

*It was with the dawn of an Islamic system of education that early childhood training got the attention it deserves.*

*But, paradoxically, the state of such pre-school training among the Muslim Community is far from enviable.*

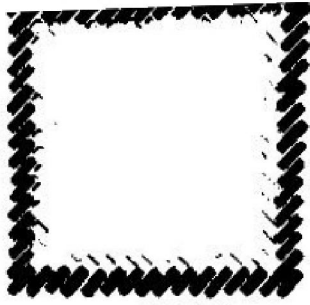
*The author, takes a close look at the whole scene.*



A glimpse of the statistical data of contemporary education in Kerala will reveal that Muslim children, especially those of Malabar area, are miserably backward in achievement at the primary and secondary levels of School education. A small percentage of average or above-average achievers at the School levels do reach the level of higher education, often taking advantage of the benefit of community reservation, but even they do not present commendable performance at the University examinations. It is high time we investigated into this miserable plight of the younger section of our community. We have been branded and denigrated as a community which is intellectually backward, unmotivated to learn, unprepared to accept the challenges of the time, and unconscious of its own inherent weaknesses. Unless we get out of this mire of lethargy and succeed in providing the best qualitative education to our children, we will be pushed further backward when the world marches into enviable vistas of progress and achievements. A slight quantitative improvement in literacy or even higher education owing to recent increase in educational facilities should not make us complacent. Such complacency will only paralyze our thoughts about enriching the human resources of our community.

## **EARLY EDUCATION IN MUSLIM COMMUNITY**

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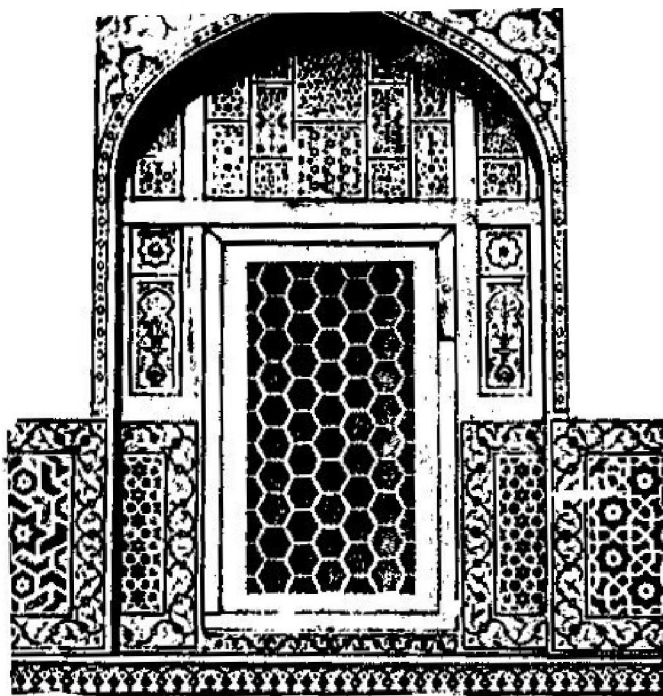


any specific and distinct objectives, or consideration for their mental faculties or stages of development. Quite unaware of the developmental aspects of the growing human organism which is to be shaped in the moulds of the Islamic concept of personality and culture, we handle him carelessly according to our whims and fancies, often making him neither a good Muslim nor a good individual. In our ignorance of his mental faculties we quite accidentally extinguish even the spark of spirituality in him and block his cognitive development. Just a peep at the process of instruction and learning at these institutions (the madrasas) will make things clearer. Children who are about 4 years are taken to the 'madrasas' which do not follow any well-designed curriculum, but which, especially now-a-days, follow some sort of unsophisticated instructional designs. The necessity of following a practical syllabus is being felt by the Organisers of such institutions, though many of them are not very clear about the role of a syllabus in the educational process. The children who attend these institutions have an irritatingly busy schedule of overeducation which possibly builds up aversion to the whole process of education. They rush to the 'madrasas' in the early morning hours (7 a.m.) even without having a proper breakfast, and return home hungry, irritated, offended, and often stuffed with undigested pieces of information. They again rush to School for another spell of five hour's instruction, and undergo the process of planned behavioural change in which he is theoretically treated like a rat or rabbit in the laboratory of Skinner, the psychologist who has influenced the modern process of education to a large extent. In a frenzy to free his child from the evil influence of the School the religiously sensitive parent does not let him rest even after the School hours. He is again sent to the evening or night classes in the madrasa. All these hectic overfeeding is the result of the true Muslim parents anxiety to provide his child with an education that integrates rational and-spiritual aspects which he hopes will equip his child with the skill of living in the world without sacrificing his true faith. The unexpected effect is that the whole system

of the child both mental (cognitive, affective, psycho-motor), and physical, get bogged down in the rut of boredom and artificiality. The whole life becomes monotonous and mechanical to him. A system that does not very much take into account the basic needs of the child is quite unscientific, even if it follows a Scientific syllabus or curriculum. But unfortunately our ambitious programme to develop good Muslims go amiss to a large extent, and instead of realizing the precious objective, we develop individuals with intellectually and emotionally stunted growth who miserably fail to achieve at higher levels of their education. Even our hypothesis that we succeed in fortifying their faith should be subjected to a test.

*The teacher and the method:* The absence of scientifically designed curriculum for early education itself indirectly suggests the existence of a disorganised process of instruction and learning. The fact that a large number of teachers who handle psychologically fragile and sensitive little human beings are neither trained in their profession nor aware of any scientific principles of the learning process indicates the gross irresponsibility of the Community. A large majority of the teachers who are employed in such institutions just for earning a living, of course, feed the children with uncooked information which remains undigested in their system and gradually develops nausea at such feeding. One can just imagine the results it breeds. It is not simply accidental that such teachers and the methods and techniques employed by them develop in the children an aversion, though not hostility, to the whole systems of education they undergo. Does it not in fact produce a diametrically opposite result? Unless we have a well-trained community of teachers who can be one with the children, who know their ins and outs, and who are able to handle them with psychological insight no system of early education can succeed. If the foundation is unscientific and shaky, how can the superstructure of the society be dependable and firm?

*Organisation:* The organisational pattern of the whole system of the early education of the community is in disarray. Though some institutions have introduced a system of levels or grades, it cannot be considered a well planned organisational step as long as it is not guided by a coherent and well-structured curriculum. Branding a particular level of education as pre-primary, nursery, kindergarten etc. or dividing the whole system into grades, does not make it organisationally meaningful unless the learning materials are properly selected and graded taking into account the developmental levels and the learning styles of children.



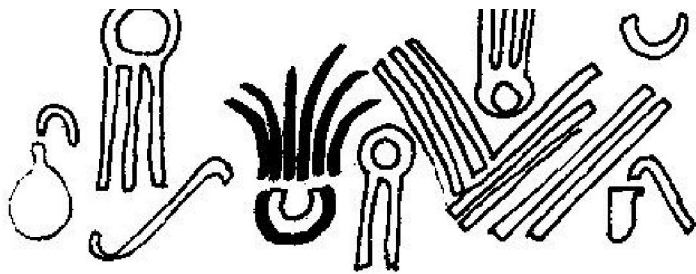
**Early Education:** No superstructure of education can be strong and dependable unless it is built on the firm foundation of early childhood education. Just a look at the education of the Muslim children around us will clearly reveal that we are building up their future on the weakest foundation which we have never directed our attention to or taken care of seriously. Islam has an enviable history of promoting education and making it obligatory to the whole community. From the very early period of Islam there has been a coherent system of early childhood education in existence in all Muslim societies of the world. Centuries before the enunciation of the principles of pre-school education in European countries, the Muslims had realized the paramount importance of early childhood education as a means of fortifying faith, building up character, and transmitting and preserving the culture. What continues as the 'madrasa' system of education in our region is a sort of shadow of or an apology for this system. The allegation that the Islamic system of education has failed to meet the challenges posed by the dazzling advancements in science and technology in the modern era is not quite unfounded. The vexing problem that the Muslim educationists have been trying to solve is that of a practical integration of the material and spiritual education. As Islam is a perfect way of life, it embraces all

aspects of life, temporal and spiritual, theoretical and practical, mental and physical. Therefore there have been attempts to recast Muslim education to meet the challenges of the changing times. But unfortunately, the Muslims of India have miserably failed to think in these lines.

The present system of early childhood education followed in our country, especially in the northern region of Kerala, of course follows a tradition of ill-organized system of Islamic education. It is often rightly alleged that the inability of the Muslim students to achieve better in education or face the intellectual challenges in life is largely due to the weakest foundation of early childhood education which does not provide for their proper cognitive, psychomotor, emotional and social development. Even an external analytical examination of the system in terms of its (a) Objectives (b) Curriculum (c) Methods of teaching and evaluation and (d) Organisational pattern will highlight some of its weaknesses to which our attention is to be directed.

**Objectives:** The existing system of early childhood education of Muslim children of our area has a very clear objective of making each and every child a true Muslim. This condensed statement of the objective can be elaborated in philosophical, spiritual, cultural, social, ethical and theological terms. Attainment of essential literacy development of character, acquisition of skill, efflorescence of Islamic cultural perspective, etc. are the different shades of elaboration of the meaning of this objective. The crucial question in this context is whether we attain this objective in its true sense. This question cannot be rightly answered without going deeper into the whole system. The fact that we have an objective does not guarantee that we realize it. The objective can only be achieved through an effective means, the means being the process of education. It is this fact which makes a close examination of the inter-related determinants such as curriculum, methods of teaching, techniques of evaluation, organisational pattern etc. relevant to any educational analysis.

**Curriculum:** The fact that there is no well-designed curriculum for early education of Muslim children is a significant defect which characterises the whole system as unscientific. A curriculum, it is to be noted, is different from a syllabus; it is not akin to a programme of instruction followed by individual institutions or institutions sponsored by respective agencies of education. The objectives of the system of education is closely linked with its curriculum; the two remain complementary in the sense that the curriculum is a means to the end. At present what happens in our institutions of early education is a sort of activity of imparting information to the educands without having



A better educational organisation demands effective supervision and leadership. Unfortunately the concept of educational leadership or supervision is quite unknown to this system. Whatever the teacher practises or feels right is unquestioningly accepted and continued.

The absence of better and dependable service conditions for the teacher makes him unmotivated to improve his professional skill or to continue in the same institution for long. The system is blind to the fact that the teachers' sense of safety and belonging enriches the educational environment. One can just imagine the intensity of the damage a disorganised, and independable system of education like this inflicts on the tender minds which are in need of maximum care.

*A way out?* The peripheral analysis above has been attempted with a view to presenting an outline of the pitiable plight of the early childhood education prevailing in the Muslim Community. What we require really is a deeper analysis which will help us to take remedial steps to strengthen the system. The tendency among social and religious workers to reorganise the system on an error-and-trial basis without identifying the casual factors of the weakness is to be deprecated and discouraged as it is almost like treating a fatal disease without proper diagnosis. Several research findings have indicated that one of the casual factors of the failure of the students to achieve at various levels of their education is their ineffective and undeveloped cognitive structure which is the reward of undergoing a poor and inadequate early education. Of course, an unscientific and impoverished education makes children ill-equipped to face intellectual challenges successfully in problem situations. It is pitiable that the organisation of the early education in our community is so poor that it keeps minds with ample potential lethargic and undeveloped; they remain shut off from the mainstream of national life. The only way out of this deep muddy rut lies in our determined new efforts to re-shape and reorganise the early education of Muslim children so as to enable them to become physically, intellectually and spiritually strong. In order to achieve this, all acceptable modern principles of education and the philosophy of Islam should be integrated and put to use.

*Some suggestions:* The practical creative endeavour towards the reconstruction of early education of our children should include building up of a network of centres of integrated pre-school education, ready to accept innovations in the field of modern education without sacrificing the cardinal tenets of Islam. Such centres must not only fortify children's Islamic faith, and present excellent models of Islamic behaviour and culture to them, but also sharpen their intellect, cultivate their sensibilities, enrich their vision and develop and perfect their psychomotor abilities. They should not be centres of pumping inert and disordered information into their cognitive system.

Active attention of the intelligentsia of the community should be directed to the setting up of a curriculum-centre which will have to structure multidimensional curricula for the education of different categories of students such as School going children, drop-outs, handicapped and disabled children, students of technical education institutions, students undergoing religious education etc. Production of suitable learning materials is a highly essential task to be carried out by experts. It should also be given an important place in the scheme of re-organisation.

It is strongly felt that our community's concept of the teacher must undergo a radical change. A community of teachers is an invaluable positive asset and resource to any society. Realising this fact, the teachers of the community, especially teachers at the level of early education, should be specially shaped and protected by all means. A teacher-education wing, committed to Islamic principles and aware of modern systems and models of teaching, must function continuously. No system of education or generation of students can be improved without the help of an army of committed and skilled teachers.

What is highly essential as the brain of the whole system is the existence of a well equipped research cell which must go into different educational and socio-economic problems of the society and plan for a better future with keen farsightedness. The establishment of such a cell should be considered a long-run investment as no research cell can work wonders within a short period. Research is a patient, slow, gradual and meticulous process which requires co-operation, and co-ordination of various potentials and resources. But such rigours will certainly pay.