

Madar-i-Millat Miss Fatima Jinnah's Vision of Education in Pakistan

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Not so eventful on its own, the life of Miss Fatima Jinnah became eminently eventful in the company of her illustrious brother, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Miss Fatima Jinnah, the youngest sister of Quaid-i-Azam, on account of her constant association with her great brother for about 28 years, 19 years continuously from 1929 to 1948,¹ had imbibed in her person many of the qualities for which her revered brother was well-known. This relationship was reciprocal. Her company had been a source of strength and inspiration for him both before and after the creation of Pakistan. She was therefore regarded by him as a “bright ray of light and hope”.² It was due to her training at the hands of the Quaid that she had become conversant with the national problems and could contribute her best to any situation she had to deal with. It was after the death of the Quaid, that “she became above all the foremost symbol and advocate of the cherished principles the Quaid-i-Azam had stood, fought and died for” and also “the principles she had herself stood by to the very end with courage and determination whatever the costs and whatever the consequences.”³

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1 No other person, not even the other two sisters of Quaid-i-Azam had such a long and close association with him.

2 Quaid-i-Azam, quoted in *Dawn*, July 31, 2003.

3 Sharif al Mujahid, “Fatima Jinnah’s Role in People’s Awakening”, *Nation*, July 8, 1995.

After the death of the Quaid on 11 September 1948, although she confined herself to a low-key role in national affairs, at times, she did emerge from her self-imposed seclusion and gave messages to the nation on Eid days, Independence days, and the birth and death anniversaries of Quaid-i-Azam. She also responded with a positive nod whenever she was invited to grace with her presence any function of educational or socio-cultural importance. As she was fully alive to the great role that education played in the advancement of a nation and as she was making untiring efforts, in spite of her old age, to advance the cause of education in Pakistan, she was requested in 1952 to preside over the annual convocation of Government Emerson College, Multan. The Students' Union also invited her to unveil the portrait of her brother because "She was eminently fitted for the performance of that ceremony by virtue of her great love of learning and long association with him as his sister, companion and confidante during his momentous career."⁴ She very graciously accepted the invitation and came over to Multan. Her visit to Emerson College Multan was highlighted in the college magazine, — *The Palm* in these words:

The English may rightly be proud of Shakespeare as an uncrowned monarch and of the Lady of the Lamp as an admitted philanthropist of the world. The Muslims of Pakistan are no less fortunate in having the two personalities who by dint of their unstinted effort and incessant toil enabled Pakistan to reach the highest pinnacle of glory and fame. One [the Quaid-i-Azam] has left this transitory world, the other [Miss Fatima Jinnah] is amidst us and is making every attempt on her part to reform the ills that have crept up into the nation and is trying to rid the posterity of the abysm of ignorance and the state of pathetic degradation.⁵

As she reached the College premises on 6 March 1952, she was heartily received by the Principal, members of the staff and the students and was conducted in the traditional procession to the convocation *pindal*. It was a spectacular scene, the teaching staff of the College in their academic robes, leading her to the *pindal*, while she, attired in pure white *gharara* dress looking like a fairy, was along with the Principal at the end of the procession. The proceedings having started, she was in the first instance requested

4 *The Palm, Emerson College Magazine*, p.20, Address presented to Miss Fatima Jinnah on behalf of Students' Union, Emerson College, Multan.

5 *Ibid.*, p.1, editorial article, "Khatun-i-Pakistan's Visit".

to unveil the Quaid's portrait. She was told that she was unveiling the portrait of a person,

who has made history by his monumental achievement and who has been the greatest personality the Muslim world has provided during the last few centuries... because his is the unique example of a statesman who, without compromising his principles for the sake of temporary gains, succeeded in achieving within an incredibly short time what seemed to be an impossible task.⁶

Having unveiled the portrait, she advised the students:

Study Quaid-i-Azam's life and imbibe his true spirit. This will reveal a personality determined to fight all odds, difficulties, trials and tribulations on the basis of axiomatic truth and universal dogmas and putting into practice in personal, social and political life and never flinching for a moment from them. Love for Quaid-i-Azam should insure you to follow his noble example to your own good and to the glory of Pakistan.⁷

The Principal in his address of welcome paid glowing tributes to the qualities of *Khatun-i-Pakistan* as she was known at that time. He reiterated:

You occupy a unique place in the heart of the nation. As the dear sister of our beloved Quaid-i-Azam, as his closest companion and associate, and as the gentle ministrant to his comfort during the last strenuous years, you already possess an imperishable claim to the love and reverence of every Pakistani. In your gracious presence, in the very tone of your voice, there is something to remind us of the aspect and accent of the great leader. You come to represent and typify in the imagination of the people all that is best and finest in our womanhood. Never was the title *Khatun-i-Pakistan* better deserved than that bestowed on you by the common consent of the nation. This day may therefore be regarded as a memorable day in the history of the college.⁸ ...the memory of your visit would be cherished and would continue to serve as an inspiration to all of us for many a day to come. You stand out as a noble and heroic figure in these stirring times and Mathew Arnold's glowing lines might as well be applied to you:

Beacon of hope ye appear
Languor is not in your hear
Weakness is not in your word
Weakness not in your brow
Ye alight in our van, at your voice
Panic, despair flee away

6 *Ibid.*, p.20.

7 *Ibid.*, p.32, convocation address delivered by Miss Fatima Jinnah.

8 *Ibid.*, p.22, Principal's Report.

Ye move through the ranks, recall
 The stragglers, refresh the outworn
 Praise, reinspire the brave⁹

In her convocation address, she thanked the Principal for inviting her to address the graduates who would be leaving the portals of their alma mater that day. She told the students that “the convocation is an assembly of graduates, enlightened elements of society, who are stepping into a new role of responsibility. In such an enlightened assembly it is proper to take stock of the country’s problems for the benefit of not only that assembly but for the benefit of the state as a whole.”¹⁰ In this connection, she reminded the audience of “the dynamic energy of the Quaid-i-Azam which brought about the birth of Pakistan and transformed his dream into reality on the 14 August 1947. Since then added she, five years had gone by to make us feel that the day of our independence was a day of distant past.”¹¹ She recounted the problems Pakistan was facing. In the first instance, she picked up the economic aspect of Pakistan and gave a very intelligent analysis. She said:

Independence of a country has no meaning unless its independence is assertive in economic sphere. Political independence is not an aim or the goal of a people. Political independence is a means to independence in the sphere of economics.¹² To redeem the pledge of improving the lot of common man, she suggested that instead of having a sense of complete contentment, we must strive for immediate industrial and economic development.¹³

She also referred to the educational problems and asserted that, “Education is indispensable to the maintenance and growth of freedom of thought, faith, enterprise and association. The role of education is therefore to ensure equal opportunity to all the individuals and to enable the citizens to understand, appraise and redirect forces, men and events for the benefit of the country.”¹⁴ For that purpose she was of the view that in order to enable the education to achieve its ends more successfully “its programmes

9 *Ibid.*, p.28.

10 *Ibid.*, Convocation address, p.29.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Ibid.*

and policies must be relevant to the characteristics and needs of our society and it must deal with current problems which are poverty, ill health, illiteracy and unemployment. To face these problems courage and spirit of sacrifice are the essential requirements.”¹⁵ She hoped that the students of Emerson College had developed those characteristics which were essential for the betterment of the individual as well as the *Millat*. “The first essential characteristic”, she told them, “is loyalty to your country. This loyalty cannot be achieved by acts of law and legislature or ordinances. It is to come from within as an effusion of love for something we hold very dear.”¹⁶ For that moral education was necessary. Moral education aimed at creating a perception among the Pakistanis, “that they should treat each other as equals, as persons who have equal rights to life, liberty and the pursuits of happiness.”¹⁷ There should be no contradiction “in the attitude of man to his duty to himself, to his community or the wider society of the world.”¹⁸ This contradiction was the product of selfishness. Solicitude about what happened to others fell prey to selfishness. For that propose, she exhorted them, “you owe a personal responsibility and the idea of responsibility contains the essence of morality and it must have honesty as its hallmark.”¹⁹ The idea of duty was also ingrained in it, duty which one owed to others, at the same time a mature person had the right to decide what his duty was.

She pointed out that, “if education is to be comprehensive, it should work for the unity of the most fundamental cultural interests of society. Graduates having gained professional or technical training in one field or the other must also be prepared for performing their duties in the practical world as a man, as a parent and as a citizen. Human wholeness and civic consciousness are essential for leading a civilized life in society.”²⁰

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*, pp.29-30.

17 *Ibid.*, p.30.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*

Then she surveyed the educational conditions in Pakistan's colleges and universities. According to her the main goal of education should be to build Pakistan "on the solid foundations of Quaid-i-Azam's teachings"²¹ for which consciousness of a common cultural heritage was to be created along with imparting specialized training in various fields of human knowledge. In practical life she emphasized, "there are several social, economic and political problems which require careful handling at the hands of a responsible citizen. Therefore, education should aim at providing men and women with the understanding of broad cultural foundation and then preparing them for a healthy role in community life and public affairs."²²

She also referred to the problems in various disciplines of scientific and technical education e.g., medicine, dentistry (which was her own subject), nursing, pharmacy and engineering etc. She recommended a national survey of the needs of those professions and supplying those needs in the teaching of these subjects. Without this survey university funds could not be best utilized, nor could vocational counselling be imparted properly.

While analysing the various imperatives in the field of education, she was not negligent to the prevailing poverty in society which impeded the acquisition of knowledge and educational progress. She therefore suggested that Government should look into the problem and alleviate poverty from those who were acquiring knowledge. She was also mindful of the economic condition of the teachers. She was of the view that those who were imparting knowledge should have "a well-balanced, well-rounded lives acquiring social skills and experience"²³ for which Government and society should be considerate and responsive.

She also stressed the role of higher education in national life. So far as universities and colleges were concerned, according to her, their role should not only be confined to improving the intellectual faculties of the students, rather "higher education must also play its vital role in Pakistan and discharge its responsibilities

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*, p.31.

in the interest of the individual and the higher interests of the state.”²⁴ If we neglected this side, she feared, “our way of life and cultural inheritance will not survive.”²⁵

Then she turned to the problem of universal literacy. She stressed that illiteracy should be destroyed from every nook and corner of our country for which concerted and sustained efforts were necessary. In this respect it was not only the duty of the state but of every individual in society that those of our brethren who were illiterate should be made literate through their efforts.

The Principal in his address had spoken about the setting up of an Adult Literacy Centre and had requested for her permission to associate her name with it and designate it as “Khatun-i-Pakistan Social Service League.” She not only approved the proposal but added that it was her innermost desire and she would feel proud of associating her name with it because she had all along been in favour of an adult literacy drive. She opined that in a democratic setup where political power was to be shared by every adult citizen, such a drive would go a long way to enable the people to understand their problems. She argued that to wield political power, people must have “sound sagacity and robust common sense coupled with an intimate knowledge of the current problems both in your midst and around you.”²⁶ To have this, she reiterated that you must create “a nation of literates able to understand, appreciate and analyse the events of the day and think independently.”²⁷ In the end she advised the recipients of degrees and told them:

You will be facing the world that may not show the same understanding that you had in the smaller world of your educational career. I hope and sincerely pray that the time you have spent in acquiring knowledge would enable you to face the destiny that is in store for you with courage and conviction. You are lucky today that there is no obstacle barring your way to the highest ambitions which you may have nourished for yourself but I hope these will be coupled with love, loyalty and service to your country and the *Millat*. Your nation and you have to fulfil your destiny. I pray that

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*, p.32.

27 *Ibid.*

courage of your convictions will help you to face the enemies of the country may they be from within or without.²⁸

She further elaborated and warned:

Never compromise on question of principle. Those who have attained greatness would not hesitate to sacrifice their all and draw the sword whenever a question of principle is involved. They would rather lose their lives than those principles. No temptation that this world could offer ever interfere with heir conduct. Quaid-i-Azam also followed that noble principle. You know on the question of Pakistan, he never compromised. I would, therefore, appeal to you and impress upon you that it is also your sacred duty to your God, to your country and to your *Millat* that you do not waver. You who are the inheritors of the greatest spiritual and worldly heritage should never compromise your principles whatever may be the temptations offered or sufferings threatened. These principles you must apply to your personal struggles in life as well as those of your country.²⁹

As she finished her address, she thanked the audience “with fervent prayer that Almighty may bless our young men and women with courage of their convictions and enable them to play their part boldly in this life with trust in God and duty to Pakistan as their motto.”³⁰

28 *Ibid.*, p.31.

29 *Ibid.*, pp.31-32.

30 *Ibid.*, p.32.