

India Islamic Cultural Centre - 1981-2018 Genesis, Aims, Obligations

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At Aligarh's Marris Road the sprawling Government of India Complex spanning eleven thousand square yards used to be my office-cum residence when I was heading the Income-tax Department there during early 1980s. One of my celebrated family guests visiting us there in 1981 was Chaudhary Mohammad Arif who had taken premature retirement from his job as senior research officer in Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi. I had known him from mid 1970s when he had put together a delegation of Delhi's well placed Muslims and had brought them to AMU where PG toppers of different academic streams were invited in Kennedy House for an interaction. As a result, I and many others had got motivated to write the UPSC's Civil Services Examination.

Chaudhary Mohd Arif's initiative

2. Subsequently, during our stay in Delhi for the UPSC Exam, Arif Bhai organized our stay at 11, Mahadev Road which was the official residence of Chaudhary Tayyab Hussain, Member of Parliament from Mewat. We used to offer our Friday prayer at the nearby New Delhi Jama Masjid adjoining the Parliament House. After the Namaz we curiously watched Arif Bhai standing alone delicately hanging in his neck a big self written placard that read: "We are going to establish India Islamic Centre in Delhi, please help".

Galaxy of Muslim Intellectuals

3. In 1981 at Aligarh, Arif Bhai reminded me of his Islamic Centre plan and invited me to be its founder member; considering this as an honor, I complied instantly and also roped in many accomplished Muslim businessmen and professionals to donate for this noble cause. He had persuaded the likes of Mufti Atiqur Rahman, Badruddin Tayabji, General Shahnawaz, MWK Yusufzai, Chaudhary Tayyab Hussain, Saiyid Hamid, Sayeedus Shafi, Yusuf Siddiqi, Hakim Abdul Hameed and Justice Hidayatullah and through their good offices and/or financial support (taking advantage of the turn of the

Islamic Hijri Century) got two Govt bungalows allotted at Lodi Road. At PM Indira Gandhi's suggestion the word 'Cultural' was added to the proposed nomenclature.

The First Decade - Productive utilization for empowerment

4. During its first decade Arif Bhai literally remained the sole personification of India Islamic Cultural Centre - mostly left high and dry - yet he practiced Prophet Mohammad's (peace be upon him) teaching Al Faqr-o-Fakhri (I take pride in keeping myself deprived) and homoeopathically stimulated the community's self-regulating mechanisms to initiate the healing process. He turned adversity into opportunity discovering promising boys from all over India, accommodating them in IICC bungalows and organizing for them some sort of coaching (including asking serving civil services officers like me and many others including Jannat Hussain, Rajen Khwaja, Noor Mohammad, Naved Masood, A. L. Khan, Siraj Hussain, Ahmad Saeed Khan, the Ghauri brothers, MNA Chaudhary and Khwaja Shahid - to occasionally speak to them) to prepare them for different competitive examinations usually of groups B and C. Thus close to two hundred youth were able to join the hierarchy of Government and the public sector at different levels.

1993 Strengthening of Guard

5. After completing my tenure as First Secretary / Consul (Haj) & Director of Indian International Schools, I returned from Saudi Arabia and in 1993 joined as Additional Commissioner in Delhi. That year itself the new IICC Team had to be elected. There were hardly any takers. Not many were interested in two old dilapidated bungalows with little funds (only rupees forty lakh including bank interest) burdened with the responsibility of raising funds and seeing through an 8-10 crore project. Arif Bhai again told me that I've to devote my time and resources and I readily agreed to undertake this stupendous task, started spending there several hours daily as Trustee, Treasurer and later also as Deputy Director General.

6. In fact the new team had been unanimously elected at the general body meeting by raising of hands followed by clapping. The suave former First Lady Begum Abida Ahmad was elected as President and Mohd Fazal was appointed as Director General, of course Arif Bhai remained the perpetual Secretary. Some Trustees like Shafi Qureshi, AR Kidwai, Chaudhary Tayyab Hussain, Najma Heptulla, Rafiq Alam had obligations of statecraft. The executive committee (members & special invitees) included Abrar Ahmad,

Sirajuddin Qureshi, Eesa Shafiq, M. A. Haq, B.P. Maurya, Wajahat Habibullah, Safdar H. Khan, Naved I. Khan and (by virtue of office) myself, Arif Bhai and Mohd Fazal. The Government Nominees (during two consequent terms) included Habiba Kidwai, A. H. Rizvi, Ishrat Farooqi and Tariq Anwar.

Moosa Raza's entry & role

8. After about a year Mohd Fazal expressed the desire to be relieved as DG because of some personal reasons; yet even during his short tenure the magnificent boundary wall of IICC was constructed that still adorns its exteriors. Also, the IICC's Memorandum of Association was got firmed up procuring ratification by the General Body. Meanwhile, we the Trustees internally mulled over whom to bring in as the new DG so that the construction project takes off. Our choice converged on Moosa Raza who was then at the fag end of his service career and was working in the Govt of India as its Secretary in the Ministry of Steel. We met him in his office and placed the offer. He readily agreed but wondered as to how it would happen to which we said, "leave that to us". Personally I typed a letter from the side of Begum Abida saying that it is proposed to appoint Moosa Raza as director general and if any trustee has any other views he should write back within fifteen days; Begum Sahiba signed the paper which was circulated among the trustees. On the sixteenth day, I typed another paper saying that Moosa Raza is appointed as DG (despite not having been a Member or elected Trustee), Begum Abida again obliged us.

9. Moosa Raza measured up to our expectations, generously and valiantly using his personal contacts in India and Dubai to raise funds. After obtaining the statutory approvals of New Delhi Municipal Committee, Delhi Urban Arts Commission and Delhi Fire Office, the project was started full steam and by 2003 when we completed our second term and laid down office 91% of the civil work of the three storied building, 88% of the electrical work, 98% of sub station, 73% of fire fighting, 100% of Elevator, 94% of air conditioning, 100% of water proofing, 100% of tube-well, and 100% of high tension connection had been completed. Specially manufactured tiles had been procured from Iran, these had been got released from the Customs Department through the intervention of the External Affairs Ministry and had been stacked in the IICC. These had to be fixed on the facade and the tomb by the Iranian experts whose arrival was then awaited. As on March 31, 2003 the IICC's audited balance sheet showed its Assets valued at Rs 8.25 crore. Out of this Rs 4.65 crore was given by B. S. Abdur Rahman & his group, 90 lakh by Sultan

of Oman and many other donors included Sirajuddin Qureshi (51 lakh). Over this ten year period 35 meetings were held of Board of Trustees, Executive Committee, Building Committee and Progress Review Committee; all proceedings were duly minuted. Letters were issued to the prime minister, party presidents and others seeking financial help. All this information is based on official documents.

Meeting Extraneous Challenges

10. We did also have our share of envious inroads. Somebody sitting somewhere in the Archeological Survey of India got a bright idea and issued a notice to IICC saying that its building had been constructed within prohibited limit around the main tomb in the adjoining Lodi Garden threatening to pass an order to demolish the IICC building. I got the actual distance from the Tomb measured upto all buildings that had come up around it - including IICC, India International Centre, Ford Foundation and World Wildlife Federation and found that our distance was longer than all other buildings which had been constructed before ours. Thus, I wrote back to the ASI graphically showing these comparative distances and the respective dates of the construction of all buildings. The ASI officer frantically phoned, came running to me and deeply apologized. The license was soon issued to us.

11. The NDMC's property tax department also had its naughty forays. It wanted to water down the IICC's exemption status. I studied the file, made out strong counter arguments supported with necessary documentation, personally appeared before the Advisor (Taxation) and reiterated my arguments. Consequently, he revised his stand in favour of the IICC. During one of such visits to NDMC, Begum Abida's son Advocate Badar Durrez Ahmad agreed to accompany me; he later worked as Judge in Delhi High Court and recently retired as Chief Justice of Jammu & Kashmir High Court.

Work done 1993-2003

12. Even while the building was under construction we had got erected temporary auditorium and seminar rooms; also the huge open space was repeatedly used to organize events by the IICC in pursuance of its aims and objects. At the IICC seminar on 'Islam for Peace' ex PM I. K. Gujral was the chief guest. The well thought out themes of umpteen other IICC programs included Importance of Madarsas, Vocations for Indian Muslims, Latest Cultural Trends in Middle East, Women's Empowerment in Indonesia, Human Rights in Islam, Muslim Agenda in the 21st Century, Role of Civil Services

in Nation Building, Future of Islam in Bosnia, Muslim Minority in Britain, Constitutional Humanism, Rise of Information Technology, etc. Senior officers of various Govt departments were invited to the IICC to conduct workshops of how to fill up application forms for taking scholarships, skill development training etc under the Govt schemes. Besides, the IICC used to regularly organize hugely attended (thousand plus audience) events of Eid Miladun Nabi, Iftar, Diwali Milan, Christmas, AMU Alumni get togethers etc. Interactive sessions were held with Supreme Court Judges, Ministers, CMs, Governors, Ambassadors, Vice Chancellors, Professors, Advisors, film personalities including Dilip Kumar and many others. Arif Bhai used to separately organize in Old Delhi the Annual International Quran Recitation program.

2003-2018: Interiors done up, facilities streamlined

13. During the last fifteen years (2003-2018) bank loan was taken, interiors were done up, final touches were given to the IICC's infrastructure and its facilities were streamlined and these became self propelling; thus the bank loan was paid off. President Siraj Qureshi's and some other NGOs organized some welfare programs in IICC. Muslim and other festivals were celebrated and dignitaries were received. There is a move even to expand the IICC building skyward and probably open branches outside Delhi. So, the hardware has surely been going strong. Now greater emphasis is required over IICC's software that is proper understanding of its primary objective and organising programs for its implementation.

The missing Civil Services wing

14. Article 3(c) of the IICC's Memorandum of Association makes it incumbent upon it to promote economic, educational, cultural and social advancement of Muslim community in India so that they, with their fellow countrymen, contribute effectively in making India into a great society. Thus, the vital purpose of establishing IICC includes empowering the Muslim community by facilitating its proportional representation in India's governance. In order to achieve this purpose, as per the architectural designs, the entire eastern wing of the basement floor was earmarked for accommodating most meritorious Muslim candidates who should be selected through a transparent system of pure merit as assessed through a professionally conducted selection process. These candidates were to be provided appropriate coaching as well as a serene atmosphere and wherewithal for self study. However, this fundamental purpose of IICC is yet to be accomplished while there is no dearth of the

required talent in the Muslim community.

15. The Indian Prime Minister's High Level Committee on Muslims (later known after its chairman as Justice Sachar Committee) had documented in November 2006 that Muslims are lagging behind every other faith community in social, economic and educational fields because of thorough under-representation of the Muslim community in India's governance. Incidentally, as OSD, I was the PM's man in this Committee so that its work could be facilitated and fast tracked. My periodical reports travelled to him through his secretaries particularly including Jawed Usmani to whom too the nation owes its obligation; later he was chief secretary in UP and is currently chief information commissioner of the state.

Muslim under-representation in elected bodies

16. In the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament) elections are held every five years for 543 seats. The Census of India 2011 says that at the national level Muslims comprise 14.2 percent of the total population. At this rate there should be 77 Muslims Members in Lok Sabha. But ever since the first Lok Sabha that was elected in 1952 till date the average number of Muslims in Lok Sabha has been less than 25. The situation is still worse in provincial assemblies. The Justice Sachar Committee revealed that the basic reason for this lack of Muslim representation is that Muslim predominant constituencies of Parliament and provincial Assemblies have been earmarked and reserved for 'Scheduled Castes' even though SC population in such constituencies is negligible.

Violation of Delimitation Act

17. This is in gross violation of Section 9(1)(c) of the Delimitation Act which mandates that those constituencies shall be so earmarked and reserved where the population of scheduled castes is highest in the State. Such (faulty) delimitation is also done by the Civil Service officers who don the mantle of election commissioners. That is why all the more it is the duty of the persons responsible for running the IICC to fulfill their mandated responsibility. Secondly, the Center needs to establish and institutionalize a mechanism monitoring the implementation of the Justice Sachar Committee's other major recommendations including the Alternative Admission Criterion for all universities & colleges admitting undergrad and postgrad students.

Promoting Mutual Understanding

18. The aims & objects of IICC include the following: To promote mutual understanding among the diverse citizens of India. To remove misunderstanding about Islam and its teachings. To promote an awareness of the ethos of the Islamic culture. To assist in the creation of an ethical society based on tolerance, universal brotherhood, love and charity. To promote mutual understanding and appreciation and amity between the people of India and those of the Islamic world, through a study of each other's past and present civilization, and a mutual exchange of knowledge and information relating thereto, and by providing facilities that would lead to a fruitful interaction between them and an appreciation of each other's contribution to world civilization.

19. Thus, the IICC should have a Committee of Learned Scholars and Successful Activists who should be given the job of shortlisting the programs that need to be launched by IICC in order to implement the above aims and objects. The Committee should also draw a time bound Annual Action Plan for implementing this agenda.

Espousing Islamic Culture at home & abroad

20. The IICC is duty bound to make institutional arrangements for enriching the relations of Indian Muslims with the rest of India through carrying forward the true Islamic culture to the whole nation. For this purpose the Centre must organize programs, conferences, seminars, exhibitions, group discussions etc. The Centre has to facilitate what we usually know as cultural diplomacy between the people of India and the Islamic world through exchange of academics, delegations, artisans, etc and that way help the Government of India in enriching its productive, fruitful liaison with the Muslim World.
