

ADDRESS BY THE CONSUL GENERAL OF INDIA, HOUSTON AT THE 12TH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE FEDERATION OF ALIGARH ALUMNI ASSOCIATIONS OF USA, AT HOUSTON, ON 29 MAY 2013.

It gives me great pleasure in participating in today's 12th Annual Convention of the Federation of Aligarh Alumni Associations of USA. The occasion has special significance due to the presence of the Vice Chancellor, and a dear friend, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Zameeruddin Shah.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I have been fortunate in having been associated with two Vice Chancellors of the AMU. The first was my former boss, Hon'ble Vice President of India, Janab Hamid Ansari Saheb. The other is Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Shah who was a colleague when we worked together at the Indian Embassy in Riyadh.

I also have my own association with the University and the city. My father was a Senior Superintendent of Police at Aligarh in the late 70s and I studied for a year in 6th Grade at Our Lady Fatima School in Aligarh. I have fond memories of the city, of skating at the University and watching movies at the University Theatre.

In October 2008, a World Summit of AMU Alumni was held in at the University where Ansari Saheb was the Chief Guest.

His introspection on that occasion is still vivid in my mind.

He concluded that the Aligarh Movement's mission was to bring the fruits of modern education to the Muslim of India and included inculcating a spirit of rational thinking and scientific enquiry. The mission succeeded to a point, but failed to go beyond it. He said that one has to candidly admit that failure was conceptual as well as practical. We failed to appreciate that educational advancement cannot be sectional, nor can it be attained in a vacuum divorced from social change and without changes in levels of consciousness about evolving requirements of the world around us, nationally and internationally.

He was specific. He said:

- We succumbed to selectivity, and did not appreciate the true worth and imperative necessity of education for all, beginning with primary education. As a result illiteracy levels remain above the national level and, until quite recently, only sections of the well-to-do were exposed to modern and higher education.
- There was an inordinate delay in appreciating the need for female literacy and its relevance for educating new generations.
- While *Shikwa* about our condition was valid, there was no need to carry it to the point of incapacity for autonomous action. We failed to take note of, emulate and adapt, the initiatives taken by other communities in creative ventures in the field of education independent of government agencies.
- While adhering to the traditional virtue of charity, we did not (exceptions apart) appreciate the need for organised philanthropy for public purposes.

- All this happened while the pace of change in modern India gathered a new momentum. To participate in this exciting venture, relevant education became a pre-requisite.

He also proposed a few solutions for the Alumni. He noted that the Aligarh fraternity lay the foundations of a new approach through the following eight steps:

1. Ensure that in our own respective localities every child actually goes to primary school.
2. Ensure that all children, boys and girls, complete eight years of schooling.
3. Ensure that after class 8, children either proceed to class 10 or go to a vocational training centre.
4. Identify and assist those qualified to enter universities or professional institutions. Inculcate in them a spirit of competition. Affirmation of identity is a legitimate pursuit; seeking special dispensations will not get us very far.
5. Draw the maximum benefit from the scholarship schemes announced by the Government in recent months.
6. Mobilise opinion for channeling income from *Awkaf* for setting up new educational and professional institutions. This has been done in some places and the practice needs to be universalised.
7. Endeavour to go beyond charity to organised and focused philanthropy so that adequate resources are mobilised for medium and large scale interventions in the educational sector.

8. Seek equity, not concessions, from the State and draw practical lessons from success stories of others, including our own elsewhere.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The New Generation is something that every generation has labeled itself since time immemorial. We all think that we are different, born in a different world as compared to our parents and grandparents, that new changes brought by nature and technology have further empowered us and that we can do things that none have attempted before. For those of us in a highly innovative and entrepreneurial society like the United States, these perceptions are further accentuated.

In terms of the most important issue to the Aligarh Movement of education, the New Generation should see how best it could augment the developmental needs of equipping of laboratories, opening of new courses, up-gradation of facilities, construction of new hostels etc. The efforts of the IIT Alumni are a pointed on what could be done to promote the spirit and infrastructure of innovation and enterprise.

The second focus could be on reorientation of courses of study and of the methodology of teaching. All Indian universities should enhance their focus on top grade research efforts and AMU is no exception.

Thirdly, the Alumni could help widen the ambit on professional, vocational and technical education, especially through learning from successful efforts in community colleges in the US.

Friends

Remembering Sir Syed should not become merely a ritualistic exercise. It could, and should, become a moment of introspection and a beginning of action for regeneration and contributing to the good of the community and to the larger national interest.

JAI HIND.