A. General Works on the History of Women’s Education


This chapter examines the provision of education for Muslim women of the elite classes in North India during the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal periods. Scanty historical evidence exists to show that education was available for ordinary women.


In his autobiography, Maulawī ʿAbdūl Qādir Khān (1780–1849), a resident of Rampur State who served in various positions in the East India Company and in the princely states, narrates that his learning and education began under the supervision of his maternal and paternal grandmothers. His grandmother taught him to read the Qur’ān. His paternal grandmother taught him the Pandnør of Sāʿādī and Mantuqīʾt-tair of Khwaja Farīduddīn Ṭāṭār. Both are Farsi classics.


That women’s education remained a low priority is evident from this paper, which has only one brief paragraph on the education of girls. Evidence, though brief and laconic, shows that in noble families, girls, like boys, were educated.


This small-sized book offers significant information on the historic development of Muslim women’s education. Describing the Silver Jubilee session of the All India Muslim Educational Conference for the year 1925, Amin records that women’s entry was barred, as they
demanded seats in the gallery with arrangements for pardah. Attiya Begam not only broke these restrictions but she addressed the male audience from behind the pardah condemning ‘the narrow-minded policy of Muslims towards women, and demanded a separate university for Muslim women.’ The first edition of the work had only seven chapters; the new edition has added four new chapters on the status of women’s education in Pakistan and India.

B. Beginning of Women’s New System of Education:
Local Enterprise and Colonial Efforts

I. Promotional Tracts for Female Education

1653. ‘ABDUL HAMĪD, MUḤAMMAD. Muḥif-un nisā’ [For the Benefits of Women]. Meerut, 1872. 85p. [U], OIOC. This didactic tale in favour of female education, was awarded a cash prize by the Director of Public Instruction, North-Western Provinces of Agra and Oudh.

1654. ‘ABDULLAH KHĀN. Inshā‘-yi muḥif-un nisā’. [Beneficial Compositions for Women] Lucknow: Nawalkishore pres, 1872. 117p. [U] OIOC/KKK. This book, in the form of letters exchanged between a female student and her woman teacher, discusses household responsibilities and duties. Some felt that once girls learn to read and write they would start communicating with men and bring shame to their family’s name. This book, on the contrary, openly instructs girls on how to write letters. The title page of the book quotes the prophet’s saying that seeking education is the duty of every Muslim man and woman. The book was written at the orders [hasb-ul hukm] of Mr. Kempson, Director Public Instruction, North-Western Provinces and Oudh for girls’ school.

1655. AḤMAD ‘ALĪ KHĀN, MUNSHĪ. Atālīq-i niswān (Women’s Preceptor) Lahore: Nawalkishore pres, 1904. 156p. [U], OIOC. This is a manual for household work and general education for women. Included are several recipes for cooking and home remedies for ailments. The author believed that women’s education should include what he wrote in his book.

1656. BILGRAMĪ, ZAHĪR. Fawā‘id-un nisā’ (Gains for Women). Lucknow: Nawalkishore pres, 1873. 188p. [U], OIOC.