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Education among Indian Muslims. Jamia Millia Islamia's journal *Payām-e ta'lim*

Margrit Pernau

Center for the History of Emotions, Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin, Germany
Email: pernaul@mpib-berlin.mpg.de

Abstract

The rapid changes caused by high imperialism and modernisation induced an orientation towards the future among the Indian Muslims: where was the community and the nation heading? What did the young generation need, in terms of both character and knowledge, to master the future and to shape it in such a way as to bring justice and civilisation, honour and prosperity to the country?

This article aims to investigate how such important, lofty questions on education were translated into everyday pedagogical practices by looking at *Payām-e ta'lim*, a journal for children that was brought out by the Jamia Millia Islamia, the nationalist Muslim university and school in Delhi, from 1926 onwards. *Payām* provided stories, knowledge, and ideas to students of Jamia's own primary and secondary schools, but which was also successfully aimed at a wider geographical spread.

Keywords: Education; emotions; Indian Muslims; Jamia Millia Islamia

The future was on everyone's mind. If the experience of the failed Revolt of 1857 had shown anything, it was that nothing was going to remain as it had been. The future was wide open and even the openness was of a new kind—pointing to the responsibility men (and later women) had for the destiny of their community that required action, immediately and urgently. Their lives were to be geared towards the new; towards *na'ī roshnī*, the light that provided one of the important keywords for the programme of the reformist Aligarh movement; towards *na'ī tahrīb*, the new civilisation that the novelist and short story writer Mirza Farhat Ullah Beg described with a delightful sense of humour;¹ towards *‘asr-e jadīd* and *nayā daur*, the new time, which became the title of a whole range of Urdu journals in the twentieth century.

As is true for all reform movements in the nineteenth century, education was seen as one of the most important ways to bring about the desired future. It would teach men, and especially women, what was wrong with their behaviour and customs and provide them with the knowledge and the emotional motivation they needed to change their lives, for their own sakes, but even more so for the sake of the community and its future. Education was how Sir Saiyid, the founder of the Aligarh College, envisaged enabling Muslims to hold their own and to proceed on the path towards an honourable future. Reflections on the appropriate education to enable young people to fight for and build up the new

¹ Farhat Ullah Beg, 'Purāni aur na'ī tahrīb ki takkar', in *Mazāmin-e Farhat*, (ed.) Saiyid 'Aziz Hasan (Delhi, 1927), pp. 56–73.

and soon-to-be independent India were central to the debates of the Non-cooperation movement and beyond.

This article aims to investigate how these important, lofty statements on education were translated into everyday pedagogical practices by looking at *Payām-e ta'lim*, a journal for children that was brought out by the Jamia Millia Islamia from 1926 onwards in an effort to provide stories, knowledge, and ideas to students of Jamia's own primary and secondary schools, but which was also successfully aimed at a wider geographical spread, reaching from Bombay to Rangoon and from Kashmir to Hyderabad.

The foundation of Jamia Millia Islamia

Francis Robinson has given us a masterly analysis of the struggle between the Old Party and the Young Party at Aligarh.² The Young Party, consisting of Mohammed Ali and his group, were young professionals, many of whom had been educated at Aligarh. They had started distancing themselves from the clientelist policy of the older generation from 1909 onwards, but they still hoped for close and friendly interaction with the British. This changed in 1912: the Balkan war and the Kanpur mosque incident were read as intentional hurts to Muslim sentiments and led to large-scale agitations all over North India, which increasingly drew on an Urdu vocabulary and religious sentiments. The Non-cooperation movement after the war brought together the forces of the Young Party, the ulema, and the Congress.³

Non-cooperation with the institutions set up by the colonial government included an appeal to students to leave government-funded schools, colleges, and universities. A large number of young men responded to this appeal, among them many students of Aligarh Muslim University, which had been granted university status just weeks previously. The foundation of Jamia Millia Islamia as a university, which was to be both Muslim and nationalist, on 29 October 1920 has often been discussed.⁴ The first months, living together in tents set up in front of the college's mosque, the poverty and hard work, the communion between teachers and students, the intensity of their hopes for the future, became a reference point for the generations to come and constituted the affective core of the institution.

Gandhi promised funds for a year, and Mohammed Ali headed the committee that wrote the first curriculum.⁵ It underlined the Islamic character of the teaching, from the primary school to the university level: pupils had to become 'not only men of culture according to modern standards, but true Musalmans imbued with the spirit of Islam'.⁶ Therefore they not only received instruction in the Quran, the prayers, the theological foundations of the faith (*aqā'id*), and the religious law, but they were also to learn Arabic as a living language, replacing English as the cosmopolitan means of communication.⁷ The medium of instruction was to be the vernacular, so as to deepen the impact of what they learned on the hearts and minds of the students. English would not be left out, but was only to be taught at secondary level, together with other European languages.

² Francis Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims. The Politics of the United Provinces Muslims 1860-1923* (Cambridge, 1974), chapters 5 and 6.

³ *Ibid.*, chapter 7.

⁴ For a very good summary of Jamia's history, see Mushirul Hasan and Rakhshanda Jalil, *Partners in Freedom. Jamia Millia Islamia* (Delhi, 2006). For an excellent analysis of the related history of Aligarh and Jamia, see Laurence Gautier, 'A laboratory for a composite India? Jamia Millia Islamia around the time of partition', *Modern Asian Studies* 54.1 (2020), pp. 199-249.

⁵ Mohammed Ali, *A Scheme of Studies for National Muslim Educational Institutions in India* (Bombay, 1921).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

The other subjects taught were rather conventional: reading and writing, arithmetic, the history and geography of India and the Islamic world, the constitution, the rights and duties of citizens, and science (as far as possible without a laboratory, which was beyond the national schools' financial means). The Gandhian impact was most visible in the inclusion of compulsory manual training, enabling the students to pursue a vocation and 'get rid of the present financial helplessness and dependence upon employment as clerks or other low paid employees in the public service'.⁸ This would 'impress the educated young with the dignity and importance of labour, and also remove that estrangement that exists at present between the educated classes and the masses dependent upon vocations'.⁹

The members of the committee hoped that the elimination of English as medium of instruction would leave the pupils with enough time and mental energy to cope with this huge programme. In addition to Urdu, some Hindi and Persian, one or two European languages, the basic Islamic studies curriculum of Deoband, history, geography, law, and science, as well as vocational training would be imparted. The young men emerging from this institution at the age of 17 would be men of culture. They would be *sharif* in behaviour like the students of Aligarh,¹⁰ pious like the ulema, and devoted to providing for the needs of their simple lives by working with their hands, like Gandhians.

New education—a transnational movement

Jamia's first years were marked by improvisation and political as well as emotional turbulence. Its teachers and leading figures were participants in the Non-cooperation movement, always aware that they could be called on to organise some part of the campaign or be carried off to prison at any moment. Their temporal horizon was limited, their future plans restricted to the next few months or perhaps a year or two. After this, they believed, everything would have changed beyond recognition. This did not mean that the pedagogical project lost its importance—the new times and the new India still needed a new system of education to create men and women of the future—but the actual teaching had to be adapted to the needs of the hour. This slowly changed once Gandhi called off the Non-cooperation movement in 1922. After the first disappointment, the struggle adapted to the new timetable. The goals were still the same, but they would take much longer to achieve. Accordingly, passion (*josh*) slowly gave way to more stable emotions, *himmat* (courage and energy) central among them. Jamia, too, had to begin thinking about developing sustainable and long-term structures, if it wanted to be part of this drawn-out battle.

In 1923, three young men, who in at least one case had been linked to Jamia since the very beginning, travelled to Berlin to pursue their studies and train for a leading role in the service of the national movement. Zakir Husain did a PhD in economics with Werner Sombart, Abid Husain was awarded his PhD with Eduard Spranger in philosophy and pedagogy, and Muhammad Mujeeb, who already had a degree in history from the University of Oxford, studied printing. The years in Berlin were formative for all the three of them, and it was during their time there that they decided to devote their work and life to Jamia. If Mohammed Ali and the Khilafat movement saw the establishment of Jamia in the context of the struggle for Aligarh,¹¹ the fledgling institution now started to develop a dynamic of its own. For instance, it no longer addressed only young men of college age, but became an all-encompassing educational venture, taking inspiration from the German version of new education movement, the *Reformpädagogik*. However, Zakir Husain and his friends

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁰ For the importance of the *sharif* culture of respectability, see David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation. Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton, 1978).

¹¹ Muhammad Mujeeb, *Dr. Zakir Husain. A Biography* (Delhi, 1972), p. 40.

never simply applied their German experiences to their new tasks, but rather used them as inspiration to create something unique.¹²

Soon after his return from Berlin, Abid Husain wrote a lengthy article on Jamia and its role in Muslim education. Jamia, he explained, had the triple task of helping children develop into *insān-e kāmīl* (perfect men), training all their faculties, intellectual as well as physical, so that they could reach a state of balance and harmony; into *sachā Musalmān* (true Muslims), by making them familiar with Islamic culture in all its aspects; and into *pakkā Hindustānī* (real Indians), awakening in them not only the love of the motherland, but also the awareness that they had shared the country and its water and air with their Hindu brothers for many generations. They could develop a common nationality only through a joint effort. Emotion was central to this educational project. It was at the core of Abid Husain's interpretation of the decline and rise of a community: it was the proper alignment between this-worldly organisation and faith, he explained, that let the blood of life course through the veins of a community. Once this flow was disrupted, the desire for life faded, hearts were overwhelmed by despair (*yās, mayūs*), and decline ended in slavery. To remedy such a development, education needed to be more than the imparting of pre-determined knowledge. Rather, the aim was to help the children experience and make sense of the beauty of their country, its art and nature. Instead of transmitting book knowledge only, this combination of experience and instruction would help children to be able to make their own decisions. These interpretations and decisions, the children had to learn, were never permanent, but could be revised at a later stage, in the light of new experiences.¹³

This experimental character marked teaching in Jamia's early years. What the teachers shared was a belief in the importance of their work, both for every individual child and also for the community as a whole,¹⁴ as well as their dissatisfaction with traditional, book-centred teaching methods.¹⁵ Instead of viewing teaching as a profession like any other, a profession, moreover, that did not seem to require much training, they believed in the importance of an affective relation to the pupils, the cultivation of a bond of the heart. Good teaching was based on the *khāndānī tariqā*, the family way of interaction, which at times made the children forget that they were addressing their teacher, calling them *abbā jān* or *nānā abbā*, father or grandfather, instead.¹⁶ It linked primary teaching back to patterns of interaction in the extended family. The transformation might have gone both ways, but it is not clear if this was ever intended, and if the extension of the democratic and egalitarian ethos to the family was ever tried.¹⁷

¹² Joachim Oesterheld, 'Zakir Husain. Begegnungen und Erfahrungen bei der Suche nach moderner Bildung für ein freies Indien', in *Akteure des Wandels? Lebensläufe und Gruppenbilder an Schnittstellen von Kulturen*, (eds) Petra Heidrich and Heike Liebau (Berlin, 2001), pp. 105–130; Joachim Oesterheld, 'Bildung nach der Kolonialzeit. Zakir Husain und nationale Bildung für ein freies Indien, 1920–1947', in *Abgrenzung und Aneignung in der Globalisierung: Asien, Afrika und Europa seit dem 18. Jahrhundert*, (ed.) Henner Fürtig (Berlin, 2011), pp. 131–140; Razak Khan, 'Entanglements of translation: psychology, pedagogy, and youth reform in German and Urdu', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40 (2020), pp. 95–308. For a broader picture of the interactions between the Indian students and their German friends, see Gerdien Jonker, *On the Margin. Jews and Muslims in Interwar Berlin* (Leiden, 2020).

¹³ Syed 'Abid Husain, 'Musalmānon kī ta'lim aur Jamia Millia', *Jamia May* (1926), pp. 289–298.

¹⁴ 'Abdul Ghafar Mudholi, 'Bachchon kī ta'lim aur tarbiyat', *Payām-e ta'lim* 1 March (1932).

¹⁵ Saiyid Ahmad 'Ali, 'Akhlāq aur ta'lim', *Payām-e ta'lim* 21 February (1931). What was at stake here was less the opposition between oral and print that Francis Robinson so perceptively drew out (Francis Robinson, 'Technology and religious change: Islam and the impact of print', *Modern Asian Studies* 27.1 (1993), pp. 229–251), but the difference between knowledge gained from individual experience and knowledge based on books, in whatever way they were transmitted.

¹⁶ Mudholi, 'Bachchon kī ta'lim'.

¹⁷ For a rather traditional exhortation to show gratitude to one's parents and to always be ready to serve them, see Fazl ur Rahmān, 'Walidain kī khidmat-guzārī', *Payām-e ta'lim* 7 November (1930), pp. 7–8.

Payām-e ta'lim, the first phase (1926–1930)

Jamia had first founded a monthly journal, *Jamia*, in 1922 in Aligarh. The first issue to have been traced thus far is from July 1923. Its editor was Nur ul Rahman and, with almost 80 pages, it was on the voluminous side for a monthly issue. Its articles ranged from reports on activities and events in Jamia and the wider Muslim community, reflections on education and civilisation, to reports on other countries, mostly on their education and social movements.

The very first edition of *Payām-e ta'lim*, published on 15 April 1926, seems to be lost. Fortunately, its editorial was partly reproduced in the Jubilee Number of 1946. In it Khwaja Abdul Majid, at that time Shaikh ul Jamia, an office corresponding to vice chancellor, explained that for some time he had felt the need for a weekly or at least fortnightly journal for the propagation of the aims of Jamia. But neither he nor the staff of Jamia had the time to take up this task. This changed with the return of Zakir Husain, Abid Husain, and Muhammad Mujeeb from Berlin. While Jamia had been brought to life through a political movement, now was the time to focus on the spreading of knowledge, as it was only through knowledge that a *qaum* (a community or a nation) could be kept alive and lead to progress. The new journal was to focus on topics related mainly to Jamia and to education, thus spreading the message and garnering a wide support network for its ventures.¹⁸

Muhammad Hasin Hasan, the editor of the Jubilee Number, added an article of his own, recollecting the early history of the journal. Its first editor was Khwaja Hafiz Faiyaz Ahmad, who later became a leading figure at Jamia Hamdard. After some months, he was followed by Sa'id Ansari, who had trained as a journalist at Mohammed Ali's newspaper *Hamdard*. He was joined by Syed Abid Husain; and when he moved to the United States, Saiyid Nasir Ahmad joined the editorial team for a brief time. After 1935, Muhammed Hasin Hasan became the editor and the moving spirit of the journal.¹⁹

In the beginning, the main emphasis of *Payām-e ta'lim* was on the discussion of educational matters, and reporting on the day-to-day events at Jamia—this could be anything from the arrest of a woman who had stolen a prayer rug, felicitations for the wedding of a student, the announcement of *mushairas* to be held at Jamia, or lengthy reports on the diverse fundraising missions by leading figures from Jamia. However, from the start, the journal also included some short stories for children. Muhammad Mujeeb wrote a tale about a man who had returned from a distant country and boasted about the many strange things he had seen, among them a cucumber as big as a house. His friend took him for a walk, leading to an enchanted bridge, which only truthful people could cross safely—liars, however, were thrown into the deep water. This had happened to two editors of a journal recently, Mujeeb mentioned in a humorous aside, which might have been lost on the children, but certainly not on the adults reading the story out to them. Frightened, the man retracted his claim and admitted that the cucumber had been of an ordinary size.²⁰

A few weeks later Umar Faruqi contributed a small piece on the clock of the heart.²¹ Eight-year-old Umar was sitting in the garden, leafing through *Payām-e ta'lim*. However, only one of the articles addressed him and that in such a boring way that did not touch his heart. He met Zaid, a friend, who showed him his new alarm clock, which helped

¹⁸ Muhammad Hasin Hassān, 'Payām-e ta'lim kā pahlā mazmūn', *Payām-e ta'lim Jubilee Number* (1946, reprint from the yearbook of 1935), pp. 77–79.

¹⁹ Muhammad Hasin Hassān, 'Payām-e ta'lim kī kahānī', *Payām-e ta'lim Jubilee Number* (1946), pp. 194–204.

²⁰ Muhammad Mujeeb, 'Ek jūte kī kahānī, bachchon ke liye', *Payām-e ta'lim* 15 July (1926), pp. 2–3.

²¹ Umar Faruqi, 'Dil kī ghārī. Fasāna', *Payām-e ta'lim* 21 September (1926), p. 5.

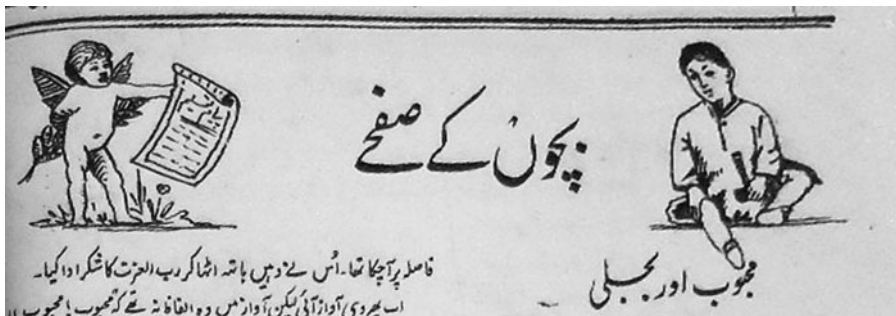


Figure 1. *Payām-e ta'lim* 7 May (1928), p. 12.

him rise early in the morning and not miss his work. When Umar envied him, Zaid pointed out that the boy, too, had an alarm clock in his heart, which alerted him whenever he was about to do something bad. Umar did not believe him, but then he heard his mother calling. Instead of running off to play with his friends, he obeyed her call and told Zaid: you were right, the alarm clock of the heart worked. I wanted to go and play when mother called me, but the alarm clock told me: don't do this!

Still, these stories did not change the overall purpose of *Payām-e ta'lim* as a journal for adult readers. Even the children's stories could hardly be read by children on their own. The pages were crammed, as paper was expensive and Jamia notoriously short of money. Slowly, however, the style became more child-friendly, as a couple of pages, the *bachchon ke safhe*, were set apart, and sparingly illustrated with drawings (see Figure 1).

It was only in 1930 that the division of labour between *Jamia* and *Payām-e ta'lim* was neatly established. Henceforth, *Jamia* addressed the adults, providing information and think pieces. *Payām-e ta'lim* became a fully fledged children's journal and adapted its topics, its style of writing, and its visual layout to its young audience. The picture on the title page summed up many of *Jamia's* ideals: the scene was in nature, but not too far away from the city and the mosque. Books were important, as shown by the woman reading to the children; however, she was not an authority figure—she could also have been the children's older sister. And, while the children are fascinated by her reading, they seemed to have interrupted their play for just a moment, before they run off again with their balls and their toy horses or continue climbing the tree (see Figure 2).

The message of *Payām-e ta'lim*, and of *Jamia* more generally, was that education, and especially the education of young children, could not be separated from everyday life. While books and the knowledge they provided were important, so were play and nature activities. Children needed to learn, but this should not prevent them from having fun and enjoying their lives. The aim was not to turn them into little hedonists, but to allow them to fully develop their mental, spiritual, and physical faculties, which one day soon they would need to serve the community and the nation.

Urdu children's journals

What were the models for children's journals in Urdu on which the editors could have drawn? The first journal, or at least the first that had a noticeable audience, was brought out by Mahbub Alam, the editor of Lahore's *Paisa Akhbār*, one of the most influential daily newspapers of its time. Born in Gujranwala in 1862, thus a generation before the young leaders of *Jamia*, Mahbub Alam supported the Aligarh movement in its belief that only collaboration with the colonial government could redeem the social and political fate

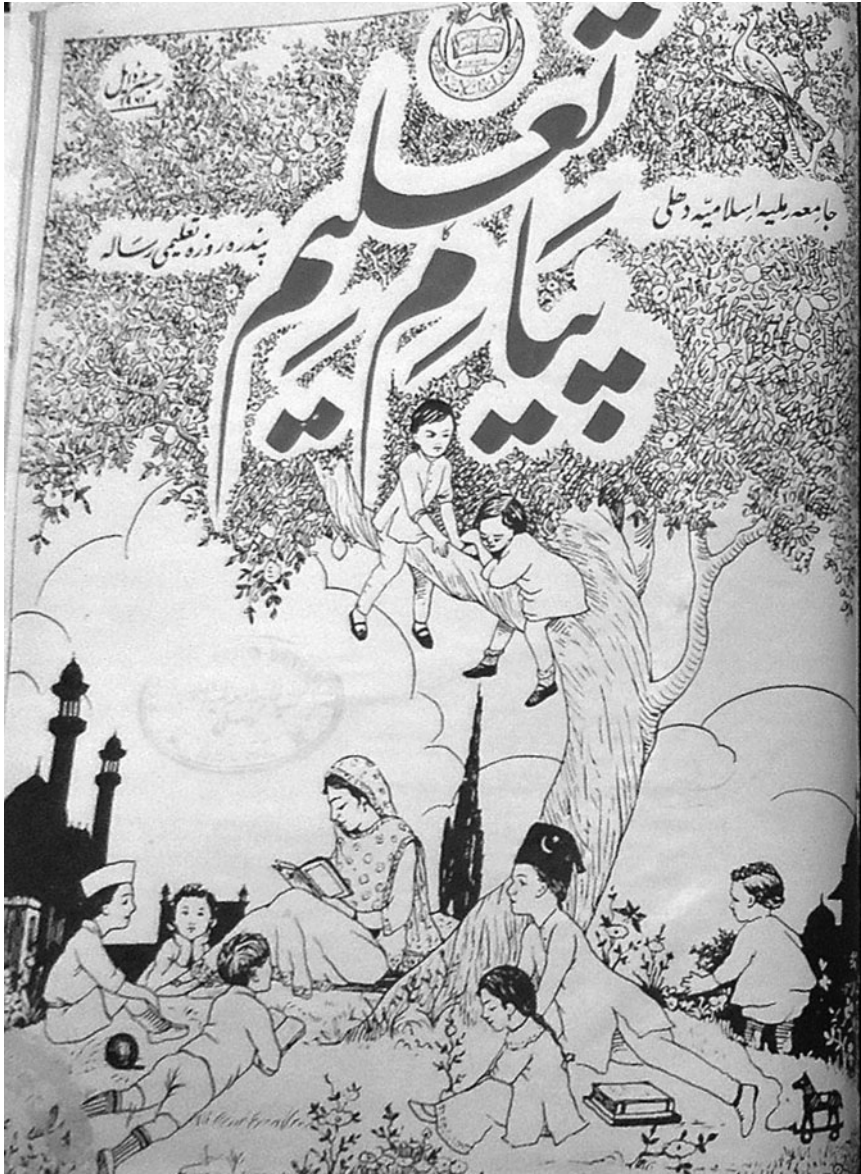


Figure 2. *Payām-e ta'lim* 21 June (1930), cover.

of the Muslim community, as well as in its conviction that the path to progress lay in education.²²

In May 1902, he founded the *Bachchon kā Akhbār* (Children's Newspaper). Although it was bulky and expensive, limiting its audience to well-off and educated families, it quickly expanded its audience and within a year was selling over a thousand copies per issue. In accordance with the pursuit of rationality, Mahbub Alam distanced the journal from the

²² Imdād Sabrī, *Tārīkh-e sahāfat-e urdū*, 4 vols (Delhi, 1953), vol. 3, pp. 505–525. For more details, see Margrit Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity in Colonial India. From Balance to Fervor* (Delhi, 2019), pp. 130–134.

dāstān tradition and avoided stories of ‘kings and traders, genii, ghosts, witches and magicians’, focusing instead on the everyday world of children.²³ The journal focused on articles providing moral education, be it in the guise of biographies of great men the readers were told to emulate, or in the form of good advice: from avoiding health risks and training the body through athletic games, to the exhortation to work hard, be punctual, and always to obey one’s elders. A special column on children in other parts of the world fuelled the curiosity of its readers—the counterpart of reporting on women in other countries, which was a standard feature in journals for women. This cosmopolitanism, both juvenile and feminine, was important, perhaps beyond the intentions of the editors, as it opened up the imagination of its readers and allowed them to think of a world different from the one they knew: things need not be the way they had always been.

These lessons were matched by some lighter sections, containing riddles, pictures, and poems, as well as a *Bachchon kā Majlis*, to which children under the age of 13 were encouraged to submit their own writings. While contributors sometimes simply retold stories they had heard, they also described their own experiences.

The tone was more playful in the second journal for children—*Phūl*—an offshoot of the famous women’s magazine *Tahzib un Niswān*, brought out by Mumtaz Ali and Muhammadi Begam.²⁴ Muhammadi Begam was also the driving force behind the establishment of *Phūl* in 1909. When she passed away before the first issue was published, Nazr ul Baqr, the daughter of a friend of Mumtaz Ali, was asked to take over the editorship.²⁵ Without institutional backing, Nazr drew together a whole network of contributors, mostly women, who worked together as an imagined family, joining in the efforts to provide education for the next generation. Unlike the stern and heavy *Bachchon kā Akhbār*, which seldom let the children forget that they were being educated, *Phūl* only had 16 pages, 12 of which contained stories and poems. These were certainly not devoid of a moral message.²⁶ Still, one often gets the feeling that the authors and their audience came together in a shared joy in narration. Here, too, we find stories from the lifeworld of the children, but also tales in the tradition of the *Panchatantra*, or modelled on short *dāstāns*, including *jinn*s, fairies, and magic.²⁷ The rest of the pages contained small items of news, announcements, competitions for articles written by the children, as well as letters to the editors, in which the readers shared their news, from the birth of a baby brother, to their joy during the Eid celebrations. More so than the stories, it was these news items that created a feeling of belonging to the *Phūl* family, a first step in being socialised into an emotional community beyond the family and the neighbourhood.

A world of stories

Payām-e ta‘līm built on this tradition of light-hearted storytelling and sharing a life world, rather than on moral *akhlāq* literature. Instead of stories reflecting the grand claims of

²³ Mahbub ‘Alam, *Urdū sahāfat ek nādir tārīkh* (Lahore, 1992), p. 133.

²⁴ For *Tahzib un Niswān*, see Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars. Women’s Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1998), pp. 110–122. With the exception of *Payam-e ta‘līm*, most early children’s journals were an off-spring of a journal for women, or were founded alongside them.

²⁵ On her life and autobiography, see Asiya Alam, ‘Interrupted stories. Self-narratives of Nazr Sajjad Hyder’, in *Speaking of the Self: Gender, Performance, and Autobiography in South Asia*, (eds) Anshu Malhotra and Siobhan Lambert Hurley (Durham, 2015), pp. 72–95.

²⁶ Eve Tignol, ‘The language of shame. A study of emotion in an early-twentieth century Urdu children’s periodical (*Phul*)’, special issue: ‘Emotions in South Asia’ of *South Asian History and Culture*, edited by Margrit Pernau, 12.2–3 (2021), pp. 222–244.

²⁷ On the *dāstān* tradition, see Pasha M. Khan, *The Broken Spell. Indian Storytelling and the Romance Genre in Persian and Urdu* (Detroit, 2019).

Jamia's first years—claims of creating an education that would break with the past as a first step on the way to a new world and a new age—the stories showed continuity in the genres as well as the messages.

From the beginning, everyone who had or discovered a talent for writing became involved in penning stories for children of different ages, irrespective of the other functions they fulfilled for Jamia. This included Zakir Husain and Muhammad Mujeeb (the latter also regularly authoring plays for Jamia's theatre productions, a topic that would merit an investigation of its own). From the 1930s onwards, Muhammad Hasin Hasan, *Payām-e ta'lim*'s editor, drew on a whole network of friends and acquaintances he could persuade to contribute. As a second step he also had a close working relationship with the Maktaba Jamia, Jamia's publishing house, to bring out these stories in book form.²⁸ Some of these collections of stories and poems became classics of Urdu children's literature and continued to be reprinted into the 1960s and 1970s.²⁹

Many stories reflected the lifeworld of their readers. Shaukat R. Begam told the story of little Akhtar Mian, who had to walk through the rain to fetch his favourite sweets from the kitchen (reflecting traditional architecture, where rooms would be built around a central courtyard). He asked his father for an umbrella, because he got so wet in crossing the courtyard. His father bought him a beautiful umbrella, which Akhtar Mian was exceedingly proud of, taking it with him wherever he went. Now that he had an umbrella like his father, he wanted to imitate him in all respects and also go to the office. However, for the time being, he just walked in the courtyard whenever it rained.³⁰

Working on an intellectual level, stories for the youngest readers could also carry a moral message. More often, however, the aim was to awaken a desire for doing good and being praised for this. One evening, Mian Pammi and his friend were walking the streets. They saw a wallet lying on the street, containing a rupee. Happily, they planned to buy a ball. But then they saw a boy, obviously looking for something. He told them that his family was very poor. His mother had earned a rupee by stitching clothes and had sent him to the bazaar to buy flour and lentils and to pay the fees at his school, so that he would not be expelled from it. But there was a hole in his trousers and his wallet had fallen out. The children immediately returned the wallet to him. When they returned home, they told their story. Their father was very pleased with them and gave them a reward.³¹

The education of older children did not always forgo shaming practices, or at least their vicarious experience.³² For example: Riaz was in tenth grade, but he was weak and lazy. Worried that he would not pass his exams, he planned to study during the holidays, but instead carried on living from day to day and did nothing. Once he was back in school, fear and worry engulfed him; every hour was a torment. Riaz just wished that the sun would not rise, but his wish was not fulfilled. The ghost of the exam (*imtehān kā bhūt*) became more terrifying as the days passed, but still, he did not start to work. As to be expected, he failed all his exams and was ridiculed by the headmaster in front of the entire class. Everyone laughed at him, and he felt so ashamed that his heart burst into pieces. The words of the headmaster awakened the extinct and dead flame of his feelings. His hopes and desires, and his sleeping honour woke up, and the blood in his veins became hot again. When he asked for a second chance, the headmaster agreed. With a

²⁸ Hasān, 'Payām-e ta'lim kī kahānī'; for regular references to his relationship with the authors in the editorial, see 'Bachchon kī bāten'.

²⁹ See, for instance, the over 30 books authored by Shafī' ud Din Nayyar. For more on the author, see Athar Parvez, *Muhammad Shafī' ud Din Nayyar* (Delhi, 1982).

³⁰ Shaukat R. Begam, 'Akhtar Miān kī chhatrī', *Payām-e ta'lim* October (1939), pp. 440–444.

³¹ Khān Ilyās Mujībī, 'Nekī', *Payām-e ta'lim* April (1942), pp. 135–136.

³² For a detailed analysis of the emotion of shame and its practices, see Tignol, 'The language of shame'.

heart full of energy and passion (*himmat, arzūmand, pur-josh*), he decided to prove his worth and worked hard throughout the holidays. The work started to delight him, and he began to learn with passion (*shauq*). His efforts were rewarded: he came first in the exams and people started to treat him with respect. In case the reader missed the message, the author ended with an exhortation to work diligently, like Riaz.³³ Stories like this allowed the young readers to experiment with how it would feel to be shamed in front of the class, without having to go through the experience in real life.³⁴ But even those who were prevented from identifying with Riaz by the early marking of him as the subject of reform went through an emotional experience—their *Schadenfreude* distanced them from Riaz and made it clear that lazy boys were a group to which they no longer desired to belong.

Not every story, however, had an uncomplicated and happy ending. *Hasīna kā sabr* (The patience of Hasina) was a sad but true story, the author explained. Sub-inspector Mahmud Hasan was married to Hasina, a serious, but friendly and pious woman, whose children were her joy in life. Mahmud, however, was uncivilised. Seduced by a *bāzārī* woman, he sent Hasina and her children back to her parents and married his new love. Months and years passed by, but he never even enquired after Hasina. Supported by divine light, Hasina lived her life in patience and was ashamed to even complain about her husband. Her family was rich enough to support her, her sons excelled in their studies, and as soon as she saw them married well, she thanked God and died. Meanwhile, Mahmud had gone to prison for corruption. His new wife absconded with all his belongings and he never heard from her again. Released from prison, he heard about Hasina's death, recalled her faithfulness, and cried tears of blood over his own sins. He asked his sons for forgiveness, which they granted him. But he grieved so much for Hasina that he, too, soon died.³⁵

For a movement that aimed to educate children to enable them to face the challenges of the present and the future, the large number of stories placed in a timeless world is something of a surprise at first sight. Abu Daud, a teacher at the Madrasa ul Islah at Azamgarh, told the story of Shafiq, a pious and loving man, the embodiment of compassion. Once a famous dacoit was released from prison after 20 years. It was cold and he was hungry and tired and had no place to sleep. Finally, he knocked at Shafiq's door, who welcomed him like a friend and brother, gave him dinner, and provided him with a bed in a beautiful room. In the middle of the night, the dacoit woke up and, overcome by criminal greed, he stole some valuables and disappeared. The next morning as Shafiq was preparing fresh milk for his guest, the police knocked at his door, having seized the dacoit. Shafiq's heart filled with love and his eyes with tears: 'oh, beloved brother, how did the police trouble you!' Hearing this, the police released the dacoit. Shafiq served him breakfast and when he wanted to leave, gave him costly presents. The result was that the dacoit renounced his criminal ways forever.³⁶

But also stories reminiscent of traditional *dāstāns* were not lacking. A prince once went hunting and saw a black snake and a white snake fighting. He killed the black snake. The white snake proved to be the son of the king of jinns and gave the prince a magic ring that was able to summon jinns to his service, and married him to his beautiful sister. The prince and his bride returned to his country. One day, he saw a cat and a parrot in the bazaar. As he was told that they would help him in times of need, he bought them for a thousand gold coins. One day, the princess went bathing in the river and lost her shoe. Much further down the river, another prince saw the shoe and vowed to marry

³³ Anon., 'Mehnat', *Payām-e ta'līm* [date illegible] March (1928), pp. 8–9.

³⁴ Ute Frevert et al., *Learning to Feel. Children's Literature and Emotional Socialization, 1870–1970* (Oxford, 2014).

³⁵ Mrs Ahmad ul Haqq Nāmī, 'Hāsīna ka sābr', *Payām-e ta'līm* 7 December (1930), p. 12.

³⁶ Abu Daud, 'Hamdardi', *Payām-e ta'līm* 21 December (1930), p. 10.

its owner. His father called a match-maker and ordered her to bring the girl, by whatever means. She discovered the princess, pretended to have fallen on bad times, and requested her permission to stay, which the good-hearted princess readily gave. When the prince went hunting, he left his ring with the princess. The match-maker asked to see it, and as soon as she had it in her hands, summoned some jinns to take the princess back to the king. The ring she kept for herself, putting it in her mouth when she slept, so no one could steal it. The prince now turned to the cat and the parrot and asked them to bring the ring back. They were successful, and the princess and the prince were reunited and lived in peace until the end of their days.³⁷

The values which these stories conveyed did not differ radically from those of the earlier children's journal. There was less of the almost-obsessive emphasis on punctuality, thriftiness, cleanliness, and hard work, through which an earlier generation had striven for colonial approbation and social mobility, but these topics did not disappear altogether, nor were they ever actively discouraged. Social values, notably compassion and feelings of brotherhood, which had been present already, steadily gained in importance. However, although the authors were deeply convinced of the importance of education for the future of the community and of the nation, and were aware of the potential of stories to teach moral emotions and ethical behaviour, education was never only geared towards the community and the future, but acknowledged the children and their present needs. This included the need for well-written and pleasurable stories, which helped them make sense of the world around them—or just enjoy the delight of immersing themselves in different worlds.

Allowing the children to try out feelings, the authors played around with stories and genres. At times, the call towards the new world was resounding in its clearness, as in the short essay that Munshi Premchand contributed to the yearbook of 1935. In almost messianic tones he exhorted his readers not lose courage and hope, and to keep on moving on the path towards the new world, in which there would be no more distinctions between rich and poor, between high and low, between ruler and ruled, and in which religion would no longer be based on a fear of punishment, but on compassion and love. In this world, God's blessings, light, air, water, the products of the earth, but also cars powered by steam and radios, would be accessible to everyone. This world, he told the children, was the goal, the *mi'rāj*, the mystic ascension of the Prophet to heaven, of their lives.³⁸

At other times, the stories seemed to be mired in a timeless world. However, this did not necessarily prevent them from incorporating a message of progress. For example: one day, a king and his wazir went for a walk and met an old peasant who was planting a tree. The king asked him why he was bothering to plant a tree at his age, as he would not live to see it bearing fruit. The peasant replied: I'm planting it for those who come after me. I'm also eating the fruit of the trees planted by those who came before me. The king liked the answer and told the wazir to give him a gold coin. The peasant smiled and said, you wouldn't have thought the tree to bear fruits so soon! Again, the king liked the answer and had him given a second gold coin. The peasant was very happy and replied, usually trees bear fruit only once a year. This one, however, has borne fruit already twice. Laughing, the king gave him a third gold coin and told the wazir that they had better leave quickly before the old man emptied the entire treasury. The twist came with the interpretation provided by the author: a man, who cared only for himself would reap some fruits, but no one else would profit, because he did not advance the world on the road of progress (*taraqī kī rāh*) by even a single step. Whoever did useful work for others,

³⁷ Iqbāl ud Dīn Ahmad Siddiqī, 'Jādū kī angothī', *Payām-e ta'līm* 7 February (1931), pp. 11–12.

³⁸ Premchand, 'Na'ī dunyā', *Payām-e ta'līm Jubilee Number* (1946), pp. 42–44.

however, was not only rewarded by God, but led the world towards progress.³⁹ *Taraqqī*, in the 1930s, came close to the English concept of progress, as a movement towards an open, ever-new future. Here, however, the older meanings still resonated. It was a movement towards an increase in virtue, at the individual, but also at the collective level, that was possible from any point in time. If it was new, then its newness resided in the perfection with which it embodied ideals long known to mankind. Ultimately, as Premchand's story had shown, *taraqqī* and *mi'rāj*, the ascending progress towards God, came together: it was in Him that the new world would be reached.⁴⁰

Science, exploration, and learning to learn

Enjoying stories, even of jinns, fairies and magic rings, was not perceived as a contradiction to developing a scientific mindset. From the beginning, *Payām-e ta'lim* contained articles that accommodated and developed children's natural curiosity. It set out to help them understand the world they were living in and the reasons why things were the way they were—for some time the science section was named *Aisā kyūn hotā hai* (Why is it like this?).⁴¹ Topics in this section were wide ranging, from new remedies to treat the plague,⁴² the working of a printing house and of lithography,⁴³ the development of aviation (see Figure 3),⁴⁴ Delhi's wireless station,⁴⁵ and life beneath the ocean,⁴⁶ to quote just a very few of them.

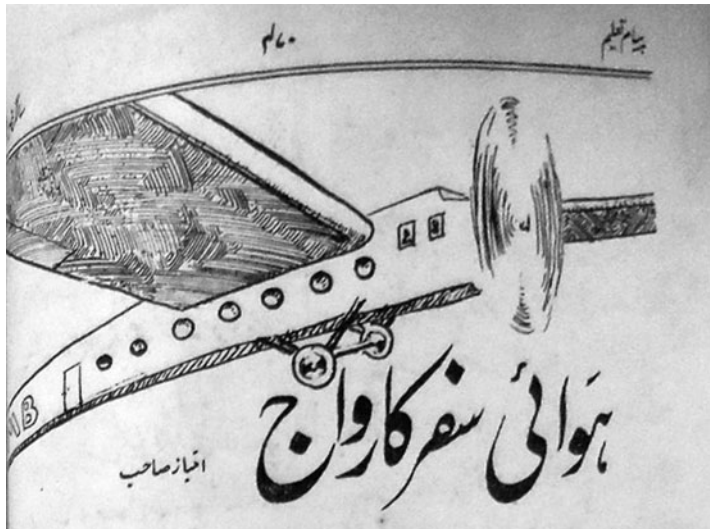


Figure 3. *Payām-e ta'lim* sal-girah number (1936), p. 470.

³⁹ Anon., 'Bādshāh aur buddhā kiśān', *Payām-e ta'lim* 21 November (1930), pp. 11–12.

⁴⁰ For the pre-history to the twentieth century concept of *taraqqī*, see Margrit Pernau, 'Fluid temporalities. Saiyid Ahmad Khan and the concept of modernity', *History and Theory* 58 (2019), pp. 107–131.

⁴¹ Anon., 'Aisā kyūn hotā hai?', *Payām-e ta'lim* 21 November (1930), p. 7.

⁴² Iqbāl ud Dīn Ahmad Siddiqi, 'Tā'ūn aur iskā jadīd 'ilāj', *Payām-e ta'lim* 7 February (1931), p. 10.

⁴³ Muhammad Ahmad, 'Chapāh khānā', *Payām-e ta'lim* August (1935), pp. 299–302; Muhammad Ahmad, 'Lithography', *Payām-e ta'lim* September (1935), pp. 345–348.

⁴⁴ Imtiaz, 'Hawā'ī safar kā riwāj', *Payām-e ta'lim* sal-girah number (1936), pp. 470–473.

⁴⁵ N. M., 'Delhi kā wireless station', *Payām-e ta'lim* March (1936), p. 118.

⁴⁶ Farogh Ahmad, 'Samandar ke niche', *Payām-e ta'lim* August (1939), pp. 354–356.

In 1943 a series was started on famous scientists. Its introductory article told the children that science aimed at explaining natural laws through experiments, which required both hard work and rigorous thinking. It was God's will that men explored nature and derived benefit from it. Science was born together with man, but it was only in the nineteenth century that it became a means of enquiry distinct from religion. Some people thought this new knowledge and the use it was put to was sorcery and the work of the devil and therefore sinful, but Islam, the author reassured his readers, had always encouraged the exploration of nature.⁴⁷

Geography often took the shape of stories about faraway countries, taking up the juvenile cosmopolitanism already present in *Phūl*: the exploration and conquest of Africa,⁴⁸ Roald Amundsen's voyages to the Antarctic,⁴⁹ new schools in Japan,⁵⁰ and the life of London's children,⁵¹ as well as children's customs from all over the world.⁵² Articles on history, mostly but by no means exclusively Indian and Islamic, supplemented the broadening of the children's minds and guided them to place their own experiences within a broader framework.

The most important aspect, however, was to encourage children to become active and to explore the world themselves. In this, Gerda Philipsborn played an important role. She was a young Jewish woman from Berlin, whom Zakir Husain and his companions had befriended during their student days, and who had joined them in Delhi at the end of 1932. Linked to the German *Reformpädagogik* and trained as a Kindergarten teacher in the tradition of Pestalozzi and Fröbel, she brought new ideas to the teaching at the primary school and became engaged with *Payām-e ta'lim*. Muhammad Hasin Husain had already thought about encouraging children to start collecting stamps from different countries, instead of just teaching them geography,⁵³ hoping that this would raise questions that they would set out to answer on their own. Gerda took up the idea and helped the children find pen friends in the 1930s, which also gave them a new and personalised knowledge about different regions of the world.⁵⁴ Many sections of the journal required the children to do something. There were pictures to colour (see [Figure 4](#)), riddles to solve, mathematical questions to answer, and many suggestions for handicrafts to try (see [Figure 5](#))—most of these articles were not signed, so we can only guess at Gerda's impact.⁵⁵ Often this went along with competitions, with the editor offering a small prize for the winner, and perhaps even more importantly, printing the names of all the successful candidates in the next issue of the journal.

None of this was devoid of a pedagogical goal—children acquired knowledge, they learned how to learn, and they cultivated a habit of learning. The editorials repeated over and over again that the articles and the games were both interesting (*dilchaspī*) and useful (*mufīd*),⁵⁶ but one gets the impression that these recommendations almost served as a permission for the children to have fun—fun, which in turn was seen as central to the learning process, as proposed by Jamia's version of new education.

⁴⁷ Saiyid Nūr ul Hasan Hāshmi, 'Science-dānon kī kahānī', *Payām-e ta'lim* salgirah number (1943), pp. 7–9 (continued over several issues).

⁴⁸ Anon., 'Afrīqā par dūsrī qaumon kā qabzā', *Payām-e ta'lim* 7 March (1929), p. 10.

⁴⁹ Muhammad Sanar (?) ul Haqq, 'Roald Amundsen aur shumālī gharbī rāsta', *Payām-e ta'lim* April (1942), pp. 152–155. This article is the second instalment; thus far the March 1942 issue has not been traced.

⁵⁰ Saiyid Nisār Ahmad (trans), 'Jāpān men ek jadīd-tarz kā madrasa', *Payām-e ta'lim* 7 December (1930), pp. 1–3.

⁵¹ Saiyid Hamīd 'Alī, 'London kī hālāt. I: Bachche', *Payām-e ta'lim* 7 August (1932), pp. 10–13.

⁵² Muhammad Hasīn Hassān, 'Mukhtalif mulkon ke bachche', *Payām-e ta'lim* March (1936), pp. 99–102.

⁵³ Hasān, 'Payām-e ta'lim kī kahānī', p. 198, referring to the initiative of Dr Saiyid Shamin, a former student of Jamia, who wrote many articles on stamp collecting and encouraged the hobby among the readers.

⁵⁴ Muhammad Hasīn Hassān, 'Bachchon kī bāten', *Payām-e ta'lim* April (1937), p. 132.

⁵⁵ I hope to present a book-length biography on Gerda Philipsborn and the Jamia before long.

⁵⁶ Muhammad Hasīn Hassān, 'Bachchon kī bāten', *Payām-e ta'lim* July (1940), p. 266 and passim.



Figure 4. *Payām-e ta'lim* February (1935), p. 80.

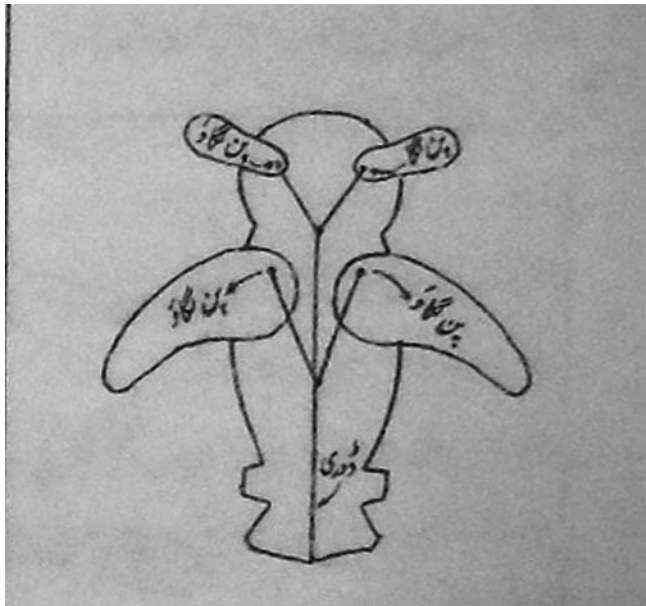


Figure 5. *Payām-e ta'lim* February (1935), p. 78.

Becoming a *Payāmi*

Before *Payām-e ta'lim* became a children's journal, one of its main goals, as shown above, had been to involve a larger public in the events happening at Jamia. The editors assumed that daily happenings, no less than the larger celebrations, were of interest to their co-workers and its intellectual and financial supporters, and thus created the very community they were addressing.⁵⁷ In this way Jamia became much bigger than just the institution and its activities, first at Karol Bagh and then at Okhla. It was a community held together by shared ideals around education and politics, but, even more importantly, by knowing and sharing each other's joys and sorrows. This was a feeling community, more than just a communication network.⁵⁸

From 1935 onwards, children were increasingly involved in the journal. Muhammad Hasin Hasan addressed them directly in the editorials, which changed its name to *Bachchon kī bāten* (Conversation with the children). He shared the travails of the production process with them and complained about authors who did not deliver because they were too busy elsewhere. He asked the children which topics they would like to see covered in the forthcoming issues and, most importantly, in the yearbook. Finally, he apologised for delays in posting the latest issue and, especially during the war years, shared his problems in finding enough paper to print the journal. He also reported back on the many letters he received from the children, where they told him about the articles and sections of the journal they liked most. The first article on stamp collecting had been a hit, he told his audience, therefore he had prevailed on its author to continue it as a series. But as this was a hobby for the slightly older boys (apparently girls did not collect stamps, in the mind of the author at least), he was still thinking about an appropriate hobby for the younger children, so that they too could collect something and not fall into the habit of spending their time on useless activities. Ideas were welcome; he and his authors would then strive to give any possible help.⁵⁹

Children were also encouraged to contribute their own articles. Muhammad Hasin Hasan created a new section called *Bachchon kī koshishen*, devoted to stories and poems written by the children. The aim, the editor explained, was to increase the self-confidence (*himmat*) of the young readers, by allowing them to see their texts in print. The only condition was for their father or teacher to confirm the children's age.⁶⁰ The children responded enthusiastically, so much so that after some time the editor had to admonish them that they could not just send in anything they wrote, but should show it first to a teacher to get some corrections. Also, they needed to provide their names, otherwise their stories could not be printed.⁶¹ The poems particularly were a challenge for the younger authors. Therefore, at one point the editor asked Shafi ud Din Nayyar, himself a regular contributor of stories and poems to *Payām-e ta'lim*, to take a look at the poems and suggest corrections. Those matching the required standard after correction would be printed.⁶²

The conversation between the children and the editor became an important feature of the journal. While children had been directly addressed earlier on, now they became *Payāmis*, a community of their own, sharing the responsibility for the journal and the well-being of Jamia and spreading its message. Beyond contributing their articles and having a say on the kind of articles published, they were also deemed responsible for canvassing

⁵⁷ For a similar movement in ladies' journals, see Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, chapters 3 and 4.

⁵⁸ For more detail on the concept of the feeling community and its history, see Margrit Pernau, 'Feeling communities: introduction', special issue of the *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, edited by Margrit Pernau, 54 (2017), pp. 1–20.

⁵⁹ Muhammad Hasin Hassān, 'Bachchon kī bāten', *Payām-e ta'lim* February (1935), pp. 43–46.

⁶⁰ Muhammad Hasin Hassān, 'Bachchon kī koshishen', *Payām-e ta'lim* January (1935), pp. 39–40.

⁶¹ Muhammad Hasin Hassān, 'Bachchon kī bāten', *Payām-e ta'lim* July (1935), pp. 243–344.

⁶² Muhammad Hasin Hassān, 'Bachchon kī bāten', *Payām-e ta'lim* August (1940), p. 310.

new subscribers and, on special occasions, for raising funds for special events. How much the lifeworld of a *Payāmi* was seen as part of a bigger whole is shown in the letters Muhammad Hasin Hasan wrote for the *Payām-e birādari* column during the war: similarly to a private letter, he started with the weather in Delhi: the cold season was over and the trees had new leaves; it was neither too cold nor too hot—what a lovely season! If any special events were happening at Jamia—exams, the beginning of the summer holiday, or the celebration of Eid—this was mentioned next. But the events marking the life of the children were no longer limited to their immediate surroundings. The editor continued with the latest news on the war and explained events his readers might have heard of, without having the background to fully understand them. From the war, he moved on to Indian politics and then back to the sphere immediately affecting the children: the announcement of new books and a new competition in the riddle section of *Payām-e ta'lim*.⁶³ In the space of a single article, the different temporalities were synchronised and the world of the children inserted into the wider world. Being a *Payāmi* was also being part of the larger community—it was the way to become Indian, Muslim, and a citizen of the world.

Conclusion

Jamia was one of the most important projects to shape the future of the Muslim community as part of the Indian nation for whose freedom they had struggled together.⁶⁴ It is the great achievement of Zakir Husain and the men and women who worked with him that they were able to reconcile the fervent enthusiasm this goal generated with a practical mindset and the diplomatic skills to bring together diverse goals and people. Jamia drew on New Education, in placing the child centre stage, in involving the children in their own education, in emphasising experiments and on manual work. All of this, as we have seen, was reflected in the columns of *Payām-e ta'lim*. Diplomacy, but also the temperament of the first generation of teachers and organisers, required the building of bridges, rather than an emphasis on newness and the exceptional character of Jamia. The values undergirding the extended family were upheld and formed the basis for the relation between teachers and pupils, but place was still made for increasing the autonomy and the involvement of the children in the decision-making process. Manual labour opened the door for an alliance with Gandhi's concepts of basic education. However, Jamia never reduced this to the spinning wheel and also went softly on the requirement of the children's labour providing for the financial requirements of the institution.

Islam did play an important part for Jamia and also for *Payām-e ta'lim*, although they never excluded children from other communities. The editor always sent his greetings for Eid and printed a couple of poems celebrating the occasion. *Milād un Nabī*, the birthday of the Prophet, was observed, something that would have led to frowns (if not more) from the Deobandis, had it not been for Jamia's strong connections to it. As it was, Mahmud Hasan from Deoband was the first chancellor of Jamia, and the evening classes Jamia provided for juvenile labourers, first in Karol Bagh and then in Okhla, drew on the supportive network of Khwaja Hasan Nizami and his *Tablighī Jama'at*. One of the most beautiful illustrations of what Islam meant for Jamia, however, was not to be found in any of the speeches or programmatic articles, but in a small story Zakir Husain wrote for *Payām-e ta'lim* in 1930, 'Abbu Khān kī bakrī'. Abbu Khan, an old man, lived high up in the mountains, with only his goats to keep him company. But like all mountain animals, the goats loved their freedom, more than food or safety, and one after the other, they ran away and

⁶³ Muhammad Hasin Hassān, 'Payām-e birādari', *Payām-e ta'lim* March (1941), pp. 110–111.

⁶⁴ For the role of Jamia in the nationalist movement and imagination, see Gautier, 'A laboratory'.

were killed by the wolf. Chandni was Abbu Bakr's most beloved goat, and she too loved him dearly. But still, she loved freedom more, and one night she escaped. For a whole day Chandni roamed the mountains, intoxicated with her freedom. Nightfall brought the choice: from one side she heard Abbu Khan calling her back to safety, from the other she saw the wolf's eyes glowing in the dark. She chose freedom, knowing that she could not win against the wolf. But this was no longer important. 'Winning or losing is not in our control—that is in God's hands. What we can do is struggle', the story sums up the goat's musing. She fought valiantly, until the muezzin called in the morning. A wise bird commented that although it looked as if she had died, it was she, and not the wolf, who had won this battle. She had overcome her fear and that was all that mattered.⁶⁵ Piety was not mentioned in this story, with the exception of the muezzin's call. Still, the readers would have agreed that this was a deeply pious story, capturing what religion, love, devotion, the sense of sacrifice, and the detachment of its results meant for the men and women of Jamia, but also more generally for the national movement.

Conflicts of interest. The author reports none.

⁶⁵ Zakir Husain (under the pseudonym Rafia Rihana), 'Abbu Khān kī bakrī', *Payām-e ta'lim* 21 June (1930), pp. 9–12. English translation by Samina Mishra and Sanjay Muttoo, *Bravest Goat in the World* (Delhi, 2004).

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