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Evolution of Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulema as Islamic educational institution in Colonial India

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Abstract

This paper explores the evolution of Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulema, a prominent Islamic educational institution in colonial India, and its efforts to synthesize traditional Islamic knowledge with modern English education. The paper discusses the historical context, the contrasting educational philosophies advocated by Macaulay, the Aligarh movement, and the Deoband movement, as well as the resulting division among Indian Muslims. It examines how Nadwatul Ulema emerged as a bridge between traditional Islamic scholars and English-educated intellectuals and became an interpreter of Islamic knowledge within the transnational Islamic Ummah. The paper also discusses the contributions of successive generations of the institution to promoting Islamic scholarship and fostering intellectual dialogue

Keywords: Cultural identity, Italian renaissance discourse, Macaulay minute on Indian education, hybridity, cultural project, education and language, humanism, humanities

Introduction

Nadwatul-Ulema (Council of Ulema) is Muslim educational institution based in Lucknow. Primarily, the council of Ulema was formed in 1894 as an intellectual and educational movement, to revitalize the Islamic intellectual heritage to comply with modernity. First, it tried to represent all Islamic institutions through a reformed and centralized curriculum. However, it did not materialize. Then, on 26, September 1898, it established its own "DarulUloom" as one more Muslim institution in north India after DarulUloomDeoband in 1866 and MadrasatulUloom in 1875. Consequently, it aspired to find out a "third Space" between the two. Third space is a post-colonial sociolinguistic theory propounded by Homi K Bhabha, which simply mean a liminal space between cultures. This concept has been employed in the analysis to argue that Nadwa primarily emerged to negotiate a liminal space between traditional Islamic culture and dominant European modern culture of British colonialism, and tried to revitalize Islamic knowledge to adjust with modernity.

Modernity has two foundational points within the intellectual history of Europe, one is rooted in the sixteenth century Italian Renaissance and the other is embedded in the Enlightenment project. Nonetheless, both focused on humanisms with distinct meanings and emphases in each historical period, but they are united in their anthropocentrism or categorical valorization of the human subject. Renaissance humanism is also known as literary humanism because it was primarily concerned with literature and the arts, whereas enlightenment humanism is known as scientific humanism because it regarded humans as a source of scientific knowledge. To emphasize the point, the evolution of humanism should be discussed in greater depth.

The Italian Renaissance, which lasted from the 14th to the 17th centuries, is widely considered to be the beginning of modernity. It was characterized by a revival of classical learning, a renewed interest in human potential, and a focus on the individual. Humanism during the Renaissance placed an emphasis on the study of classical texts, the pursuit of knowledge, and the celebration of human creativity and achievement. This Renaissance humanism celebrated the idea that human beings could shape their own destinies. It represented a shift away from religious authority's dominance in shaping intellectual discourse and promoted a more secular and human-centered worldview. According to Diderot, man has become the single point from which everything begins and ends.

In this tradition, humanism has its origins in the mid-sixteenth century Italian humanista, which refers to teachers, scholars, or students engaged in the branch of studies known as studiahumanitatis or humanities. This field of study is known as humanities because, according to Renaissance humanist Leonardo Bruni, it has the ability to shape the perfect man and produce whole or representative human beings, and thus it has superiority over the

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branches of knowledge it excludes from its curriculum. The humanities came to define themselves through a series of curricular exclusions such as logic, mathematics, natural sciences, astronomy, medicine, law, and, most notably, theology. In general, the conflict between humanism and scholasticism was essentially one between so-called science of man and sciences of nature, with the assertion that science of man has superiority in social hierarchy, as Petrarch says:

Carry out your trade, mechanic, if you can. Heal bodies if you can. If you can't murder, take the salary for your crimes. But how can you dare, with unprecedented impertinence, to relegate rhetoric to a place inferior to medicine? How can you make a mistress inferior to the servant, a liberal art to a mechanical one ^[1]?

In short, humanism in the Renaissance tradition has pedagogical meaning rooted in the branch of studies known as humanities with the claimed moral high ground against the allegedly 'base' concern of nonliterary discipline.

The Enlightenment, which reached its zenith in the 18th century, represented another crucial juncture in the development of modern thought. While it drew on the Renaissance's humanistic foundations, it took a distinct turn in its focus. Philosophes, or Enlightenment thinkers, emphasized reason, empirical inquiry and the application of scientific principles to all aspects of human life. Unlike Renaissance humanism, which often retained a connection to religious and classical traditions, the Enlightenment project aimed to free human thought from superstition and religious dogma. Individual liberty, the separation of powers, and the pursuit of universal human rights were principles advocated by thinkers such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Kant. They sought to apply rationality and critical thinking to social and political issues, laying the groundwork for modern democratic ideals and scientific methods.

In the Enlightenment tradition, humanism has epistemological meaning. It stressed the importance of individual reason and sensory experience as sources of knowledge. It rejected reliance on revelation, tradition, or unquestioned authority as valid grounds for knowledge. Instead, it promoted the notion that humans could gain a more accurate understanding of the natural and social realms through empirical observation, critical thinking, and the scientific method. Humans, with their thinking and sensory capacities, or as subject and object, have replaced revelation and theology as the source of knowledge and truth. Humanism is epistemologically significant because it elevated human reason and experience as the primary means of acquiring knowledge and understanding the world, challenging traditional sources of authority and contributing to the development of modern epistemology ^[2].

The Charter Act of 1813 constitutes a landmark in the educational history of British India. Section 43 of the Charter Act of 1813 specifically allocated public revenues for educational purposes, at a time when such allocations were scarce in England. The said section has broadly stated two goals: (1) "the revival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India," and (2) "the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India." Because there were no instructions on how to secure these objects, it sparked a heated debate about whether or

not they should be taught. This debate is known in Indian educational history as Orientalist-Anglicist controversy.

The debate, sparked by the 1813 charter act, was finally settled in favor of Anglicists on February 2, 1835, when Thomas Babington Macaulay presented his (in) famous educational minute on Indian Education. As the minute marked the end of the controversy and the beginning of English education, it also introduced a new pedagogical logic of utility to Indian education.

The utilitarian logic that underpins Macaulay's argument for English education and rejection of Eastern and Islamic knowledge resonates with both types of humanism discussed above. In other words, "a single shelf of a good European library," as he claimed, "was worth the entire native literature of India and Arabic ^[3]" because it lacks the capacity to make man human or produce whole or representative human beings, as well as the epistemological value of being a source of knowledge and truth. Utilitarianism has two foundations: philosophical and political. Philosophically, English education claimed that it is based on rationality and scientific experimentation, and that it has the capacity to make man human, whereas Eastern knowledge lacks these utilitarian values. Politically, Eastern knowledge has no capacity to serve colonial rulers or the British empire, whereas English education, as stated in Macaulay's Minute, will "form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, opinions, morals, and intellect ^[4]."

The Deobandi Madrasa Movement, which was launched against the political backdrop of 1857, outright rejected this utilitarian logic of education to protect and safeguard the Islamic heritage from the onslaught of both senses of humanism; pedagogical and epistemological, and decline to be mere interpreters between ruler and ruled, and refused to live with dual consciousness of East and West. The Aligarh movement based its education policy on the utilitarian logic of English education and attempted to establish an Indian Cambridge to train a group of people who could serve as interpreters between ruler and ruled. This is also worth noting that, while on his educational trip to England, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan visited a plethora of educational institutions of science and technology, and he was even enamored with this technological advancement, but he eventually chose Cambridge as the model for his educational institute, where the focus was on humanities, not technologies, because he wanted to create a class of ruling elite India, which cannot be possible without humanities ^[5].

During the second half of the 19th century, Islamic or Muslim education majorly oscillated between Aligarh's modernism and Deoband's traditionalism. This situation created an intellectual vacuum and ever widening social divides and fractions among Indian Muslims. They continued to exhaust their intellectual energies by solidifying sectarianism, fatwabazi, and takfeer. On the other hand, among Indian Muslims, there was no intellectual class capable of responding to the questions raised by orientalist scholars and modern science and philosophy, which had shaken the foundations of religion. The Aligarschool was inept because it was uninterested in Islamic knowledge, and Deoband was inept because it was unaware of modern education, and the material challenge posed by modernism could not be adequately met with

centuries-old theology and scholasticism. Politically, Aligarh graduates served as interpreters between Indian natives and British rulers, whereas Deoband, in its last-ditch attempt to protect Islamic heritage and win the lost battle, was incapable of imagining a new arena in which linguistic and methodological possibilities for new pedagogical political spaces could be realized.

In response to this intellectual vacuum and widening social divides, the Nadwa movement was founded in Kanpur in 1893 and later relocated to Lucknow in 1898, with all activities confined to its educational institution, DarululoomNadwatululema (Council of Ulema). It was founded on the principle of a well-balanced synthesis of classical and modern elements. Its main goal was to create a proper integration between the eternal fundamentals of the faith and the ever-changing values of human knowledge and learning, as well as to bring harmony and cohesion among the various groups and schools of thought among the AhleSunnat Muslims. The Nadwa has always believed that the Islamic sciences are alive, evolving, and progressive, and that education is subject to the law of change and reform. As a result, it was critical that the educational system continue to change and evolve in accordance with the spirit of the times and the needs of the Islamic Millat ^[6].

The Nadwatululema sought to achieve the following goals: introducing appropriate changes in the curricula of Islamic theological institutions in order to bring them in line with the changing conditions of the modern era and to achieve, as far as possible, a balance between education and cultural progress; examining and evolving the injunctions of Islamic Sharia in light of the problems raised by modern civilization in order to enable the Islamic pattern of life to cope with the new; and propagating Islamic ideals and Islamic thought by bringing out suitable literature and making necessary arrangements for its publication.

However, there is considerable disagreement about who was the primary force behind the formation of NadwatulUlema. The institution's official historiography has emphasized the importance of Muhammad Ali Mungeri in the formation of the council and the actualization of institutions. Some of the writings have emphasized ShibliNomani's critical role in providing intellectual oxygen to the institutions. Some English education scholars focused on the role of Abdul Gafoor, who presented a proposal in the meetings of the Muhammadan Educational Conference in Aligarh in early 1891, years before the council was formed in 1894. It was essentially his proposal and idea that found Mungeri suitable for its realization.

The entire debate over who was the driving force behind the formation of the council suggests that there was a section of people from the English educated group and traditional ulema who were dissatisfied with Aligarh School and Deoband Madrasa because they were unable to respond to the cultural questions raised by modernism and cultural forms of colonialism.

The council was thus intended to represent the cultural aspirations of a post-rebellion class that worked in British bureaucracy but felt culturally wounded by colonial writers' constant attack on the origins of Islam, Islamic historiography, and central figures of Islam. The problem was exacerbated by sectarian rivalries within Muslim society. This class felt compelled to form a council that can heal their wounds by rediscovering the greatness of Islamic civilization and responding to orientalists. Minimizing

Muslim society's internal differences and developing a new curriculum were critical to realizing this dream. The desire was first expressed in the proposal of Abdul Gafoor, a deputy collector, at the Muhammadan Educational Conference. Although the proposal was not approved at the meeting, the efforts continued and culminated in the convocation of Madrasa Faiz-e-Aam, Kanpur and Mungeri was chosen for its leader ^[7].

The main question that remains unanswered is how DarulUloomNadwatulUlema navigated the pedagogical and epistemological logics of modern English education with traditional Islamic knowledge. To do so, we must expand on its epitomic trope "QadeemSalih and JadeedNafe," which encapsulates its fundamental epistemological and pedagogical idea of education.

Qadeem is an Arabic word that literally means "old" or "ancient." It may refer to two things conceptually: first, traditional Islamic knowledge; and second, essential and unchanging, if we consider the Islamic scholastic debate over Qadeem and Hadith. The word Qadeem is qualified by another Arabic word, Salih, which roughly translates as good, appropriate, and pure. Now, QadeemSalih could mean that some essential Islamic knowledge has been tainted by Greek philosophy and medieval scholasticism over time and that it needs to be cleansed by revisiting essential Islamic texts with a new creative methodological understanding. Here comes the second part of the trope "JadeedNafe". Jadid is also an Arabic word, which etymologically means new. It could also refer to modern knowledge and theologically non-essentials that can change and be destroyed. Nafe is another Arabic word for something that can be useful, something that has utilitarian value. The entire trope implies that pedagogical and epistemological utilitarianism can be useful as methodological tools for interpreting the unadulterated essential Islamic texts, which are the Quran and Hadith in original Arabic, as long as it does not contradict and violate the sanctity of infallibility of the essential Islamic texts. Only through this creative methodology can a new knowledge branch or discipline of the Islamic humanities be proposed for shaping the perfect human.

This logical assertion can be seen in the debate over the creation of a new syllabus for Islamic education as well as the re-evaluation of Dars-e-Nizami, which was filled with scholarly debates. ShibliNomani and others argued that Dars-e-Nizami is incapable of producing scholars capable of understanding the challenges of modernity, as well as being full of unnecessary scholastic debates that may have been useful in medieval times but have now lost their utility. If we extend Shibli's argument a little further, we can fairly argue that Macaulay's rejection of Eastern knowledge and Shibli's call for Dars-e-Nizami reform are logically similar, except that Macaulay had overgeneralized views of Islamic knowledge and was unable to distinguish between essential Islamic texts and their attendant theological debates. It also echoes two types of medieval Islamic conceptions of knowledge ^[8], namely uloomMaqsoodbizzat and uloomAaliya, which distinguish between knowledge in itself and knowledge with instrumental value. IbnKhalidun says in Muqaddima:

اعلم أن العلوم المتعارفة بين أهل العمران على صنفين: علوم مقصودة بالذات كالشرعيات من التفسير والحديث والفقه وعلوم الكلام والطبيعية والإلهيات من الفلسفة، وعلوم آلية وسيلة لهذه العلوم مثل العربية والحساب وغيرهما

للشروعات، وكالمنطق للفلسفة. وربما كان (=المنطق) آلة لعلم الكلام وأصول الفقه على طريقة المتأخرين. فأما العلوم التي هي مقاصد فلا حرج في توسعة الكلام فيها وتقريع المسائل واستكشاف الأدلة والأنظار، فإن ذلك يزيد طالبها ملكته إيضاحاً لمعانيها المقصود. وأما العلوم التي هي آلة لغيرها مثل العربية والمنطق وأمثالهما فلا ينبغي أن ينظر فيها إلا من حيث هي آلة لذلك الغير فقط^[9]

Nadwa's curriculum focused on texts that are essential in nature, such as the Quran and Hadith, and proposed teaching these texts directly in Arabic. Nadwa stressed the teaching of Arabic language for four particular reasons; one, it will help to revisit the unadulterated Islamic texts and interpret them in modern context, second it will help connect with larger Islamic world physically and textually, temporally and spatially, third, Arabic is not just another language of the world, rather it is also sacred language in which essential original Islamic texts are available, it has sacred spiritual energy, adopting it will help normatively reorganizes Muslim social life to create a community on the line of or closer to the community of early period of Islam which is ideal period of Islam, fourth, learning Arabic language can be placed in contrast with English language which will, as Macaulay asserted, create a class of people who will serve as interpreter between ruler and ruled. Adopting Arabic as the language of transnational communication within the Islamic Ummah is thus a conscious rejection of the role of mere interpreter between ruler and ruled, and a conscious assertion of the role of interpreter between transnational intellectual Islamic spaces, both physically and textually, temporally and spatially.

The first generation of Nadwatululema was fluent in Arabic and Persian enough to conduct research and respond to contemporary questions raised by orientalist scholars. Syed Suleiman Nadwi, AbdusslamNadwi, and Rais Ahmad JafriNadwi, to name a few graduates of the first generation, skillfully used Islamic resources to write Islamic history and highlight historical distortions perpetrated by orientalist scholar.

Conclusion

Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulema emerged as a pivotal Islamic educational institution in colonial India, bridging traditional scholarship and modern education. Established amidst the contrasting philosophies of the Aligarh and Deoband movements, it aimed to create a "third space" that honored classical Islamic teachings while embracing contemporary thought. By emphasizing the Arabic language and essential texts, Nadwatul Ulema empowered students to engage with both the Islamic Ummah and modernity. The institution fostered a progressive curriculum, enabling a new generation of scholars to address evolving cultural challenges. Its founders' vision reflects a commitment to reform, illustrating how educational institutions can act as catalysts for cultural renewal and intellectual engagement. Today, Nadwatul Ulema remains vital for fostering discourse and promoting harmony within the broader Islamic community, highlighting its enduring relevance in a complex global landscape.

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