deputy inspectors of districts were Muslims.

service in India from 1891–97, in Selections from the Records of the Government of India, Home Department, No. CCCLVIII. Serial No. 24, p. 108.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 329.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 331–332. For details about the Congress resolutions, see Nash, *Progress of Education in India*, pp. 331–334.

¹³⁶ Barrier, ‘Punjab government and communal politics’, p. 534.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 535.

¹³⁸ W. W. Hornell, *Government of Bengal, Ministry of Education, Fifth Quinquennial Report on the Progress of Education in Bengal 1912–1913 to 1916–1917* (Calcutta, 1918), p. 17.

¹³⁹ Aitken, *Sind Gazetteer*, p. 479.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56.

The District Boards were appointing Muslims as sub-inspectors, while the number of Muslim teachers in schools was increasing as well.¹⁴¹

Evidently by the late nineteenth century the benefits of the British education system were able to appeal to those groups of Muslims who found ‘a sense of hope and belief’ in the ‘fairness of the colonial order’ and were being trained to find ‘jobs in the service of the colonial government’.¹⁴² Such trends strengthened the prospects of a ‘cheek by jowl’ relationship between Muslims and the British government in India. Among the contributing factors were ongoing Islamic modernist efforts coupled with British patronage of Muslim educational institutions as well as various special measures adopted to help Muslims find employment opportunities. Saying this, the turn of twentieth century ushered in more testing times for the relationship between Muslims and the British government in the Indian subcontinent.

Twentieth-century educational challenges

With their education policy of 1904, the British government undertook a challenging set of reforms when it promised to prepare a workforce that would enhance industrial growth and develop the fine arts.¹⁴³ For instance, by 1908, at least one high school was maintained in each district of the province of Punjab in accordance with the new education policy of the Government of India.¹⁴⁴ Saying this, early twentieth-century educational ventures coinciding with the socio-political developments was a great challenge for both the rulers and the ruled in the Indian subcontinent. Contrary to Lord Curzon’s belief in educational reforms strictly regulated by the British government, the decade following the proposed policy saw an emerging response that favoured adopting national education based on the strong conviction that the state education system at the time ‘was not only unhelpful but antagonistic to national development’.¹⁴⁵ In general, Indians demanded education that was meant for the masses rather than for a select few classes of society. In particular, Muslims still had to go a long way to go to persuade their compatriots to work harder to achieve their educational targets as a Muslim community in the Indian subcontinent. At an MEC meeting, which was also attended by British officers, including Lord Kitchener, Lord Pembroke, and Sir M. Hicks Beach, members argued that ‘the most pious and moral’ Muslims needed to refrain from their ‘constant and silent withdrawal’ into ‘a life of private prayer and devotion’.¹⁴⁶ Rather, they should devote their energies to establishing a university where Muslims could acquire, ‘in addition to modern sciences, a knowledge of their glorious past and religion’, and where ‘the whole atmosphere’ would help with character building as well as training for examinations.¹⁴⁷

Deliberating on their efforts for the educational uplift of Indian communities, British officers declared that they had undertaken a task of ‘deterrent magnitude’.¹⁴⁸ Alongside the administration of state-run schools, the British government promised to look after newly opened government schools like the Woodburn Middle English School that was under the control of the Calcutta Madrasa, and, in a similar fashion, to extend patronage

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56

¹⁴² K. Kumar, ‘Reproduction or change? Education and elites in India’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 20 (1985), pp. 1280–1284, p. 1281.

¹⁴³ Mukerji, *Administration of Education in India*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁴ Imperial Gazetteer of India, *Provincial Series Punjab*, vol. I (Calcutta, 1908), p. 138.

¹⁴⁵ Biswas and Agrawal, *Development of Education in India*, p. 36.

¹⁴⁶ H. T. Knowlton, *The Punjab Educational Journal* (Lahore, 1903), p. 322.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Sharp, *Education in India 1907–1912*, p. 5.

to those *maktabs* imparting secular instruction.¹⁴⁹ In 1906, for instance, in response to the expressed desire of the Muslim community of Sukkur (Sindh), the Sukkur Madrasa was established by a government board with the Collector as its president.¹⁵⁰ And outside the government's direct patronage or control, new private madrasas were also established. Again in Sindh, in 1901, as a result of Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi's efforts, the *Dār al-Rashad* madrasa was established at Goth Pir Jhando.¹⁵¹ In line with the times, various secular subjects, alongside the traditional subjects of Arabic, Persian and theology, were taught there.¹⁵²

The British authorities, however, continued to worry about Muslims' 'backwardness' which, they believed, was 'attributable partly to poverty, partly to indifference, and partly to their educational wants not being the same as those of the remainder of the population amongst whom they live'.¹⁵³ H. W. Orange, the director general of Education in India, elaborated further on these concerns in his report for the years 1902–1907:

They require their children to learn the Koran by rote at an age when other children are beginning to make progress in secular education, even when it is not the vernacular language of the locality. Both these causes operate to make the common schools less attractive to Muhammadans ... and also to make it more difficult for government to provide schools suited to their special needs.¹⁵⁴

For him, a gradual increase in Muslim enrolment in schools had taken place thanks to their changed outlook towards Western education coupled with the British government's own efforts to make 'the common schools attractive to the Muhammadans'.¹⁵⁵ This had not only brought 'indigenous Muhammadan schools' under departmental influence but had also raised the educational standard of such institutions.¹⁵⁶ While Muslim education institutions such as Government Madrasa at Calcutta, the aided Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, and the Anjuman-i Himayat-i Islam and Islamiya College at Lahore had continued to actively serve the Muslim communities of their respective localities, Muslim educational institutions in Madras, including Government Madrassa-i Azam and Harris High School (managed by the Church Missionary Society), were also added to the list of what the British called 'Muhammadan schools'.¹⁵⁷

The question of religious instruction was reconsidered during the Sixth Quinquennial Review of Education (1907–1912), when the authorities decided to stay overtly neutral, though certain concessions through education codes were allowed for Muslims.¹⁵⁸ For instance, in the United Provinces, without involving ordinary staff, religious instruction was permitted for an hour per week should parents desire it. Similarly, in Punjab, when parents wanted this, religious instruction in public schools was allowed after school hours in accordance with local rules and on the condition that the costs of that teaching were not met through public funds.¹⁵⁹

¹⁴⁹ Nathan, *Progress of Education in India*, p. 157.

¹⁵⁰ J. W. Smyth, *Gazetteer of the Province of Sind, 'B', III, Sukkur District* (Bombay, 1919), p. 35.

¹⁵¹ Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power*, pp. 79–80.

¹⁵² Aitken, *Sind Gazetteer*, p. 485.

¹⁵³ H. W. Orange, *Progress of Education in India 1902–1907* (Calcutta, 1909), p. 282.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

¹⁵⁸ Sharp, *Education in India 1907–1912*, p. 22.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

During the same quinquennium, discussions about direct religious as well as moral instruction in schools raised heated debates in a local conference being held in Bombay; this continued in February 1911 at the Imperial Conference deliberations held in Allahabad.¹⁶⁰ While the Government of Bombay was preparing a book about moral instruction, it was suggested that ‘excellent materials for ethical teaching’ could be added from texts like the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, excerpts from the work of Hafiz, Sadi, and Maulana Rumi, and from other classic pieces in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and Pali.¹⁶¹ In September 1911, the central government invited local administrations to make suggestions.¹⁶² In Bengal, although the process of developing revised curriculums for *maktabs* was initially adopted by the Muslim Education Committee in 1909–1910, it was put in abeyance until 1914 when the Muslim Educational Advisory Committee proposed that the syllabus for Muhammadan education be prepared by the assistant director of Public Instruction. This recommendation, however, was set aside until syllabuses for the primary schools for the whole Presidency were prepared.¹⁶³

At the national level, equally significant were other developments in those years. For instance, the British government reported that ‘an awakening’ was revealed in the founding of specific Muslim education institutions such as the Islamia Colleges in Lahore and in Peshawar, coupled with Muslim demands for a university at Aligarh.¹⁶⁴ However, in 1912, proposals for establishing the latter faced criticism at official level; and in 1913, the Kanpur Mosque incident turned the anger of influential educational groups like the *Dār ul-‘ulūm* of Deoband against the British government.¹⁶⁵ Hence, the government had to find a way of countering this emerging resentment among Muslims. A government resolution issued by the governor-general in Council in February 1913 reflected on the development of Muslim education in the Indian subcontinent:

The last nine years have witnessed a remarkable awakening on the part of this community to the advantages of modern education. Within this period the number of Muhammadan pupils has increased by approximately 50 per cent. ... Still more remarkable has been the increase of Muhammadan pupils in higher institutions, the outturn of Muhammadan graduates having in the same period increased by nearly 80 per cent. ... The whole question of Muhammadan education, which was specially treated by the Commission of 1882, is receiving the attention of the Government of India.¹⁶⁶

Some Muslims at least had been cognisant and supportive of the British policy to formulate a comprehensive education system that could promote virtues of a ‘civilised nation’.¹⁶⁷ And in its 1914 report entitled ‘Progress of Education in India’, British authorities presented a review of British involvement in educational developments from the times of the East India Company to the present day. In its words, ‘the British found not a system of education, but a number of educational institutions, already established in

¹⁶⁰ Sharp, *Education in India 1907–1912*, p. ii.

¹⁶¹ *Indian Education Policy, 1913: Being a resolution issued by the Governor General in Council on 21st February 1913* (Calcutta, 1913), p. 4.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁶³ Hornell, *Progress of Education in Bengal 1912–1913 to 1916–1917*, p. 136.

¹⁶⁴ Sharp, *Education in India 1907–1912*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁵ Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power*, pp. 78–79.

¹⁶⁶ *Indian Education Policy 1913*, p. 42.

¹⁶⁷ *Report on the All India Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental Educational Conference held at Rawalpindi dated 27–29 December, 1914* (Karachi, 2003), p. 56. Report translated by the researcher from Urdu into English.

the more settled parts of India'.¹⁶⁸ The British believed that during their time in India, education, as an expanding function of the state, 'was first ignored, then violently and successfully opposed, then conducted on a system now universally admitted to be erroneous, and finally placed on its footing'.¹⁶⁹ Their role, therefore, was to facilitate rather than regiment educational uplift. In the due course, a growing number of Muslims had established a clear vision about the necessity of their training in aspects of the kind of 'modern' education that state-run schools could offer for Indians. Hence instances of an ambivalent 'cheek by jowl' relationship could be found between Muslims and the British from the time of their engagement with the former in the Indian subcontinent. The continuity of such a relationship was to go further during the First World War and even beyond.

Conclusion

We may conclude that by the latter half of the nineteenth century, certain patterns of knowledge traditions had surfaced in response to emerging Western knowledge traditions. Aspects of Islamic modernist and reformist trends in Muslims' education worked in parallel with the Western educational ventures—hence generating an ambivalent relationship involving both contestation and cooperation between groups of Muslims and the British government in India. Thereafter, while early twentieth-century developments witnessed more defined lines between those Muslims who supported the cause of Islamic modernism and those who preferred Islamic reformism in response to British educational policies in the Indian subcontinent, we also find aspects of Islamic modernism and Western knowledge forms working to establish what could be described as a 'cheek by jowl' relationship between the rulers and the ruled.

Conflicts of interest. The author reports none.

¹⁶⁸ Sharp, *Education in India 1907–1912*, p. 1.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Cite this article: Noreen S (2023). 'Cheek by jowl': education as a bridge between Muslims and the British in colonial India. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 33, 829–847. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186323000330>