



Women Political Organizations of United Province: A Case Study of *Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam*.

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Abstract The main focus will be on the 'All India Muslim Ladies Conference' (Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam). This organization was founded by Sheikh Abdullah on 1st March 1914, as a part of a ceremony inaugurating a new residence Hall for Aligarh Girl's School. Begam of Bhopal namely Sultan Shah Jahan Begum had presided the ceremony. The central concern of Anjuman was the promotion of Muslim women's education and making them aware about their religious rights and other rights. This paper will also examine the political, social and religious aims of the organization as Anjuman was founded at a momentous time for India as well as for British Empire because world war 1st had broken out in the same year the organization was founded. We will also take up the works done by the organization at the ground and their success. We would most importantly study the foundation of Aligarh Girls School, its success and contributions. The core idea of both Anjuman and of the Aligarh school in general bears close comparison with that of salient 19th-century Hindu social reform. Both believed that the much-needed reform of their societies would be initiated by the British. Both were keen to maintain their roots in religion citing scriptures to prove ground for a particular reform. What had been rudimentary nationalism of the early 19th-century social reformers had flowered into an organized, nationalist, and anti-colonial movement.

Index Terms Anjuman-i-islam Khawatin, women education, polygamy,

1. Introduction

The establishment of All-India women's organizations and the beginning of women's participation in the national struggle occurred in the early years of the twentieth century and thus marking two significant milestones in the history of the women's movement. Both processes marked developments probably unforeseen by the founders of women's organizations and pioneers who championed women's participation in India's freedom movement. Although the Indian nationalist leaders were the first to take up the cause of Indian women, the latter came up closely behind and organized themselves for upliftment of their kind. The ideas, which governed women's organization, however did not make a break with the earlier reformist and revivalist movements of 19th century. Rather the geneses of these movements were found in the preceding period. Some of the outstanding women of the 19th century had struggled against heavy odds and pursued with all sincerity the goal of women's emancipation. With original mind and sharp intellect they chalked out a definite scheme of constructive work and succeeded in their mission.

The women movements in India provide examples of confluence of educational, social and political reforms in modern India. Organization to promote women's education or to bring about legal and social reforms provided a training ground, a way for women to meet with other women, to develop organizational skills, to become socially active in ways that were limited but acceptable to their society. Political actions were not far behind. The social reform movements and nationalist politics were inextricably entwined. The priorities of certain individuals or organizations might vary, but one form of public action usually entailed the other. Geraldine Forbes has discussed the close relationship between social reform and political action in all Indian women organizations. The *Women's Indian Association* and *All India Women's Conference* found that political considerations were inescapable constituencies had to be rallied, their position as spokeswomen for an interest group established, compromises among members reached, deals made with the government or with the nationalists or both. In short these women organization were political. Some of the socio-political organizations are discussed in the following pages of the paper.

The Ladies Association was founded in 1886 by *Swarna Kumara Debi*, under auspices of *Brahmo Samaj*. Its object was to promote friendly intercourse among Indian ladies and to foster in them the spirit of service for the general welfare of the people. The

association also made provision for rescue homes for imparting education to poor girls enabling them to become *Zenana* teachers after proper training.¹

Stree Zoroastrian Mandal was established in 1903 by *Parsi* women of Bombay.² They formulated a scheme of visiting poor women and emphasizing to them the role of constructive work. They inspired poor women to secure economic independence by working in different cottage industries so that they might stop living on charity. They also distributed medicines food and milk among poor *Parsi* families. The organization also did good work in the field of education.³

Pandita Ramabai, an Indian activist, launched her Sharda Sadan (or Home for Learning) in Chowpatty, Bombay, on March 11, 1889.⁴ She established this organization to support a subject near and dear to her heart: providing protection and education to Hindu widowed young women. Pandita Ramabai began her effort to enhance the lives and possibilities of Indian women with this statement, after spending five years abroad in England and the United States. Women in this society were taught Christian ideas, but they were also free to practise their Hindu faith. The ShardaSadan was only one of her numerous projects aimed at improving women's education (from young girls to adults) and providing security to widows. After 1895, a new life began to surge around *Ramabai* and the number of women in *Sharda Samaj* rose to forty-nine. This Organization worked hard to improve the lives of widow women.⁵

Swarna Kumari founded the *Sakhi Samiti* (Society of Friends) in 1896. The Tagore family's other members were involved in her organisation.⁶ The society's mission was to support helpless orphans and widows. In 1898, Bharati and Balak published the following report:

*"The first aim of the Samiti is to help helpless orphans and widows. This will be done in two ways. In those cases where such widows and orphans have no near relations or if those relations have not the means of maintaining them the Sakhi Samiti will take their full responsibility. In other cases, the Samiti will give them help as far as possible. In the case of those women whose full responsibility the Samiti will take they will educate them and through them spread women's education. After they have finished their education they will take up the work of Zenana (female) education. The Samiti will give them remuneration for their work. In this way, two objectives will be accomplished. Hindu widows will be able to earn through service to others according to sanction of Hindu religion."*⁷

Sakhi Samiti's activities lasted until around 1906, when they were taken up by Hiranmoyee Bidhaba Ashram. The widows' home founded by Sashipada Banerjee in Baranagore, which is regarded as the first of its kind, motivated Hiranmoyee Devi, Swarnakumari's daughter, to found the MahilaBidhabaAshram (which was named after her after her death).⁸

Ramabai Ranade established the Hindu Ladies Social and Literary Club.⁹The aim of which was to impart religious, literary, medical and industrial instructions, by means of regular classes and institutions. She organized a number of classes for married women and widows to give them free training in sewing, knitting, and embroidery.¹⁰ She also arranged weekly lectures on first aid and subjects of general interest.¹¹

Shurid Samaj founded by *Sarla Devi Chaudhrani* in 1905, with a view to spiritualize the freedom struggle and in 1910 in face of bitter opposition, she founded *Bharat Stree Mandal* and worked as its secretary.¹²

One of the organization's key missions was to promote women's education, which was lacking at the time. To ameliorate the position of women throughout India, the organisation established offices in Lahore (then part of undivided India), Allahabad, Delhi, Karachi, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Bankura, Hazaribagh, and Kolkata (formerly Calcutta). The main goal was to bring Indian women closer together through a shared interest in the moral and material advancement of Indian women.¹³

Rameshwari Nehru formed the Prayag Mahila Samiti in difficult circumstances in 1909. It operated in a society where traditional ideas influenced gender norms, making it difficult for the majority of women to participate in public life.¹⁴ It was organised by Allahabad's elite women, including members from the Nehru family, with the goal of organising and mobilising women in the United Provinces. The *Prayag Mahila Samiti* had a remarkable 200 members, and its mouthpiece, the magazine *Stri Darpan*

¹ Asthana, P. 1974 *Women's Movement in India*, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, . p. 46.

² Desai, N. 1957, *Women in Modern India*, Vora & Co publication, Bombay, p.120

³ Ibid.

⁴ Asthana, P. *Op.cit.* p. 41-48

⁵ Ibid., p. 46

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p.50

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid, p.70

¹³ Ibid, p. 70

¹⁴ Thapar-Bjorkert,S. 2006 *Women in the Indian National Movement*, Sage Publication, London, pp. 65-67

(Women's Mirror), had almost 1,000 subscribers.¹⁵ *Stri Darpan*, which was published in Allahabad, disseminated the *Prayag Mahila Samiti's* political activities, linking the political movement against indentured labor emigration with the fledgling Indian women's movement.¹⁶ This organization articulated issues that were concerned with women's 'enlightenment', social reforms, and women's education. Political participation of these meetings remained confined to elite women. These issues were also articulated in another magazine published in Allahabad named as 'Chand'.¹⁷

"All India Muslim Ladies Conference" (Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam)¹⁸

Background:

This organization was founded on 1st March 1914, as a part of a ceremony inaugurating a new residence Hall for Aligarh Girl's School. Aligarh had been a center of the movement for modern education among Indian Muslims since Sir Syed Ahmad Khan founded Aligarh College there in 1875. The Muhammad Educational Conference founded in 1886, had begun a section to promote women's education in the late 1890s in reaction to the growing desire of western-educated Muslims to find educated life partners. The secretary of this section was Shaikh Abdullah, a Kashmiri Brahman who had converted to Islam, attended Aligarh College for the BA and law degrees. Among his other activities, he started an Urdu journal for women '*Khatun*' and in 1906 he founded a primary school for Muslims girls in Aligarh¹⁹. He was assisted by his wife Begam Abdullah who had been educated at home by his father. Sheikh and his wife believed that women's education was the key to the reform and advancement of the Muslim community in India.²⁰

The Sheikh and Begam Abdullah had to encounter many obstacles in their effort to establish a girls' school: attacks on their morality in Urdu press, lack of monetary support from fellow Muslims. However, the Sheikh secured the patronage of Begam of Bhopal, Sultan Jahan Begam then ruler of a small central India state. She was a highly educated lady, granted Aligarh Girls' school a monthly stipend and also gave generously towards the construction of a new residence hall at Girls' school Aligarh.²¹ This was the milestone in the development of women's education among Muslims as it could assure the parents that their daughters will be provided proper *Purdah* arrangements behind the high walls of the new residence hall and a proper supervision under the Begam Abdullah.²²

Sheikh Abdullah had invited prominent Muslim women from all over India on occasion of the opening of the new building. Sultan Shah Jahan Begum had presided over the ceremony. The wives of other Aligarh luminaries present there included Begam Aftab Khan and Nafis Dulhan Sherwani, their husbands were both local trustees of Aligarh College, Begam Sayyid Mahmud, widow of son Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. From Lahore came Begam Mian Muhammad Shafi, and her sister Begam Shah Din, (wife of Justice in the Punjab High Court). From Bombay came the Fyzee Sisters, Zohra, and Atiya, who had been educated in England, Fatima Arzu Begam sister of well-known Urdu Journalist Abul Kalam Azad, Waheeda Begam Yaqub editor of *Tahzib-e-Niswan* of Lahore²³ and Fatima Begam editor of Sharif Bibi another Lahore journal for women.²⁴

The main concern of these women leaders was the promotion of Muslim women's education throughout India. Begam in her ribbon-cutting speech quipped that the doors of the new hall (which was stuck when she tried to open it) symbolized the obstacles in the way of Muslim girls' education. She said we will succeed in overcoming these obstacles.²⁵ Muslims had not realized the importance of women's education for the progress of the community as a whole. The Government was willing to help but it was not possible without the initiatives from the people concerned. Even the Mohammad Educational Conference, she said would continue to pass resolutions but can do very little, until Muslim women become active on their own behalf. They as educated women had considered it an obligation to spread the word, to organize meetings, make speeches, to write articles, to raise funds, for schools. But the propaganda aspect was only one part of the work. They should also start schools and pay special attention to the training of teachers, to religious and moral instruction and to ensure adequate proper *Purdah* arrangements. The Begam's emphasis was upon education, but also on art of possible: Without adequate religious instruction and proper arrangements, Muslim parents would not send their daughters to school. Their job was to promote and send to supervise their daughters' education.²⁶

¹⁵ Nijhawan, S. 2014, Fallen Through the Nationalist and Feminist Grids of Analysis; Political Campaigning of Indian Women against Indentured Labour Emigration, *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, Sage Publication, 21, p. 114.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 67

¹⁸ The name of the conference was translated into English by its members. It will be referred to hereafter as the "Anjuman",

¹⁹ Minault, G. (ed.), 1981, *The Extended family, Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan*, Chankya publication, Delhi.. p. 87

²⁰ Abdullah, S. 1954, *Sawanah-e-Umri-e Abdullah Begam*, Aligarh Privately Printed, Aligarh, pp 14-19

²¹ Minault, *Op.cit*, p. 88

²² *Khatun*, woman journal published from Aligarh, X 2-3 (February-March) p.59, Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh

²³ Begam Yaqub was the daughter of the first marriage of Sayyid Mumtaz Ali, who founded *Tahzib Niswan* in 1898. Mumtaz Ali's second wife, Muhammadi Begam had been the editor of *Tahzib* until her untimely death in 1908. C.f. Minault, *Op.cit*, p. 89

²⁴ Fatima Begam was Daughter of Maulvi Mahbub Alam the editor of *Paisa Akhbar*, one of most popular Urdu newspapers in Punjab. C.f. Minault, *Op.cit*. p.89

²⁵ *Khatun*, Aligarh, X, 2-3 (Feb-March, 1914), p.28

²⁶ *Khatun*, Aligarh X, 2-3 (Feb-March, 1914), p.63

After the inaugural ceremony, the women reassembled to found Anjuman, which was dedicated to the advancement of education and rights for Muslim women²⁷. The Begam of Bhopal presided once more, emphasising the need of women's education, as without it, Muslim women would be unaware of their rights under Islamic law. She urged them to start the work of propagating education, start schools in their families, extended kin groups, and neighborhoods and to pay special attention to education and health care.²⁸

The meeting then elected officers and decided upon a program of action. In addition to the president, the Begam of Bhopal, and the vice president Waheeda Begam Yaquib, there was an honorary Secretary Nafis Dulhan Sherwani, and joint Secretary Begam Abdullah.²⁹ The working committee of ten members included Begam Syed Mahmud, Begam Aftab Ahmad Khan, Begam Muhammad Ishaq Khan, Bilquis Begam (a sister of Aftab Ahmad Khan), and Begam Haji Musa Khan, Begam Abdullah, Mrs. Khwaja Abdullah Majeed, Sikandar Jahan Begam, Khawaja Syed Jahan Sahiba, and Nafis Dulhan³⁰.

Seven women were selected from outside Aligarh viz., Mrs. Nazar Sajjad Sahiba (wife of well known Urdu writer and an author herself, Dehradun), Syeda Ehsaan-ul-Haq (Julundhar), Zehra Fyzee Of Bombay, Mrs. Raza-ul-lah (Bhawalpur), Begum Shah Din (Lahore), Iktidar Dulhan Sahiba (Bhopal), Begam Raja Naushad Ali Khan (Muradabad)³¹.

Following resolutions were passed, which became the main objectives of *Anjuman*³²

General Aims

- To work for Indian women's unity and agreement.
- To ensure support for women's education and to ensure that both religious education and practical training were included in the curriculum, and to overcome those obstacles which come in the way of women's education?
- The domestic issues in families, which generally had affected the national economy and society of the country. These issues were provided solutions in the conference. Some of them were:
 1. To have a conference every year in a different city, or failing that, to meet at Aligarh Girls School
 2. To found branches of the Anjuman in major cities and towns in India, for enduring the cause of the *Anjuman*.
 3. To urge the nation to establish more girls' schools.
 4. To contribute to the advancement of Aligarh Girls' School and to ensure that girls from all regions are admitted to the school and boarding house so that the entire community can profit from its efforts.
 5. To increase the publication and circulation of journals aimed at the spread of education and reform among women.
 6. To promote the writing and publication of books for women contains scholarly articles and intellectual thoughts. Also, the books which can help in child nourishment, health care, and homemaking.
 7. Local branches of this Anjuman endow scholarship for girl students of their area and send them to Aligarh Girls' school so that, female teachers will be available in these areas after completion of their course of study.
- No Muslim girl should marry before the age of sixteen, as earlier marriages have been shown to be detrimental to girls' education.

Sessions of *Anjuman*:

During the initial years the *Anjuman* started opening of local branches in Lahore, Delhi, Meerut, Jullundhur, Dehradun and in other few towns. Small girls' schools were set up by members of those branches. The working committee continued its work of supporting the girls' school in Aligarh.³³ The attendance of members of Anjuman in 1914 was thirty-nine and it rose to seventy-six in the first Annual Meeting in 1915 at Aligarh. In Meerut 2nd annual session in 1916, the number of members increased to 101. In Delhi at the 3rd annual session held in 1917, it raised to 127.³⁴

²⁷ ibid

²⁸ *Risale-e-Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam*, Lahore XXX,3-4 (March-April,1914), pp 18-24, C.f. Minuault, *Op.cit.* p.90

²⁹ Minuault, *Op.cit.* p..90

³⁰ *Khatun*, Aligarh, X, 2-3(Feb-March, 1914), p. 62

³¹ *Khatun* X, 2-3 (February-March, 1914), p. 28

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 61-63.

³³ Minuault, *Op.cit.* p. 93

³⁴ All India Muslim Ladies Conference Report of 1920, NMML, New Delhi

In 1918, at its fifth annual meeting, the number of members was raised to 159 when a group of prominent Punjabi Muslim women invited the conference to convene in Lahore. The sisters Begam Shafi and Begam Shah Din and their daughters Begam Shahnawaz and Begam Muhammad Rafi composed a local arrangements committee of remarkable skill and energy. They had been active in educational and social causes in the Punjab and with this effort sought to broaden the Indo-Muslim women's movement.³⁵ The conference was held in Faridkot House, Lahore on 3-5 March 1918 and more than 500 women attended it more than twice the previous conference.³⁶ Women from Punjab had a chance to meet women from Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, and Hyderabad and to stay up all night talking if they wanted. Further, the local committee had asked that all women wear only plain clothes-no gold, no heavy silks in the interest of symbolizing their sense of equality and desire for community service, as opposed to showing off their wealth and privilege. Accounts of the meeting noted the sense of solidarity and enthusiasm among the participants.³⁷

The conference itself provided several interesting developments. The All India aspiration of the Anjuman was reemphasized when girls' schools in Calcutta, Jullundur, Lahore and Meerut were all mentioned as recipients of financial aid from the membership. The resolution against polygamy proposed by Jahanara Shahnawaz as a first step to social reform of Muslims was passed by acclamation to the effect that:

*"The kind of polygamy which is practiced by certain sections the Muslims is against the true spirit of the Quran and of Islam and that it is inimical to our progress as a community. And that it is the duty of educated women to exercise their influence among their relations to put an end to this practice".*³⁸

The Muslim press was enraged by the resolution condemning polygamy. The largest Urdu newspaper for women in Punjab, *Tahzib Niswan*, supported the resolution, but others, including Rushdulkhairi, editor of *Ismat*, an Urdu monthly for women published in Delhi, denounced it and declared it anti-Islamic.³⁹

Sayyid Mumtaz Ali the founder of *Tahzib Niswan* commented on entire proceedings in pages of his journal. He has said that the *Anjuman* was one of the few opportunities for *Purdah* observing women to get to know their sisters from different regions of India or of different points of view. It was a beginning to foster an increased social consciousness among Muslim women and hence wished it well.⁴⁰

Sixth Annual session of the Anjuman was held in Calcutta on February 10-12, 1919. The invitation to hold a meeting in Calcutta from Mrs. Sakhawat Hussain, principle of Sakhawat Hussain Memorial Girls' school. Begam Khedive Jang (daughter of Imad-ul-Mulk, Sayyid Hussain Bilgrami, had been director of education in Nizam Government.), presides over the session. Nafis Dulhan, the secretary arrived in Calcutta a few days before the conference was to begin to supervise the local arrangements for the conference. The membership of Anjuman has reached 170 and increasing at a rapid pace. At the meeting, the officers who had served for five years were re-elected for another five-year term.⁴¹

Seventh Annual session was held in Agra on April 2-3, 1920 under the presidency of Begam Shafi.⁴² The honorary secretary visited a month before to make arrangements for the conference. She visited different families of Agra to make them familiar with the objectives of the *Anjuman* and got sympathy and help from them. One of the royal family members, Seth Suraj Bhan offered his house to host and thus the venue of the conference was selected and the members of the conference stayed there.⁴³

Posters were sent to the villages and towns and the venue of the conference was also published in local newspapers. The women of Agra responded positively and more than 500 women participated in the conference.⁴⁴ Women from surrounded areas like Etawah, Muthara, Fatehgarh, Hyderabad, Ferozabad, Fatehabad, Shahjahanpur, and Fathepur and a woman from Isfan Iran named as Lady Sir Daud Shahiba also participated.⁴⁵ On the first day of the conference after the inaugural ceremony, presidential address by Begam Shafi was delivered in which she focused on the importance of women's education. She began her speech by the following couplet in Urdu:⁴⁶

Zamana Naam hai Meratou mein tum ko batadouga

Ki jo taleem say baghyga naam is kamitadouga

³⁵ Begam Shahnawaz autobiography, *Father and Daughter*, Lahore, 1917, C.f. Minualt, *Op.cit.*, p.93

³⁶ *Tahzib-i-Niswan* (Lahore) XXI, March 30, 1918, pp. 199-201, hereafter cited as TN, C.f. Minualt, *Op.cit.* p. 94

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ TN XXI, April 29, 1918, pp. 245-49;

³⁹ Minualt, *Op.cit.*, p.94

⁴⁰ TN XXI, February 9, 1918, pp.94-96 Cf. Minualt, *Op.cit.* p.95

⁴¹ Ibid. p.97

⁴² TN XXIII, March 13, 1920, p. 164; April 17, 1920, pp. 243-48, C.f. Minualt, *Op.cit.* p. 97

⁴³ The Annual Report of All India Muslim Ladies Conference Agra (here after AIMLC), NMML, New Delhi, 1920, p.1st (alif)

Urdu source

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.3 (jeem)

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.5

She said, “Today need of our society is education, and by this I mean not simply education but the national education.”⁴⁷ She mentioned about the report of Calcutta university commission, which urged the government to take necessary steps to improve the education system of Calcutta University and make the syllabus relevant to present situation. She stressed that religious education should be part and parcel of national education. She also said that those girls who want to peruse higher education should have knowledge of *TasheerulBadan* (Anatomy) and Child nourishment and those who do not want to pursue higher education should have knowledge of health care, simple math, crafts, cooking, etc.⁴⁸ A resolution was passed in the last conference about to appeal to Muslim educationists to establish a course of study for women. We have selected the names of Muslim educationists and if needed financial support will be provided by Anjuman for the arrangement of their meeting.⁴⁹ She also stressed about the need for female teachers of all subjects. Mrs. *Mohd. Shafi* regrets the fact that educated women of noble families had not shown any concern for taking the responsibility of women education by recruiting themselves in National schools of the country and work upon it.⁵⁰ She also stressed upon writing and publication of books on women's education and said, “We should encourage Urdu writing among women authors”. She paid special thanks to Begam of Bhopal who has published her book named ‘*Khana-dari*’ which is very informative and useful for women.⁵¹ She also compared Hindu women and said they are far ahead of us in the field of education. She also gave reference about a Hindu women organization namely *Mangal Sabah* Lahore which worked for improvement of life of women.⁵² At last she highlighted the work done by Anjuman in these years like a girls’ school was opened in Etawah which was given 30 rupees monthly stipend, a girl of Multan given a stipend of 15 rupees per month for her education and a girl send to Delhi Diayain (maternity nurse) *madrassa* to learn nursing training there.⁵³

Resolutions Passed on the First Day of This Conference

Resolution First *Khilafat* Issue: the resolution was presented by Jahan Ara Begam and explained by Begam Abdullah by her vivid speech. The resolution was passed easily by the affirmation of Asgari Khanam and Zakiya sultan to the speech about ‘conditions of Muslims and impact of cooperation’ by all members. The resolution reads as,

“All India Muslim Ladies Conference session which is representing all Muslim women of India consider the *Khilafat* issue as an important religious issue and support the cause of pressurize British government to preserve the authority of the Ottoman Sultan as Caliph of Islam following the breakup of the Ottoman Empire”.⁵⁴

Resolution 2nd Anti Polygamy Resolution: This resolution was advocated before two years at the Lahore conference by Jahanara Shahnawaz Begam and appealed to women not to give their daughters and sisters for the 2nd marriage to a person whose first wife is alive. She presented this resolution again at this conference and once again it was passed. She urged that if we can convenience only ten of our brothers in India not to practice polygamy and our sisters not do injustice to their consubstantial, we will think that we had succeeded in our mission. Abdullah Begam, Mahmud Jahan Begam, Nafis Dulhan delivered speeches and explained in detail about its merits. Hindu women who were present in the conference also welcomed this step wholeheartedly.⁵⁵

Resolution 3rd Steps taken for Anti Polygamy

This resolution was advocated by Jahanara Shahnawaz Begam and passed by all 109 members.

- Resolution of anti-polygamy should be passed every year in annual conferences until this practice is ultimately rooted out from our society
- Members of the conference took an oath that they will not give their daughters, sisters, and other relatives’ sisters on whom they can take care of in the marriage of a person who wants to remarry despite his first wife being alive and healthy.
- Members present here at this conference will take an oath to take every possible step to remove this practice.⁵⁶

Following this resolution, the Jahanara Shahnawaz Begam delivered her speech; she quoted following Quranic verse and explained how some men misinterpreted it.⁵⁷

وَإِنْ جُنْتُمْ إِلَّا تَقْسُطُوا فِي الْبَيْتِ فَأَنْتُمْ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَنَىٰ وَتَلَّتْ وَرُبِعٌ ۖ فَإِنْ جُنْتُمْ إِلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاجِدَةٌ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ ۖ أَلَّا تَعُولُوا (4:3)

Verse 3 of Surah 4 An-Nisa (Women). A translation is shown below:

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.7

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.8

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp.8-9

⁵¹ Ibid, p.9-10

⁵² Ibid, p.15

⁵³ Ibid, p.18

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.4 (hay)

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.5(waw)

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.5 (waw)

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.89

If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, Marry women of your choice, Two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice.⁵⁸

Muslim men were misinterpreting this Quranic phrase to mean that they may have more than one wife, and they were abusing the provision of polygamy for "selfish purposes." "Polygamy was permitted by the Quran for a good reason. Men today take advantage of that provision for selfish reasons. The Quran only mentions polygamy once, and it is about conditional polygamy." Muslim Personal Law prohibits a Muslim from treating one wife unjustly, driving her out of the marriage house, and then marrying again.

Finally, a document of the agreement for anti-polygamy was prepared and 109 members signed and gave consent to it. Among them some names are as Mrs. Qurban Ali (Agra), Mrs Zakir Ali (Gulab khana Agra), Mrs Amjad Ali, Begam Jameel ul Rahman (Meerut), Jamela Khatun (Fatehgarh), Aisha Begam, Abdullah Begam Mrs Mohd Shafi, Nafis Dulhan, Mrs. Shahnawaz Begam, Gaeti Ara Begam, Asghari Khanam, Zakiya Sultan etc.⁵⁹

Resolution 4th Condolence of Maulvi Abud ur Rehman

Resolution 5th: The conference decided to establish permanent office for *Anjuman* in Aligarh, which will include a library and Ladies club, this resolution was presented by the president of this session Mrs. Shafi Begam and passed by all members. This was followed by a *nazm* of Nusheba Khatun of Hyderabad delivered by Asghari Khanum.⁶⁰

Day 2nd of the Agra session held on 3rd April 1920

Resolution 1st Primary Schools for Muslim girls: This resolution was presented by *Ashgari Khanum*, and supported by *Jahanara Begam*, *Mrs. Mohd Shafi*, *Geati Begam*, *Abdullah Begam*. This resolution urges that the women *Madaras* all over India teach religious knowledge to students and open new primary schools for Muslim girls in areas where there is no school available. To contribute to the already established schools to strengthen their base. The Anjuman is happy with the school opened by *Nafis Dulhan* in *Etawah* named as '*Conference school*'.⁶¹

Resolution 2nd Maternity Nurses School for girls:

This resolution was presented by *Jahanara Begam* and supported by *Nafis Dulhan Zakiya Sultana* etc. This resolution was of opinion that some girls should take admission to *Jinab Sadiq-ul-Mulk Badhur Madrasa Dayian* (maternity nurses school) for basic health care training which provides free education and charges for food only. Secretary of this Anjuman had already admitted a girl from *Dera Gazikhan* (a district of present Pakistan) in this *Madrasa* in March, 1920.⁶² This resolution was followed by the speech of Mrs. Arif Beham delivered by *Jahanara Begam* on the importance of medical education.

Resolution 3rd for Sager Fatima Girls School Agra:

An appeal for financial help for same school was made and an amount of 300 rupees was contributed by the members of the conference. Some of contributors were as *Mrs. Mohd Shafi*, *Nafis Dulhan Abdullah Begam*, *Mrs. Mirza Habib Hussein*, *Mrs. Qurban Ali*, *Shahnawaz Begam*, *Gaeti Begam*, *Mrs. Sakir Sahiba*, *Zakiya Sultana*, etc.⁶³

This amount was sent to this school in the hands of Mrs. Mohd Junaid. Some members like *Jaferi Begam* (wife of Nizam- u din), wife of *Nazim Ali Sahib* (Sub Registrar Agra), wife of *Syed Ahmed Ali* (Agra), *Noor Jahan Begam*. agreed to send monthly stipend to this school. A committee was also established for it, which included *Mrs. Mohd Junaid*, *Mrs. Zakir Ali*, *Mrs. Ziyarat Ali*, *Mrs. Qurban Ali*, *Akhteri Begam*, *Mrs. Hira Khan*, *Rukiya Begam*, *Bismillah Begam*, *Aisha Begam*, *Mrs. Tasaduk Ali*, etc. Some prestigious speeches were delivered in the conference like Mrs. *Himayun Mirza* delivered the speech on '*Reform of Traditions and Rituals*', followed by speech of *Bilquees Begam* on '*Women Education*' and then Speech of *Maqbool Fatima* on '*Women Education*'. In the earlier conference, a resolution to honor *Mumeena Begam* of *Bulandsher* and *Zahara Begam* of *Alweri* was passed and so in this conference, they were honored by the golden medal by the President of the conference. Mrs. Ahmad Arif Beham was also honored golden medal for her religious and educational contribution and this was sent to Calcutta by post. At the end annual report was read and concluded by the validatory address by the president of the conference.⁶⁴

From 1921 to 1923 no session of the conference was held and the 8th Annual session of the conference was held in Aligarh in November 1924, this conference was held here because men's conference was also held in Aligarh. Women came there comfortably with their men-folk.⁶⁵ (Not much information of this session was available to us).

9th Session of Anjuman in Malikpur, Berar held on 23-24 February 1925: This session was presided over by Mrs. Amir Hassan and the joint secretary was Begam Abdullah. In the last session of Aligarh, women of Malikpur had invited members of Anjuman to hold the next session in Malikpur Berar.⁶⁶ Among them was Begam Sahiba of Khawaja Qutib-ud-Din of Malikpur. More than four

⁵⁸ <https://quran.com/4/3?translations=17,19,20,22,84,18,21,95,85,101>

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.95

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.7 (zey)

⁶¹ Ibid, p.7 (zey)

⁶² Ibid, p.7 (zey)

⁶³ Ibid, p.8 (tuy)

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.9 (yey)

⁶⁵ The Annual Report of AIMLC 1925, NMML, New Delhi, 1925, p. 20

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 1-2

hundred women from Bombay, North Khandesh, Burhanpur, Nagpur, Amravati, Jabalpur, Calcutta, etc had attended the conference. Many of them delivered their speeches in the two-day session of the conference. The main focus of this conference was 'Reformation and Education of women'.⁶⁷ One of the important decisions taken here was approval of financial help for a girl from Kholapur who had passed F.A (matric). She wants to become a doctor by taking admission to medical college Poona. The course of study was seven years and the fee was two hundred annually plus boarding charges. Women of Khandesh, Malikpur named Mrs. Hyderi, Mrs. Qazi Shafiq-ud-Din, Mrs. Qazi Qadir-ud-din, Shah Noor Sahiba, etc. sympathized and collected some money for her. They also promised to send yearly stipend for the next 6 years of her course.⁶⁸ Provincial conference branches were opened in Poona, Allahabad, Bihar, and Hyderabad. Land for construction of office was also purchased in nine thousand rupees and part of this land worth of four thousand was granted by Mrs. AmirHassan for free. Following resolution was passed in this conference

- Appeal to local government to teach *Dinayat* as a part of the syllabus in Muslim women *Madrassa*, instead of Hindi that was made compulsory in other *madrassas*.
- Thanking Begam of Bhopal for her stipend of one lakh twenty thousand for Aligarh Muslim University.
- Appeal to local government to appoint a female Muslim inspector for exam and supervision in Girls' school of Berar
- This conference appeal to local government to frame the course of study in consultation with All India Muslim ladies conference for Muslim girls
- The government had already sanctioned the amount for construction of *Purdah* Schools but no action taken yet, we appeal the local government to take necessary steps for the construction of these schools.
- This conference appeals to the education department to recruit female teachers from Aligarh Girls School for Muslim girl Schools' in consultation with the general secretary of AIMLC.⁶⁹
- An individual resolution send by *JinabMehtab Khan*, Persian teacher of high school *Amravati*, appealed to government for recruitment of an another Persian teacher for government girls school, which was unanimously passed by the conference.
- A resolution was made to establish a library for women's college Aligarh by conference funds, on the condition that until *Anjuman's* office is not constructed, the library will work in Aligarh Women College and later on to be shifted to office. An appeal was sent to *Molvi Syed Mumtaz Ali* to compile a list of books on women's education and acquire some Islamic history books from *Dar-ul-Musnafeen Azamgarh* and sent to office of *Anjuman*.

At the end of 2nd day of the conference, vote of thanks was presented by Begam Khawaja Qutib-ud-din and the valedictory speech by Mrs. Amir Hassan, president of the conference.⁷⁰

Conclusion

Summarizing the career of *Anjuman* one may say that it had certainly fostered an increased sense of community and social consciousness among Muslim women. It had provided a respectable meeting place for *Purdah* observing women from many provinces, branching out from north India and Punjab to include representatives from Calcutta, central India, Bombay, and Madras.⁷¹

The *Anjuman* has continuously provided donations to Aligarh Girls' school. Local branches of *Anjuman* as well supported girls' education in their localities. A number of Muslims were active during *Khilafat* and *Non-Cooperation Movement*, even from behind the veils.

In 1927, *All India Women Conference* was founded; a few Muslim women became active in it. The Begam of Bhopal, patron of the *Anjuman* ceased her payment of stipend to it just before she died in early 1930. It was a setback to the *Anjuman*, due to which, the organization later ended to pay its monthly grant to Aligarh Girls College. In 1931 *NafisDulhan* reported that there were only three branches of the *Anjuman* working in Poona, Berar, and Calcutta in addition to Aligarh. The *Madras Anjuman-i-Khawatin-e-Islam* flourished under the leadership of *Rahmat-un-NisaBegam*.⁷² The Punjab branch too, which had flourished under the energetic direction of Begam Shahnawaz remained active. In 1936 the *Punjab Anjuman-i-Khawatin* transformed itself into the Women's branch of the *Punjab Muslim League*.⁷³ Thus the *Anjuman* during its early years contributed to a sense of solidarity among Muslim women from different regions of India. There were also references in their resolutions to Indian womanhood as a whole, but by and the specific measures they espoused were Muslim women Education and Social reform. The *Anjuman* serves as an excellent example of close interaction between social reform organizations and political parties in India. It shows the class nature of Indian social and political movements at the time, the importance of status, and of personal alliances and kinship in making of factions, all of which are important in understanding the course of Indian nationalism. It is thus an excellent example of the way in which the study of women's history can illuminate the history of society as a whole.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.3

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.4

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.4-6

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp.6-7

⁷¹ Minuault, *Op.cit* p.100

⁷² Rahmat-un-Nisa Begam, Ms of Autobiography, pp. 7-11; *C.f.* Minuault, *Op.cit.* p. 100

⁷³ TN XXXIX, May 2, 1936, p.430; *C.f.* Minuault, *Op.cit.* p. 100