Dr. Zakir Husain who was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's call to the students to leave their schools and colleges revolted against the system of education in the Aligarh Muslim University and left it without completing his studies. He subsequently went to Germany where he studied economics. I heard him speak once or twice in New Delhi which created the impression that he was an economist, but he was first and foremost an educationist.

When the Jamia Millia was shifted from Aligarh to Delhi, he became the head of the academic community of the Jamia and dedicated his life to the pursuit of ideas, which the Jamia community had placed before itself.

The early history of the Jamia is a saga of self-sacrifice by him and his colleagues. He was given a monthly salary of Rs. 100/-, but he reduced it to Rs. 80/-. As the regular payment of the salary of the teachers was beyond the capacity of the Jamia, it was decided later that those getting Rs. 100/- or more should receive half their salary in cash and have the other half credited to their account, so that some regularity might be introduced in the payment of the salaries.

Dr. Zakir Husain thus received Rs. 40/- a month and continued to receive the same amount till 1944 when the Jamia was in a position, thanks mainly to Dr. Zakir Hussain's efforts, to pay the full salaries regularly. His salary remained Rs. 80/- per month till his appointment
as Vice-Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University towards the end of 1948.

It was Dr. Zakir Husain’s good fortune to have as his colleagues persons who were ready to bear all hardships in order to ensure the life of the Jamia.

I came to know two of them—Dr. Mujeeb, who is happily still with us and is well-known for his sacrifices and services in the cause of the Jamia and for his scholarship, simplicity, freedom from all prejudices, and capacity for taking an objective view of important matters and Shafiqur Rahman Qidwai, who is unfortunately no more. His nobility of nature, self-effacement, devotion to an ideal and sacrifices in the cause of the Jamia cannot be forgotten by those who had the privilege of knowing him. His premature death was a loss not merely to the Jamia, but to Delhi and the cause of nationalism in general.

The Jamia which had to pass through hard times came in course of time to be recognised as an institution from which other educational institutions might learn something. The Government of India recognised its matriculation and Teacher’s Training Diplomas. As is well-known it has now been given the status of a University.

Such recognition as the Jamia obtained was largely due to Dr. Zakir Hussain’s achievements and personality. His courage to differ from others, senior to him in the Managing Committees of the other institutions which invited him to join them made him respected for his sincerity and understanding of educational principles. Because of him, all the leaders of the country became acquainted with the Jamia and gave it such encouragement as they could.

Dr. Zakir Husain played an important part in the Basic Education Conference, which was convened by Mahatma Gandhi at Wardha in 1937. Gandhiji briefly explained the scheme that he had in mind. Though Gandhiji spoke of a ‘vocation’ as a means of drawing out the minds of the boys, there is hardly any doubt that he wanted spinning to be the chief vocation to be introduced in the basic schools. Besides, the basic education taken as a whole can and must be self-supporting in fact, he was sure, “self-support is the acid test of its reality.”

Dr. Zakir Husain respectfully differed from him on both these points. When he was appointed President of the Committee of the whole Conference, to consider the question of basic education, Mahatma Gandhi had asked him to draft the resolution of the Conference. On the two points mentioned above, he again expressed his dissent. The
Committee passed four resolutions embodying Gandhi's ideas, with significant modifications, in a modern form, as Prof. Mujeeb has said.

The Committee proposed that the abilities to be developed or training to be given "should, as far as possible, be integrally related to the central handicraft chosen with due regard to the environment of the child."

On the question of self-support, it said that the Conference "expects that this system of education will gradually be able to cover the remuneration of the teachers." Gandhiji thought that in those provinces where there were Congress Ministries, his scheme would be given effect to on a large scale. But for many reasons, including the resignation of the Congress Ministries two years later, the work on the scheme was stopped in these provinces.

To my mind, the manner in which Dr. Zakir Husain expressed his views testifies to his independence of spirit and regard for truth. When he was made the President of Hindustani Talimi Sangh, he came to be known all over the country. By touring the country and holding discussions, he did what one man could to make the basic education scheme better understood and properly carried out in practice.

Dr. Zakir Husain was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University in November, 1948. When he took charge he found that a considerable number of students and teachers had left it. The teachers who remained were not unaffected by the Muslim League propaganda. There was great confusion and uncertainty about the future of the University.

Some people even suspected the motives of the Vice-Chancellor and thought that he would readily carry out the wishes of the Government of India about the University. Dr. Zakir Husain however soon gained their confidence by his goodwill and taking no vindictive action against them. He appointed competent teachers from other Universities to fill the gap that existed. He helped the students liberally with the special funds at the disposal and even used a good part of his salary for their assistance.

He kept an eye on the post-graduate classes, says Prof. Mujeeb, and selected the promising students for further education in India and abroad. A portion from his report is published in Dr. Zakir Husain's biography by Prof. M. Mujeeb, Vice-Chancellor of the Jamia.

In the concluding part of the report he said:
“Its (Aligarh University) destiny is to play a significant role in Indian national life. If I were not keenly conscious of this destiny. I would not have left my work at the Jamia Millia and come over to Aligarh. I agreed to come and have agreed to stay, for I saw that there was important work of national significance to be done here.”

He said later in the same report:

“The way Aligarh works, the way Aligarh thinks, the contribution Aligarh makes to Indian life in its manifold aspects will largely determine the place Mussalmans will occupy in the pattern of Indian life. The way India deals with Aligarh will largely determine the shape of things in the future national position.”

Dr. Zakir Husain had faith in its future. He said at a dinner given in his honour in 1952:

“I always feel happy when I come to Aligarh. When I was a student I looked upon Aligarh as my all. It was my home, my garden, my native land. Even when I parted from Aligarh even for a short time, my heart was filled with thoughts of this home, this garden, this native land.”

This feeling was not shared by many of his colleagues in the Jamia Millia. But he gave of his best to the Aligarh University. He succeeded in improving the quality of education given there. But as regards the students, it appears that in spite of his hopes and efforts, they were like the students in other Universities.

His speeches both in English and in Urdu were appreciated by the educated public because of the importance he attached to felicity of expression. In fact, he appreciated beauty in all its forms. He had some Persian verses written by well-known calligraphers and their borders decorated.

He had a good part of the campus of the Aligarh Muslim University converted into a garden, when he was the Vice-Chancellor of the University.

Good paintings also greatly interested him and he secured copies of the old paintings which particularly appealed to him.

The very first time I heard Dr. Zakir Husain speak I was impressed with his personality. This impression became stronger when I came
in close touch with him after his appointment as a member of the University Grants Commission and later after his nomination to the Rajya Sabha.

His speeches were appreciated because they expressed his convictions. His personality seemed to me to shine in his face when he was elected Vice-President of India. His moral worth shone more brightly when he was elected President of India. I met him several times when he held these offices and I always felt when I met him that he was greater than the high offices he was called upon to fill. I am glad that a publication presenting Dr. Zakir Husain's life and works is being brought out on the occasion of his Seventy Seventh birthday.

_H. N. Kunzru_