

HISTORY OF MADRASA EDUCATION IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

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DOI No. – 08.2020-25662434

Abstract

The word Madrasah is derived from the tri-consonantal Semitic root “d-r-s” which means, “to learn, study”. Therefore, Madrasah literally means, a place where learning and studying are done. In the Arabic language, the word Madrasah simply means the same as school does in the English language. However, in English, the term Madrasah usually refers to the specifically Islamic institutions. Madrasa means a “place of study”, generally; the word “dars” means lecture or sermon. It is also used in the sense “to train” or to “discipline”. In modern Arabic, Madrasa signifies any educational institution from preschool to high school. The fall or rise of a nation depends upon its younger generation. The fate of a nation is irretrievably linked with it and, therefore, the men at the helm should pay due attention to its upbringing and training. The survival of the cultural values of national life and its hopes and aspirations crucially depends upon how they bring up the younger generation. They will be able to safeguard their cultural heritage, if they succeed in handing over it to their progeny. Otherwise, they will lose their cultural identity and the ideological foundation of the country will gradually will weaken. The younger generation will no doubt, survive physically but it will cease to maintain its distinct identity. If a nation wants to survive culturally, it should provide training to its younger generation in such a manner as to become the custodian of its traditional values. Education is, therefore an investment in the development of a total human personality. It is also an effective instrument of social, economic and political change. It supplies the required trained manpower to the community to run its professions, services and economy. If correctly applied, it may also help in creation of a just society and an accelerated development of the younger generation in intellectual, spiritual, cultural and aesthetic fields. In India, the word Madrasa is used for an educational institution where education-related to Islam is imparted along with many other modern subjects like English, Hindi, a state language, Science, Social Science and Mathematics. The curriculum of Madrasas may vary according to their affiliation.

Keywords: Madrasa, Madrasa-e-Sufa, Maktabas, Islamic theology, Darul Uloom, Jamia, Spirituality

INTRODUCTION

Madrasa means a “place of study”, generally; the word “dars” means lecture or sermon. It is also used in the sense “to train” or to “discipline”. In modern Arabic, Madrasa signifies any educational institution from preschool to high school. The fall or rise of a nation depends upon its younger generation. The fate of a nation is irretrievably linked with it and, therefore, the men at the helm should pay due attention to its upbringing and training. Following the birth of Islam, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) himself actively undertook the promotion of education. In *Dar-ul-Arkam* (House of Arkam, a companion of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)) at the base of mountain *Safa*. The Prophet himself established and taught in the first Madrasa. The first students of the very first educational institute established by Prophet were Abu Bakr, Umar bin Khattab, Uthman Ibn Affa'n, Ali Ibn Abi Talib, and the other Prophets companions. Later, the Prophet handed over the responsibility of teaching to Hazrat Ibn Umm Maktoom and Musaib Bin Umayr before migrated to Medina to spread the word of Allah. When he reached Medina, the Prophet established an educational institute in near *Masjid Nabwi* (Mosque of Prophet). This was named the *Madrasa-e-Sufa*.

Following the death of the Prophet, during the time of the *Khulafa-e- Rashidun* (Rightly guided Caliphs), education expanded further. All new Muslims embarked in spreading the words of the Prophet. Paying for teaching was not customary at that time. As teachers in that period did not accept payment for their services, similarly students were not required to pay for their tuition. In addition to all education related expenditures, scholarships were arranged for the personal expenses of meritorious students. All these expenditures were made out of the money collected through *Zakat*. (Alms giving). The second phase of the Islamic education began with the reign of Hazrat Umar bin Abdul Aziz. The eighth *Caliph* of the Umayyad lineage. During this time, state proclamations were made throughout the country and wages and allowances for teachers and scholarships for students were arranged. Separate learning rooms for students and teachers were established in the *Mosques* during this period as well. The whole of Arabia and Iran was transformed into Muslim centers of learning, knowledge, and research.

The establishment of organized institution of *Madrassa* took place much later. The first formal *Madrassa* was established in Nishapur in Khorasan, and the second was *Madrassa Nizamiyah* in Baghdad (Iraq), both in 11th century by Nizam-ul Mulk Tusi (1018-1092 AD), who is considered the father of the Islamic Public Education System. The first two institutions, which achieved everlasting fame, were *Madrassa Nizamiyah* and *Madrassa Mustansariyyah* in Baghdad. Starting from *Masjid al Nabwi* of Medina Al Munawwara, it steadily developed through *Nizamiyah*, *Zaituna Tunisia* (732), *Baithul Hikmah Iraq* (830) by Caliph Al-Mamun, *Al Qaraviyan Morocco* (859), *Al Azhar Cairo* (972) by Caliph Al-Muizz, *Madrassa Nizamiyah* in Baghdad (1067) by Nizam-ul-Mulk Hassan Bin Al- Tusi, *Grenada and Qurtaba* (Cordova), *Jami 'ul Andulus* (Spain) and spread all over the world. The arrival of the Arabs through Muhammad Bin Qasim's conquest of the Indus had a similar influence on the Indian localities as well.

MADRASA EDUCATION IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

India is the museum of all the world religion with the presence of all major religion of the world. It is a land of diversity; a mosaic of many castes, communities, languages, religions, and cultures. In exercise of its freedom, it has chosen to be a Socialist, Secular, and Democratic Republic. The essence of secularism is the recognition and preservation of different groups of people with diverse languages and beliefs and integrating them into a whole and united India. Its constitution reflects the pluralistic, essence of the Indian society and the right of each segment to self-development, but as an integral part of a nation in the making. Unity in diversity or plurality is the key concept, which leads India to set an ideal for peaceful co-existence of diverse groups. Significantly, all the religions have contributed in forming the culture, heritage and traditions of the nation. The Muslim conquest of India did not succeed in presenting a superior educational system to the Indian subcontinent. Instead, following the traditional Indian educational institutions teaching religion and Sanskrit, they established *Maktabas* and *Madrasas*.

Initiatives undertaken by the recently arrived Muslims, alongside the increase in the Muslim population resulted in the growth and expansion of the *Madrassa* education system in the major cities like Delhi, Lucknow, Rampur, Agra, *Madrassa*, Dhaka, and other major cities of the Western region of India. According to the *Tarikh-e-fareshta*, the first *Madrassa* was established in the Multan province of Western India. It was probably in the sixth century that Nasiruddin Kabacha built the *Madrassa Firuzi* building for Maulana Qutubuddin Qasani. It is believed that this was the first formally approved *Madrassah* in the subcontinent. According to another source, Muslim religious education in India, the establishment of *Maktabas* and *Madrasas* occurred in the twelfth century. Shahabuddin Muhammad Ghuri established a number of *Madrasas* in Ajmer, where slaves he had brought to India with him and the local converted Muslims received education. It was in 1203, following the establishment of Muslim rule with Ikhtiar-din Muhammad bin Bakhtiar Khilijis conquest of Bengal and Bihar, that Islamic education spread

widely throughout this land. A number of *Mosques, Madrasas, and Khanqas* were established. The Mughal ruler's sultan Zaheeruddin Babar (1483-1531 AD), Naseeruddin Humayun (1508- 1556 AD) and Akbar (1542-1605 AD) comparatively took greater interest in education of the subjects. About Babar's educational contribution, it is reported that he not only exhorted people to learn but also established various colleges and Madrasas. Sher Shah Suri (1486-1545 AD) also did the same. Among the institution set up by him, *Sher Shah Madrasa* in Narnol district of Patiala became very famous for scholarship. There was a big Madrasa for which Akbar had invited a scholar from Sheeraz-mir-Fatheullah Shirazi to educate the students in the *Madrasa*. Under the imperial patronage Ulema like Fatheullah Shirazi, Hakim Abdul Fateh Gilani, Abul Fazl, Faizi, Sayyid Nurullah Shushtari and other laid the foundation of a new education policy and revised the syllabi of *Madrasas*. Numerous *Madrasas* were established in Fatehpur Sikri near Agra, which was inhabited by Akbar. Akbar was far ahead of his age with regard to changes in the mode of study, curriculum and methods of teaching. Akbar introduced morality, arithmetic, accounts agriculture, geometry, astronomy, geography, economics, and the art of governance, physics, logic, natural philosophy, divinity and history in *Madrasas*. Mughal rulers mainly Jehangir, Shah Jehan, Aurangzeb Aalimgeer played a very significant role in establishing Masjids and *Madrasas*.

In 1678 AD, Aurangzeb rebuilt many *Madrasas* and *Maktabas* in Gujrat and appointed experienced teachers to educate the students. During Mughal period, Delhi was thronged with Arabic *Madrasas* and great scholars. The most famous among them were Madrasa Rahimiyah, *Madrasa* of Bazr Khanam and *Madrasa* Ghaziuddin at Ajmeri gate. This period witnessed a wide expansion of *Maktabas* and *Madrasas* and would be remembered for another curriculum reform, which was introduced in the *Madrasa* system of education and which for centuries has remained almost unchanged and static. The man responsible for reshaping of this curriculum; was Mullah Nizamuddin of Sihali, and this was why this modified system came to be known as *dars-i- Nizami*.

MADRASAS AND EDUCATION DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

During the British rule, the entire system of education was changed. Closing down of most of the *Maktabas* and *Madrasas* was the result of British apathy towards such institutions. It gave serious jolt to the traditional educational set up as they were deprived of their endowments in the form of free land and were left to depend on their own resources. The establishment of modern schools was also the cause of the decline of many of the *Maktabas* and the *Madrasas*. The establishment of *Madrasa-i-Aliya*, Calcutta (Kolkata) was the first step by British rulers to provide for traditional education of Muslims. In 1781, Warren Hastings established the Calcutta *Madrasa* College for Muhammedans for the study of 'Muhammedan law and such other sciences as were taught in Muhammedan schools'.

During the colonial period, the term *Madrasa* did not signify primarily a place of religious learning, meant only to educate and train the students to pursue ecclesiastical profession; on the contrary, its existence was the dissemination of true knowledge of all subjects for the harmonious intellectual, moral and material development of society. The transformation of *Madrasa* into an institution of purely religious instructions was the phenomenon of the late nineteenth century when the traditional sciences ceased to be parts of the academic syllabus because these had been rendered obsolete by the role of new techno-scientific changes and developments in the colonial process.

Warren Hastings founded the Calcutta *Madrasa* in 1781 in response to a petition submitted by a section of Muslims of the city under the leadership of Maulana Majid al-din alias Maulana Madan on 05 September 1781 to teach the Muslim students Islamic theology (*dinya't*) and other religious subjects. An

English army officer, acquainted with Arabic and Persian languages was appointed its principal. The government granted aid to the Calcutta *Madrassa* and the payment of stipends to oriental scholars. In North India, not only the old *Madrassa* survived and flourished, but also many new ones were opened. The towns in the Eastern parts of Uttarpradesh, which in the age enjoyed the status of 'Shiraz of Hind', resembled cities with tall buildings, *Masjids*, *Madrassas*, and *Khanqas*, fully developed and crowded. These towns were inhabited by a large number of teachers, scholars, saints, people of the noble birth belonging to different nationalities, and also agriculturalists, arcticians, traders, professionals and service men.

MADRASAS IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

After the revolt of 1857, Muslims became conscious of preserving their culture. Among the famous *Madrassas* established after 1857 revolt are Madrasa Darul Uloom of Deoband (1866), Madrasa Mazhahirul Uloom of Saharanpur (1866), Nadwat-ul-Ulema of Lucknow (1894) and several other *Madrassas* in Delhi. Nadwat-ul-Ulema introduced rational sciences and working knowledge of English in its courses of study while emphasizing Arabic literature and Islamic history. Replacement of Persian by English in 1837 as the language of the courts was another blow to the *Madrassa* system. The mutiny of 1857 and the subsequent transfer of authority of governance of India from the East India Company to the British Crown had a very profound impact on Muslim education in India. The Muslims had to face many formidable challenges along with general animosity of the British rulers. They had to counter the preaching activities of the Christian missionaries. The Ulema and the masses rose to the occasion and started a series of *Madrassas* in the country. A large number of *Madrassas* were set up in the later half of the 19th century.

Now multi-disciplinary education is imparted which includes English, Science, History, Geography, *Tib* (Medicine) besides the religious disciplines. Aligarh movement headed by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan started later, was another attempt to improve educational institutions of Muslims. The last two decades of 19th century and the first half of 20th century witnessed various commissions appointed by British rulers for studying the educational scenario of the country and it is to be noted that, some of these also studied the reasons of the educational backwardness of Muslims of India. *Madrassa* system came under serious scrutiny in these studies. At present in India, there are three types of *Madrassas*. They are:

- Maktab for elementary education.
- Madrasa of secondary and senior secondary level education.
- Darul Uloom for higher education.

Among these *Madrassas*, there are government aided and unaided *Madrassas*. Mostly *Madrassas* are registered from the State Madrasa Board or some other board. Some *Madrassas* are not registered. Their purpose is to provide education to children from poor families who cannot afford to go to school.

MADRASA EDUCATION AT PRESENT

At present there are several thousand Islamic schools spread all over India. Institutions known as *Madrassas* may be divided into four categories:

1. Maktab (For Primary education)
2. Madrasa (For secondary \Senior Secondary level of study)
3. Darul Qur'an (For memorization of Holy Qur'an)
4. Jamia (For Higher Studies)

Partition of the country made a significant impact on *Madrassa* system of the country in terms of both; quality and quantity. In the wake of Indian independence, most of the politically articulate and well to do

Muslims migrated to Pakistan, whereas the weak Muslim masses remained in India. *Madrasas* have contributed to the national cause tremendously. The founders and graduates of *Madrasas* have played leading role in the country's freedom struggle as well as in nation building. Molana Ubaidullah Sindhi and Moulana Barkatullah Khan Bhopali were among the first to ask complete freedom for India.

Most important and famous among them were:

1. Darul Uloom, Deoband, 1866
2. Mazaheral Uloom, Sharanpur, 1866
3. Madrasaa Baqyatu Salehat, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, 1883
4. Jamia Mazharul Uloom, Banaras, 1893
5. Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow, 1894
6. Madrasaa Ameeniah, Delhi, 1897
7. Darul Uloom Khalilia Nizamia, Tonk, 1899
8. Jamia Arabia Hayatul Uloom, Mubarakpur, 1899
9. Madrasaa al-Islah, Sarai Mir, Azamgarh, 1909
10. Jamia Darus Salam, Umnabad, 1924

CONCLUSION

Madrasas in India are institutions running for the past few centuries. During the present times, they cater to the educational needs of Muslim children from economically weaker sections. The constitution of India in its several articles has granted provisions for the upliftment of minorities regarding their education. The national education policy 2020 emphasizes quality education for all children irrespective of caste, creed, religion, sex, and region. The government of India has to implement measures to ensure quality education in Madrasas also. Financial assistance to Madrasas needs to be raised and a timely supply of funds from the state as well as the centre has to be ensured which is necessary for quality education. The Madrasa education system introduced by Muslims has emerged as one of the largest non-formal education systems prevailing in the country. Even though Madrasa education is very much a formal system of education in many states, the government documents consider it as a non-formal system of education. Now it is one of the largest network of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) in the country. Madrasa education in India which originated several centuries ago in a different political and social context, continues to address though in part the educational needs of a large section of Muslim population.

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