

# Education, Cultural Diversity and Citizenship in Late Colonial India.

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EMIGRA Working Papers núm. 58  
ISSN 2013-3804

## Resumen/ Abstract

The demand for an indigenous educational system to be different from the one introduced by the colonial power was from the very beginning an integral part of India's strive for independence. When in 1937 the Indian National Congress formed governments of its own in the majority of the provinces of British India, Gandhi directed the focus again on education. He convened an All India Educational Conference and a small committee of educationists prepared a primary education scheme under the title 'Basic National Education', also known as the 'Wardha Scheme'.

*In a first part* the paper will briefly deal with the main features of the 'Wardha Scheme'. With an emphasis on educationally productive and socially useful work, it tried to overcome the artificial distinction between physical and mental work. It aimed at educating children on the basis of their native culture and in equipping them with all the basic abilities and attitudes deemed to be essential for a common citizenship. The Indian National Congress directed its provincial governments to introduce the scheme.

Taking into consideration the limited implementation of the 'Wardha Scheme' one is surprised about its political repercussions, especially from Muslim quarters which will be dealt with *in the second part of the paper*. In a country with such a diverse population, professing different religions, speaking various languages and differing from one another in a large number of social and cultural traits, education was bound to become an area of contestation among people belonging to distinct communities. For the majority of the population education was embedded in and linked to a larger Hindu religious-cultural background which more or less all the minorities even partly shared. In the sphere of education, however, the Indian Muslims wanted their traditions and cultures not to be found in a subordinate position, as partly experienced, but equally to be recognised and protected. The issue became a suitable tool in the hands of Muslim League politicians for communitarian mobilization, for bridging intra-Muslim differences and for finally demanding a distinct type of education based on Islamic religion, Muslim culture and converging with the idea of a separate homeland.

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**Palabras clave / Keywords:** primary education under British colonial rule, Wardha Scheme

Cómo citar este artículo: **OESTERHELD, J.** (2007) "Education, Cultural Diversity and Citizenship in Late Colonial India." en *EMIGRA Working Papers*, 58 . Accesible en línea: [www.emigra.org.es](http://www.emigra.org.es). Descarga realizada el (dd-mm-aaaa)

How to quote this paper: **OESTERHELD, J.** (2007) "Education, Cultural Diversity and Citizenship in Late Colonial India" *EMIGRA Working Papers*, 58. Available on line: [www.emigra.org.es](http://www.emigra.org.es). Last retrieved on (dd-mm-yyyy)

Este texto se presentó como comunicación al II Congreso Internacional de Etnografía y Educación: Migraciones y ciudadanías. Barcelona, 5-8 Septiembre 2008



## **Introduction**

The demand for an educational system to be different from the one introduced by the colonial power was from the very beginning an integral part of India's freedom struggle. Under the Government of India Act of 1919 and the introduction of the system of dyarchy, education departments in the provinces were transferred to Indian Ministers. Administrative power and control over primary education were left in the hands of the local authorities. They often proved to be incompetent and have in many instances gravely abused their powers for political and other purposes. The majority of schools under their supervision were single-teacher schools, e.g. schools with one or two classes only. Teachers were inadequately trained, poorly paid, and very often transferred. In addition there was an uninteresting and uninspiring curriculum with emphasis on books and book-learning, the lack of proper equipment and after all of finance. With poverty looming large there was hardly any encouragement by parents for their children to go to school instead of contributing whatever little to the family budget.

Education in British India including primary education was more or less an adaptation of and response to Western and first of all British education. It had accepted the basic programmes and structures of 'western' education for responding to the needs of British administration in India. The apathy of the Indian elite towards education for the common people can also not be overlooked. The plan of basic education known as the Wardha Scheme was to become a genuine challenge to and the most significant dissent from the essential form and structure of schooling and education being built round British rule in India. This scheme however was instrumental in opening another dimension in the contested terrain of education in addition to the already existing dichotomy between colonisers and colonised and the privileged and the underprivileged in Indian society. Disagreement over the issue of education began to emerge within the movement for liberation led by the Congress between communities in view of the country's diversity of cultures, religions and languages. The question how to cope with such a complex and complicated social situation turned education from the late 1930s onwards into a political issue with far-reaching implications.

## **From Basic Education to National Education**

With the Congress in power in seven out of eleven provinces and running coalition ministries in two more provinces from mid-1937 onwards, Gandhi in October 1937 convened an All India Educational Conference at Wardha, to which he invited some well-known educationists as well as the ministers in charge of education in the provincial governments run by the Congress (Reconstruction 1937). Taking into consideration the lack of finance for providing education to all boys and girls of school going age, Gandhi suggested making education self-supportive and proposed a necessary combination of education and productive work, so that this system of education could gradually cover the remuneration of teachers. A small committee of educationists under the chairmanship of Zakir Husain, principal of the Jamia Millia Islamia, was asked to prepare a primary education scheme which was submitted along with a syllabus in October 1937 under the title Basic National Education, also known as the Wardha Scheme.

This scheme became the first blueprint for a comprehensive system of universal, free and compulsory education on a nation-wide scale. Fundamentally a democratic conception (Salamatullah: 4) it provided for education to all children, admitting them in the same school



irrespective of their caste or creed without any substantial difference in the instruction of boys and girls and in the standard of education between village and town. With an emphasis on educationally productive and socially useful work, it tried to overcome an attitude which considered manual labour as something menial and intended to contribute to eradicating the artificial distinction between physical and mental work. By making the mother tongue of the children and not another Indian or a foreign language the medium of instruction during the first years at school, basic education aimed at educating them on the basis of their native culture and in equipping them with all the basic abilities and attitudes deemed to be essential for establishing and strengthening a democratic society.

The Wardha Scheme reflects a lot of progressive educational thought prevalent in the West from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. It could be seen as the Indian variant of an educational transition similar to changes occurring in school education in Western Europe along with the process of industrialisation but in the case of India rather preceding than coinciding with it.

On the basis of the Wardha Scheme the Indian National Congress adopted a resolution on "National Education" at its 51<sup>st</sup> session in Haripura in February 1938. Underlining its long-standing commitment to national education and condemning the existing system of education, the resolution emphasised that "the Congress attaches the utmost importance to a proper organisation of mass education and holds that all national progress ultimately depends on the method and content and objective of the education that is provided for the people". With the Congress ruling the majority of provinces there were new opportunities "of influencing and controlling state education" as well as "to lay down the basic principles which should guide such education". The Congress accepted the content of the resolution passed at the Wardha Conference as the principles on which basic education should be imparted on a nation-wide scale with the exception of the self-supporting aspect. An All India Education Board was to be established scheduled to work out a programme of basic education and "to recommend it for acceptance to those who are in control of state or private education" (Zaidi/Zaidi 1980: 431f.)<sup>1</sup>.

The provincial governments run by the Congress started introducing the scheme from 1938 onwards. In 1939 the governments of the United Provinces, Bihar, the Central Provinces, Assam, Orissa and Bombay had initiated some steps while the other Provinces did not introduce the Wardha Scheme (Aryanayakam 1939). They were all more or less faced with the same problems: non-availability of funds and basic preconditions missing such as trained teachers, new text-books and more important lack of sympathy for and commitment to the basic educational ideas of the scheme in administration and policy. Education was not topping the agenda of provincial governments policy despite the Haripura resolution with other problems being more urgent such as the release of political prisoners, the demands raised by peasants and industrial workers and quarrels within Congress ranks. Governments made use of their authority to introduce the scheme and entrusted its execution in some cases to persons who did not appreciate its value, had not full faith in it or disliked it for reasons that had nothing to do with education. Zakir Husain therefore concluded in 1941, that "if

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<sup>1</sup> The Circular sent by the AICC to the Provincial Congress Committees after the Haripura session mentions only at the end the resolution on "National Education" expressing confidence the scheme "will solve the question of our almost universal illiteracy". The only reference is to village workers and organisers as the ones who "should give thought to the Wardha Scheme" (Mitra 1990a: p. 313).

basic education has derived some benefit from being adopted by governments, it has also suffered harm” (Report 1941: 26).

The Congress established the All India Education Board (Hindustani Talimi Sangh) only a year after Haripura and in Gandhi's later assessment never took any interest in it. The Board had to cope with interference from a government body, the re-established Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), which appointed two sub-committees to consider the Wardha Scheme. CABE in general approved of the scheme, but recommended a different duration of school years, the introduction of a junior and senior basic school and it favoured the teaching of English on a voluntary basis at the senior basic level. Thus the original scheme was undermined by adjustments “made to fit basic education into the existing pattern” (Mujeeb 1997: 110).

In general there was a fairly broad and positive public response to the Wardha Scheme first of all by various non-educational organisations, institutions and individuals with an all India or provincial platform. Support for introducing primary education for all children, especially for girls, to remove illiteracy, came from the All India Women's Conference, while the All India Kisan Sabha expressed dissatisfaction with the urgency of its implementation by provincial governments. The All India Library Conference stressed the need for primary education, asked for steps to prevent the lapse into illiteracy afterwards by making provisions for rural and travelling libraries and for measures to print valuable books in the vernacular languages. Various provincial students' conferences voted in favour of the scheme as an instrument for introducing free and compulsory primary education for boys and girls without dealing with the pros and cons.

Loud criticism was very often based on a not too intimate knowledge and on misinterpretation of the scheme. Vice-Chancellors were afraid of restricting university education for the sake of encouraging primary education. They warned of an imbalance between productive work and cultural training and were questioning the wisdom of a common syllabus for boys and girls. After all it was the self-supporting aspect associated with education, which raised the strongest protest voiced by so diverse organisations as the All India Students' Conference and the National Liberal Federation. Along with it went strong objection against the introduction of productive work in education. The committee had emphasised in its report the unanimity in modern educational thought in commending the idea of educating children through some suitable form of productive work. Gandhi's emphasis on spinning as the main craft for introducing manual activities at school had its enemies as well as strong defenders, but obviously there were “too many persons connected with the propagation of basic education whose mental horizon did not extend beyond charkha and takli and yarn” (Mujeeb 1965: 187). There is not denying the fact that even for educationists it was difficult to grasp the correlation which was supposed to be established between the teaching of crafts and other subjects<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless and despite taking into consideration all these aspects, the Vice-Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University in his Presidential address to the

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<sup>2</sup> “Correlations improvised for the sake of orthodoxy, by teachers with a poor knowledge both of the craft and the academic subjects have added to the confusion of ideas and the futility of the new educational practice” (Mujeeb 1965: 195).

All India Educational Conference in December 1940 still opted for giving the scheme “a fair trial before the final decision is reached” (Mitra 1990d: 406).

Zakir Husain as chairman of the committee which drafted the scheme of basic education explained and defended its salient features in his writings, speeches and statements again and again. According to him the criticisms voiced “arose from either misconception of the fundamental ideas on which the scheme rests or from statements extracted from their context which give a false or distorted impression” (Report 1939: 2-4). He reminded his critics that shortcomings could always be corrected as it was declared to be experimental when it was first presented by the committee and welcomed publications which helped to settle misconceptions and doubts (Varkey 1939).

Taking into consideration the place education occupied at the end of the agenda of provincial governments’ policy and the limited impact it actually had on the dissemination of primary education and literacy, one is surprised about the political repercussions which it triggered off right from the point of its inception and in particular about the criticism from Muslim quarters. From an educational point of view the Wardha Scheme was much advanced and as observers remarked the educational policy based on it was „the most enlightened and encouraging feature of the new regime, and it is somewhat ironical that it should have provoked the bitterest attack” (Coupland 1943: 83). To find out the reasons for this seeming contradiction let us have a further look at the content of this concept and later on at the circumstances and the manner, in which it was implemented by some of the Congress Provincial Governments.

### **National Education with an Unresolved Issue**

Indian Nationalism which had emerged in the 1920’s stressed unity in the past while striving for mobilising the mass of the people irrespective of their class, caste and religion into a new national community. It represented in the 1930s everything that was forward-looking and ‘modern’ and perceived the loyalty and affiliation to cultural and religious features of a particular community as the main obstacle for national unity. Communalism in this view was all that was backward-looking, pre-modern, reactionary and was supposed to reflect interests of upper-class elements exploiting religious sentiments of their community to their own advantage. The national approach underlined the common political and economic interests of Hindus, Muslims and other communities in the struggle for freedom as of primary importance in comparison to the ties of an individual to mother-tongue, religion and culture. The Wardha Scheme was framed on the basis of such an Indian nationalism and therefore was not too elaborate about taking into consideration the education of the country’s major communities in view of their diverse cultural and religious traits. One of the objectives of national education was to inculcate love of the motherland, reverence for its past and belief in its future destiny “as the home of a united co-operative society based on love, truth and justice”. Pride in the past was to be prevented from degenerating into an arrogant and exclusive nationalism. In accordance with its secular character religion was to be dealt with not from the point of view of belief and faith, but in a larger context where the study of history, geography, civics and current events was “combined with a reverential study of the different religions of the world showing how in essentials they meet in perfect harmony” (Report 1938: 22-23).





The scheme did not intend to discourage any form of religion or religious observance. As such it was in line with the position in force since 1921 which allowed for publicly managed schools the utilisation of school premises out of school hours, with no financial burden for the state and a sufficient number of parents demanding religious instruction. It is probably from this point of view that the All India Educational Conference did not deal separately with the issue of religion and education in its resolutions, accepted the scheme with some modifications in 1939 and recommended it for adoption to the Government of India, the National Planning Committee and the Provincial and State Governments (Mitra 1990e: 424).

But the idea to exclude religion as a subject from education and by doing so to underline the secular character of the Wardha Scheme was in fact based on another reason. "We have left out the teaching of religions from the Wardha Scheme", so Mahatma Gandhi, "because we are afraid that religions, as they are taught and practised today, lead to conflict rather than unity" (Reconstruction 1937: 63). Gandhi believed that the truths that are common to all religions should be taught to children not through words or books but through the teacher himself lining up to the tenets of truth and justice. Zakir Husain, however, according to M. Mujeeb had excluded religious instruction from the syllabus as "Muslims would not be able to get teachers of Islam appointed in the rural areas and, even if they were, the teachers would be more Government employees than Muslims" and under these circumstances for Zakir Husain "Islam would not be safe in the hands of such teachers" (Mujeeb 1997: 112).

We do not know what other kind of assumptions guided the various committees appointed by the Central Advisory Board of Education from 1936 onwards when dealing with the problem of religious instruction at school. Their reports reveal serious discussions and contradictory attitudes and opinions in favour and against the inclusion of religious instruction into the curriculum without coming to final conclusions and decisions. When a committee appointed by CABE to consider the Wardha Scheme had to deal for the first time with the issue of religion and education in June 1938, "this question showed fundamental differences of opinion". The majority of its members felt that religious teaching was best left to the parents or to the communities concerned. It however concluded that the State should continue to provide facilities "for every community to give religious teaching, when so desired but not at the cost of the State", outside school hours and anyway not as part of the curriculum. Muslim members, among them Syed Mahmud and Zakir Husain, however pointed out in the discussion that religious instruction is for Muslims "an essential part of general education and any scheme of compulsory education which excludes religious instruction will be resented by that community". Two out of the four Muslim committee members even desired that religious instruction should be a school subject (Report 1939: 10).

When a second CABE committee submitted its report on the Wardha Scheme in December 1939 at the peak of the opposition to the scheme from Muslim quarters, the issue was not dealt with at all in its report anymore. On the contrary, the committee mentions that in the deliberations careful consideration was given to resolutions submitted on behalf of the All India Muslim Educational Conference regarding the Wardha Scheme. The Committee however avoided to discuss that part of the resolutions of the All India Muslim Educational Conference dealing with the agenda of religious instruction in schools. Herein it was emphasized that "without religious instruction, the entire education, according to Muslims, would be defective and incomplete" and therefore it thought very essential "that



arrangements should be made for the compulsory religious education during school hours for the Muslim students in all the basic schools"(Report 1947: 18).

In 1944 the Religious Education Committee dealt extensively with the question of religious instruction in educational institutions in India. For primary schools it recommended to make provisions for religious instruction an "integral part" of the approved curriculum, not to restrict it only to ethical and moral teachings common to all religions, but to include teaching "in accordance with the tenets of different religions and denominations" as well. The time devoted to the teaching of religion should be about two hours per week. A common act of devotion with the participation of all communities was to be introduced and religious instruction be "entrusted to teachers trained and expert in the subject" (Report 1945: 5). In its next report, however, the Committee concluded

that conditions in this country, where so many different religions exist, would aggravate the present situation if dogmas of different sects were introduced in school instruction. The provision of facilities for the teaching of denominational religions ... may add seriously to administrative difficulties and may even help to accentuate rather than mitigate existing communal differences (Report 1946: 79).

In January 1944 CAGE submitted to the Reconstruction Committee of the Viceroy's Executive Council what it regarded as a practicable plan of post-war educational development in India. Concerning the problem of education for the various communities, the Board finally proposed "to lay down certain general principles for guidance as to the best way in which the whole question of religious instruction should be approached and they have accordingly appointed a special Committee for this purpose" (Report 1944: 3-4). So the decision about how to cope with the problem in face of India's diversity of communities and religions was again postponed and no consensus reached prior to independence. But apart from the unresolved problem of religious instruction in education there were equally other important developments responsible for turning education finally in a political issue.

### **Muslim Response to the Wardha Scheme – Context and Content**

Indian nationalism perceived the country's past as the common cultural heritage of its diverse but as equal regarded communities. However, the denial of any communitarian moorings of this kind of nationalism was challenged by a contradictory notion which not only underlined the role of different communities in interpreting India's history but in the extreme "sought to establish a hierarchy of cultures among the cultures of India" (Pandey 1992: 261). In this context the development of Hindu nationalism and Hindu communalism accompanied by the growth of the RSS and activities of the Hindu Maha Sabha as well as the competition between Hindu nationalism and Indian nationalism, particularly in North India in the decades prior to independence have to be taken into account. They have to be looked at both from an all India perspective (Jaffrelot 1996, Dalmia/Stietencron 1995) and a provincial perspective, and here in particular in Muslim minority provinces such as the United Provinces (Misra 2001: 287-317) and the Central Provinces (Mojumdar 2002) are of particular relevance.

Among the factors and developments contributing to the sudden rise of Muslim nationalism and communalism up to the point of separatism in less than a decade, it was the growing perception among sections of Indian Muslims of an equation of Indian nationalism with Hindu nationalism in the political domain. Orsini convincingly proves how in Northern





India the nationalisation of religious, linguistic, and literary traditions in the 1930s finally culminated in a Hindi nationalism, which mirrored an harmonious and unified Hindu-Indian society rejecting the plural character of Indian culture and excluding Urdu and Indo-Persian culture as 'foreign'. She rates the efforts to homogenize Hindi and Hindu culture as so successful in Hindi "that even the memory of social, cultural, or historical difference and conflict has been erased in accounts of the nationalist movement and in literary history" (Orsini 2002: 381). From the 1930s onwards the perception of India as a Hindu nation was equally fostered by the dissemination of Hindu mythological pictures, circulated on a mass scale and making politics due to the existence of a substantial allegorical and metaphorical infrastructure also possible to be articulated through religious images (Pinney 2002: 141).

On the eve of Congress taking over provincial governments, Zakir Husain in a letter to Gandhi underlined "as a nationalist, not as a Muslim" that very much depends upon "the tact and strategy of Congress leaders ...to remove at any cost the suspicions and reservations entertained by Muslims", because "if the Muslim community is hostile or disgruntled, we cannot expect to construct a united, happy India". Regarding the language issue, he warned that it would be fatal for promoting Indian nationalism and a composite Hindustani language if citizens are deprived of the right that the Urdu script be used (Faruqi 1999: 193-194). While Congress as an all India organisation in official resolutions continued to favour Hindustani, some of its leaders seemed to have been unaware that the institutionalisation of Hindi had already succeeded to an extent where it could not be rectified.

Two more aspects are of particular relevance. One refers to the role of North Indian Congress leaders like Purussottam Das Tandon, Narendra Dev, Sampurnanand and others as intellectuals and partly in charge of education at provincial level as ministers as Sampurnanand or as chairman of committees in the case of Narendra Dev. They were often trying to combine rational knowledge and radical politics with allegiance to Hindi as a culturally loaded language and a vision of ancient India culture as an allegedly homogeneous block. The consequence of such a dualism had far-reaching implications: "While politically they carried popular and democratic aspirations, culturally their role was largely conservative" (Orsini 2002: 356).

The second aspect concerns the question of authority and hegemony in the public sphere under conditions of colonial rule in provinces such as U.P., Bihar and the Central Provinces and Berar. The victory of Hindi in the Hindi-Hindustani controversy went along with establishing an institutional stranglehold over what Orsini calls "the transmission of officially recognized knowledge, in other words, over education" (Orsini 2002: 382). Hindi intellectuals in charge of schools and colleges as well as of textbook production imparted a particular world view. Due to the strength of their leading positions in educational institutions and literary associations, they established in the course of the Hindi-Hindustani controversy strong links with Hindi politicians. Thus the victory of Hindi was a victory, "that refused the claims of other subjects and accepted them only as subordinate to the Hindi-Hindu cultural mainstream" (Orsini 2002: 364).

It is with such an attitude that the U.P. Government dealt with Muslim proposals and demands when appointing two sub-committees in 1938 to report on necessary reforms in the provincial educational system. To a request submitted by the All India Muslim Educational Conference in early April 1938 for its representation in these committees, Sampurnanand in



his capacity as Minister of Education rejected the principle of “giving representation to bodies which concern themselves with the education of particular communities” claiming the appointed committees contain “representatives of all shades of opinion”. In its reply the Conference reminded him that education under the British tended to undermine the cultures and traditions of very large sections of the population in India and that the new educational scheme run by provincial governments

“will be equally abhorrent to some religious communities including the Muslims, if they are not consulted during its evolution, and if they ultimately find that their traditions and cultures are either ignored in the new system or have been accorded a subordinate position”.

Sampurnanand replied that he felt “no useful purpose will be served by entering into a discussion in this connection” (Brelvi 1938: 61-64).

Criticism of the scheme of national education based on the Wardha Scheme and its handling under the responsibility of Congress provincial governments was voiced in different ways and at various institutional and personal levels. The whole spectre of Indian Muslim cultural and political organisations objected in one form or the other to the scheme. The All India Muslim Educational Conference rejected the scheme already at its session in Patna in October 1938 after Bengal Premier A.K. Fazlul Haq had strongly criticised at length its basic principles and claimed that schools would be turned into factories or ashrams (Mitra 1990c: 438). In December 1939 the Conference passed a resolution disapproving the Wardha Scheme without reservation and suggesting to appoint a small committee “to frame a comprehensive and broad-based scheme of education suiting the special needs and requirements of the Muslims and helpful to the preservation of the distinctive features of their culture and social order”. An interim report was submitted in December 1940 characterising the introduction of the scheme by Congress ministries as a “crusade against Islamic culture” and describing the present state of things regarding religious instruction in the curriculum as “most unsatisfactory” (Mitra 1990f: 413-414). The report listed the nature and extent of the objections against the Wardha Scheme and especially against the Vidya Mandir Scheme.

The Vidya Mandir Scheme (VMS) was introduced in the Central Provinces to provide basic education in small villages. From the very beginning there was outright opposition to the name of the scheme on provincial and on the all India level including objections raised within Congress ranks itself. Zakir Husain as chairman of the VMS syllabus committee had given a note of warning in early 1938 by underlining “that there is a strong feeling against the use of the name among a section of the people in as well as outside the province. I have taken pains to assure myself that the feeling is genuine and sincere”. In an atmosphere “surcharged with suspicion and distrust” he felt the success of any new educational effort endangered and its success finally depending on removing the distrust. In putting the new syllabus into operation, he thought it imperative with regard to new textbooks and the medium of instruction that “every attempt will be made to see that the interests of no section of the people are neglected” (Report 1942: 117).

The C.P. and Berar Nationalist Muslim Conference recorded its disappointment and concern at the introduction of the VMS “without any regard to the educational needs of the Mussalmans, and despite their unanimous protests”. It quoted a concrete case which “tends to



confirm the charges that by professions and not by practical measures equal treatment and facilities are assured to the minority communities and in particular the Mussalmans"<sup>i</sup>.

The Jamiyat-i-Ulama-i-Hind, known for its pro-Congress attitude, declared at a conference in March 1939 that it would not be advisable for the C.P. Government to insist on the name Vidya Mandir Scheme. It objected to the ultimate object of the scheme "to produce a class of educated people having the same kind of culture, faith and practices" as neither correct nor practicable. It objected to a concept of a common nationality if this meant

that the Muslims should give up their own Islamic culture and be absorbed in a culture which is not their own... Let it, therefore, be known that the Muslims of India are not prepared even for a minute to lose their Islamic culture. To them religious freedom is more important than political emancipation (Haq 1982: 128).

When nationalist Muslims met for the first All India Independent Muslim Conference in April 1940 trying to find a solution to the communal deadlock, they highlighted the protection of Muslim culture and religious rights and the provision for safeguards of the economic, social and cultural rights of Muslims (Mitra 1990g: 330). Mirza Ismail, Prime Minister of Mysore State wrote to Syed Mahmud on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1940:

My view is merely this – that it should be our endeavour to make every community in the country feel that its special interests are quite safe in the hands of the administration. By ‘special interests’ I mean – its language, religion and culture, and it should be rendered impossible for a majority community simply by majority vote in the Legislature to go against the wishes of a minority community”<sup>3</sup>.

### **The Muslim League – Education as a Campaign Issue**

From 1937 onwards, the criticism and rejection of provincial government educational policies became one of the main planks of the All India Muslim League to rally the support of the Muslim electorate and to attack the policies of the Indian National Congress. The Hindi-Urdu controversy, the singing of Bande Mataram as some kind of national anthem in school and the hoisting of the Congress flag on public buildings, along with general opposition to the Wardha Scheme were crucial in catapulting the Muslim League into a prominent position (Misra 2001: 187).

The session of the Muslim League in October 1937 did not yet refer to the Wardha Scheme. In its resolutions the League protested against the Bande Mataram song which it considered “not merely positively anti-Islamic and idolatrous in its inspiration and idea, but definitely subversive of the growth of genuine nationalism in India” and warned that attempts to replace Urdu by Hindi “might adversely affect the growth of comradeship between the Hindu and Muslim sections of the people (Pirzada 1970: 278-79).

In April 1938, M. A. Jinnah as League president charged Congress provincial governments for pursuing a policy of making Hindi a compulsory language with the consequence, that “Hindi with its Hindu Sanscritic literature and philosophy and ideals will

<sup>3</sup> Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Manuscript section. Private Papers Syed Mahmud.

and must necessarily be forced upon Muslim children and students” (Pirzada 1970: 294). In October 1938 he dealt for the first time no longer separately with Bande Mataram, the Congress flag, Hindi-Hindustani and the Wardha Scheme but summarized them as an attempt to “give a death blow” to the culture and solidarity of Indian Muslims (Yusafi 1996: 860-861). Two months later he was wondering whether there was “a single instance where the Muslim League or Muslim individuals may have tried to force their own culture upon the Hindus in the last eighteen months”). Objections against the introduction of the Wardha (and Vidya Mandir) Scheme were equally raised in the deliberations held by Provincial League conferences.

In July 1939 Jinnah listed on behalf of the League’s Working Committee among its “fundamental objections to the Wardha Scheme” that (1) The scheme is calculated to destroy Muslim culture gradually but surely and is intended to secure the domination of Hindu culture and language. (2) It imposes the Congress ideology and aims at inculcating , among others, the doctrine of Ahimsa. (3) Its objective is to infuse the political creed, policy and programme of one party, namely, the Congress, into the minds of the children. (4) It has neglected the question of providing facilities for religious education and (5) Under the guise of the name Hindustani the scheme is meant to spread what is highly Sanskritised Hindi and to suppress Urdu which in Muslim League’s view was the lingua franca of India at present. After scrutinising the textbooks prescribed and provisionally sanctioned by some of the provincial governments the Muslim League held that „they are not only offensive to the feelings and sentiments of Muslims, but are mainly devoted to the praise of Hindu religion, philosophy and heroes minimising Islamic contribution to the world and to India in particular and ignoring their culture, history and heroes and speaking of them with scant courtesy“ (Yusafi 1996: 1015-16).

Among the grievances listed in other reports of the Muslim League between 1938 and 1939 were a lack of Urdu schools in districts where Muslim figures were high enough to justify the opening of such schools, Muslim boys were forced to greet Hindu goddesses with folded hands, Assembly speeches delivered in Urdu but reported in Hindi only, applications in Urdu ignored by Municipal Committees etc. In another report Congress leaders were blamed for refusing to acknowledge “the wide gulf that separates the innocent looking resolutions passed by the Congress and the actual practice enunciated by no less a person than a Minister of Education in a Congress Government” (Report: 33).

### **Separate Education for Separate Citizenship**

Within the broad spectrum of opposition among Indian Muslims to the Wardha Scheme some circles started thinking of shaping a separate type of education based on Islamic religion and Muslim culture. An early signal came in April 1939 when the committee of the All-India Muslim League Committee on the Wardha Scheme recommended in its report, that in case of non-acceptance of proposed modifications of the scheme “the Muslim education should be conducted on separate lines” (Kamal: 176) with complete control over policy, finance, curriculum, institutions and supervision for which it laid down the principles in the report.

The idea of separation was favoured in a scheme submitted by Abdul Latif in March 1939. The scheme provided for a confederation of cultural zones and envisaged for the Muslim cultural zone in each provincial unit the establishment of a Moslem Board of Education “to control and supervise the cultural side of education of Muslims, their technical



and industrial training and to devise measures for their economic and social uplift” (Pirzada 1995:158). Another scheme known as the “Aligarh Scheme”, proposed in August 1939 to launch a number of constructive programmes for the social, educational and economic improvement of Muslims (186).

Among the ardent supporters of a separate system of Muslim education was Mohammed Afzal Husain Qadri at Aligarh university, member of the Committee which submitted the Muslim League’s report on the Wardha Scheme and one of the two persons which drafted the “Aligarh Scheme” demanding a repartition of India into Muslim India and Hindu India. He continued addressing letters to Jinnah as somebody fighting the Wardha Scheme since 1938 and looking back in April 1943 at this endeavour, he wrote to him:

Not only have we been able to convince the Muslims of its harmfulness but we have given them to believe that they should place their own system of education and run it under their own control.”<sup>4</sup>

In early December 1943 when the Government of India’s scheme for national education included recommendations of the Wardha Scheme, Quadri thought it “a matter of supreme importance and of vital necessity that we should have our recommendation ready as early as possible”. The outline intended among others “to lay the foundations of our system of education on our cultural and religious heritage” and to make Muslim education “independent of any non-Muslim control or influence”<sup>5</sup>. These efforts went along with intentions to associate the All India Muslim Educational Conference with such a policy.

In January 1945 Jinnah in his address to the Gujarat Muslim Educational Conference referred to a special sub-committee set up “to draft a scheme for the education of Muslims in India”. However, in the election campaign to the Central Assembly and the Provincial Legislative Assemblies held in winter 1945-46, education was no longer a particular issue the Muslim League had to rely upon for winning the support of the majority of Indian Muslims. We do not know whether the League had a separate scheme of education ready in 1947. But immediately after Pakistan had come into existence, Jinnah in a message to the All Pakistan Educational Conference in November 1947 draw attention to education as a precondition for “any real, speedy and substantial progress” for which an educational policy and programme would be required

suit to the genius of our people, consonant with our history and culture and having regard to the modern conditions and vast developments that have taken place all over the world ... (Tahir 1980: 39).

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<sup>4</sup> Shamsul Hasan Collection, United Provinces, vol. V, Letter dated 28/4/43.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, Letter dated 19/12/43.





### Conclusion

The idea behind a scheme of 'national education' administered by Congress governments between 1937 and 1939 was to lay the foundations for a common citizenship. Its implementation under circumstances dominated by a 'stream of majoritarianism' contributed to a growing opposition to the Congress, the deepening of the Hindu-Muslim divide and to an atmosphere where a feeling among Muslims gained ground that they are and have to live under a religiously coloured dominance of a Hindu majority. Their resentment against the educational policy of the Congress reveals the crucial importance of religion and culture both in educational theory and practice for influencing the self-perception of communities and for their interrelationship.

When Congress politics with an all embracing nationalism revealed insensitivity to culture as a difference in the field of education, and Indian Muslims began to perceive the Wardha Scheme as a threat to their culture and religion, the Muslim League at an early stage recognized the relevance of such an issue as a suitable instrument for communitarian mobilization and for strengthening culturally and religiously informed solidarity among Muslims across political and social divisions within their ranks. The unwillingness of the majority of Muslims to join a system of national education if this meant undermining or the extinction of their cultural distinctiveness explains to a large extent why the opposition to the Wardha Scheme proved to be of particular relevance for contributing to rallying a growing number of Indian Muslims behind the banner of the Muslim League.

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<sup>i</sup> Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Manuscript section (henceforth NMML): All India Congress Committee G-26/1937.