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EDUCATION UNDER THE SULTANS OF KASHMIR (14TH-16TH CENTURIES)

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Abstract: This paper argues that during the Sultanate period education and learning in Kashmir was one of the most important priorities of the state whose legitimacy *inter alia* depended on serving Islam through the creation of a network of educational institutions and patronizing the agency of Islamic scholars and teachers. This process was further augmented by the *ulama* and Muslim missionaries who had taken upon themselves to accomplish the crucial job of Islamizing Kashmir. As the Sultans, *ulama* and *sufis* belonged to Iran and Central Asia, the educational aims, practices, curricula and institutional framework have to be situated in the context of Persian and Central Asian educational system.

Keywords: *'ulama, sufis, maktaba, madrasa, khanaqah, Sultans.*

Keeping into account the Persianate-Islamic cultural background of the Sultans and the zeal of the Persian and Central Asian Muslim missionaries to change the world-view and value system of the people of Kashmir after the one that was forged in their own homeland over a long period of time, the adoption of a systematic policy of teaching-learning process assumed the central importance before the rulers as well as the Sufis and *'ulama*. In this regard they had not to make any innovations; they had only to borrow the system that was in vogue in Persia and Central Asia for many centuries. The promotion of education was an exceptionally commendable activity displayed by the Muslims since the very birth of Islam. The Muslim rulers, whom their religion enjoins upon to give priority to seeking knowledge¹ had given a considerable importance to education by opening *maktabs*, *madrasas* and *khanaqahs*, bestowing liberal patronage upon the teachers and scholars, establishing translation bureaus and building rich libraries. The exemplary zeal showed by Abbasids, Saljuqs and Timurids towards the promotion of education and learning interests even the ruthless critics of tradition. In this regard a recent opinion is worth quoting:²

Closely related to the civilization of the Iranian plateau, Turkistan reached comparatively high levels of learning during the 9th-13th centuries. In certain respects these levels were not attained in Western Europe until late in the Renaissance, and in the vast region of the Middle-East Central Asia, they have yet to be surpassed by the indigenous populations.

For a proper understanding and appreciation of the Persian and Central Asian influences on the educational system of Kashmir it is necessary to make a brief mention of the system that obtained in Iran and Turkistan during the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries - the period of our study. As elsewhere the system of imparting education in medieval Persia and Central Asia was both formal and non-formal. Formal education comprised teaching of Qur'an, *hadith*, *tafsir* (exegesis), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *kalam* (theology), *nahw* (grammar), *adab* (belles letters), *riyadiyya* (mathematics), *tib* (medical science), *ilimiramal* (astronomy), *fara'id* (laws of inheritance) and *tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism).³ For imparting this education there were three types of institutions, namely, *maktaba* (primary school), *madrasa* (college) and *khanaqah*⁴ (residential university for those who yearned to follow a spiritual path). The books taught in these institutions were, with exception, generally authored by the Persian and Central Asian scholars.⁵ It is hardly necessary to repeat that major contribution to medieval Islamic learning was made by the Persian and

¹ The *Surah-i-hjra*, the first revealed *surah* of the Qur'an, opens with an injunction addressed to the Prophet "to read" and the place assigned to education in Islam can be best appreciated in the light of importance attached to ink, pen and paper- the three indispensable instruments to acquiring and extending knowledge. There are numerous traditions (*Ahadith*) treating the subject and enjoining it as a religious duty. "Allah will exalt those who believe... and those who have knowledge, to high degrees." Quotation cited in A. Shaleby, *History of Muslim Education*, 1945, p. 61. For an account of Prophet Muhammad's educational ideas. See R.L. Gulick, *Muhammad the Educator*, Lahore; Institution of Islamic Culture, 1961.

² William K. Medlin and William M. Cave Finley Carpenter, *Education and Development in Central Asia: A Case Study on Social Changes in Uzbekistan*, pp. 26-27.

³ George Makdisi, "Muslim Institutions of Learning in Eleventh - Century Baghdad" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (B.S.O.A.S.), pp. 51 ff.; J. Gilbert, "Institutionalization of Muslim Scholarship and Professionalization of the *Ulama* in Medieval Damascus", *Studies Islamica*, LII, 1980, pp. 105-34; A.L. Tibawi, "Origin and Character of Al-Madrasah."

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Ehsan Yarshater et al (eds.), *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 91-92.

Central Asian genius.⁶ Although there was no department of education as such, nevertheless the rulers patronized education from lower to the highest levels by providing *madad-ima'ash* grants to the teachers and *waqf* grants to the institutions.⁷

There were no formal technical institutions. Yet the Muslim rulers patronized the technologists, scientists, engineers and urban artists and craftsmen. Not surprisingly therefore their cities became the hubs of advanced technologies of the time even if they had to attract the experts from distant lands.⁸ The remarkable efforts made in this regard by the Timurids especially Shah Rukh, Baisunqur Mirza (1433-1443), Ulugh Beg (1447-49), Abu Sa'id (1452-69) and Husain Baiqara (1469-1506) - the contemporaries of the Sultans of Kashmir- make an interesting reading.⁹

The Muslim rulers of Persia and Central Asia had also shown considerable interest in building large libraries. In pursuance of this interest they not only procured books from far off lands but also established translation bureaus to translate the precious books into Arabic and Persian. Al- Rashid' s and al- Ma'mun's library and translation bureau known as *Bait al- Hikmah* , and al- Hikm's more comprehensive *Dor al- 'Ilm* was a great tradition bequeathed by them to the lovers of learning to follow. ¹⁰ The neighbouring Herat had become the hub of literary, artistic, scientific, technological and social and religious science studies thanks to the efforts of Baisunqur Mirza and Husain Baiqara who established academies and libraries at Herat by attracting poets, scholars, artists, technologists and scientists from the whole Timurid Empire.¹¹ The cultural dominance of Persian civilization and language in Central Asia is a fact well known to the experts in the field. It is therefore no wonder that all the major works on different branches were written in Persian, and education was also imparted in this language.

As in Kashmir the patrons of education-the Sultans and the missionaries, who established schools and acted as teachers-belonged to Persianate zone, the educational system of Kashmir came to be modelled exactly on the same lines as we find in medieval Persia and Central Asia. The educational aims, curricula, organization and practices all articulated religious concerns at both lower and upper school levels. The main purpose of the education was to inculcate Islamic values through the teaching of Qur'an, *Haidith*, *Fiqh* and works of Sufi masters including Sufi poets.

The most influential Muslim thinker of 11th century al- Ghazali had already advised: "The soul of the child is pure like a natural coloured stone, soft like wax, to which one can give various forms; it is similar to a fertile soil, in which each sown seed grows."¹² The great saint of Kashmir, Sayyid Ali Hamdani articulated the same views and forcefully advocated the policy of what may be called "catch them young."¹³ Acting upon this suggestion the Muslim rulers and preachers gave first preference to opening *maktabs*. The first known Sultan to open *maktabs* is Sultan Shihab al-Din.¹⁴ The establishment of *maktabs* to teach Qur'an and basic elements of Islam, received a great fillip from Sultan Qutub al- Din onwards thanks to the influx of Sufi missionaries. After the foundation of *maktabs* in Srinagar and major towns, *maktabs* were opened almost in every village during the sixteenth century by the efforts of Mir Shamas al- Din 'Iraqi¹⁵, Mirza Haidar Dughlat¹⁶ and Suhrawardi saints under the leadership of Shaikh Hamzah Makhdam.¹⁷

Madrasa was a college of medieval Persia and Central Asia. The establishment of an extensive network of *madrasas* in Persia and Central Asia is specially associated with the name of the great Saljuqid minister, Nizam al- Mulk.¹⁸ After him *madrasa* assumed the leading position for teaching Islamic sciences, eclipsing all other institutions¹⁹ save *khanaqah* which, however, imparted only Sufi learning. In Kashmir, *madrasas* came to be established immediately after the establishment of the Sultanate. However, the earliest evidence pertains to the reign of Sultan Shihab al- Din who, according to the author of *Nawadir al- Akhbar*, opened *madrasas* in Srinagar.²⁰ The establishment of *madrasas* received further impetus from the reign of Sultan Qutub al- Din following the large scale inflow of Muslim preachers and scholars. Sultan Qutub al- DTn established a college in his new capital Qutub al-Dinpura.²¹ This college existed till the establishment of the Sikhrule in Kashmir when, owing to the lack of patronage it had to close down.²² Another famous *madrasa* founded during the period was *Madrasa 'Urwatal-Wusqa*.²³ Sultan Sikandar also founded a *madrasa* in his newly founded capital Sikandarpura. According to *Tarikh-i Kabir* Mulla Afzal Bukhari was its principal; and he was given village Nagam as *madad-ima'ash* grant²⁴. Sultan Zain al-'Abidin, whose exemplary love for learning is well known, opened many *madrasas*. The most leading college was opened near his palace in Naushahr.²⁵ Besides this we come to know many other *madrasas* opened outside Srinagar in Zainagir and at Sir²⁶ (Dachinpara). Sultan Hasan Shah founded *Madrasa-i Daru'sh Shifa* at Pakhribal on the Dal Lake.²⁷ Sultan Husain Shah Chak improved the *Daru'sh- Shifa*, and also opened

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See fn. 3.

⁸ See P. Jackson and L. Lockhart, *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 6, Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 615-16; A.J. Arberry (ed.), *The Legacy of Persia*, Oxford University Press, 1953, pp. 138-39.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ For details see Makdisi, op. cit.

¹¹ See, *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 6, op cit., pp.615-16; *The Legacy of Persia*, op. cit, p. 139.

¹² Quoted by Medlin and Finley, op. cit., p. 28.

¹³ *Dhakhirat al- Muluk*, Tr. by Shamas al -Din Ahmad, Vol. I, pp. 150-153.

¹⁴ Aba Rafi al-Din Ahmad, *Nawadir al Akhbar*, f. 29b; Sayyid Ali, *Tarikh-i Kashmir*, fn. 10

¹⁵ *Tuhfat al Ahbab*, transcript copy, Research and Publication Division, Department of J&K Libraries, Srinagar.

¹⁶ Baba Nasib al- Din, *Nur Nama*, Research and Publication Division, Department of J&K Libraries, Srinagar, ff. 415a-417ab.

¹⁷ Bābā Dā'ūd Khaki, *Dastur al- Salikin*, Vol. II, Urdu tr. by Mohamad Tayyib Kamli, Srinagar, (nd), pp. 70-80.

¹⁸ For details, see Makdisi, op.cit.

¹⁹ J.A. Boyle (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 5, Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 215.

²⁰ *Nawadir al Akhbar*, f. 29b.

²¹ Sayyid Ali, f. 6b; *Waqi'al-i Kashmir*, p. 82.

²² Hasan, *Tarikh-i Hasan*, Vol. IV.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Miskin, *Tarikh-i Kabir*, p. 290.

²⁵ Haidar Malik, *Tarikh-i Kashmir*, p. 49.

²⁶ Sufi, *Kashir*, Vol. II, p. 349.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 349.

a *madrasa* called *Madrasa-i Husain Shah* to which he assigned the revenues of Zainpur.²⁸ These *madrasas*, it may be mentioned, used to have both library and hostel facilities for which *Waqf* grants were provided.²⁹

Khanaqah was the residential university of spiritual learning. This Sufi institution began emerging from the end of the 10th century in Iran and Central Asia.³⁰ The first half of the 11th century is one of first developments and organization.³¹ The Sufi Abu Sa'id Abil Khair drew up a code of ten rulers for the people in the *Khanaqah*.³² He was considered by the next generation as the first to have regulated the communal life in the *khanaqahs*.³³ During the second half of eleventh century *khanaqahs* spread far and wide with Saljuk expansionism. Around the same period they reached the territories of the Ghaznivids and then the Ghurids.³⁴ *Khanaqah* was a teaching, learning and meditating center as well as the home of the Shaikhs and the *talibs* (students in search of spiritual path). The *khanaqah* worked under the Shaikh. For seeking admission in the *khanaqah*, it was necessary for the *talib* to have completed *madrasa* education.³⁵ In the *khanaqah* emphasis was laid both on theoretical as well as practical education. Besides studying the works and biographies of the great Sufis, the students had to seek seclusion, adhere to *zabti nafs* and concentrate on *dhikir*.³⁶ Each student had his own cell in the *khanaqah* to concentrate without distractions. However, in the beginning the junior inmates had to live with the seniors for cultivating an orientation of *khanaqah* life.³⁷ The students of the *khanaqah* had to strictly observe the code of the *khanaqah*. They had to completely submit before the authority of the Shaikh. The submission was so complete that non would step out of the *khanaqah* without proper permission. ³⁸The students were provided free food, lodge and other basic necessities. It is therefore, understandable to see *langar* (kitchen) a necessary concomitant of the *khanaqah*.³⁹ The *khanaqahs* were maintained with the help of *waqf* grants bestowed by the state as well as by *nazar wa niyaz*, *zakat*, *sadqat* and *khairat* of the people.⁴⁰

Once the Shaikh was satisfied that the *murid* reached to the expected level in the Sufi path, he was allowed to establish an independent *khanaqah* to enroll disciples for the order in the new *vilayats*. In this way a network of *khanaqahs* came to be established, producing a large number of Sufis who proved as the most successful social reformers besides the missionaries of Islam as the spiritual education enabled them to transcend narrow self interest.

As Islam entered into the Valley through the medium of Sufism, *khanaqahs* came to be established simultaneously with its introduction. The most famous *khanaqahs* of the period were Khanaqah-i Bulbul Shah (Srinagar), Khanaqah-i Sayyid Husain Simmini (Kulgam), Khanaqah-i Muaila (Srinagar), Khanaqah-i Amiriya (Tral), Khanaqah-i Nunawani (pargana Vachi), Khanaqah-i Mattan (Mattan), Khanaqah-i Naqashbandhiyya (Asham, Sonwari), Khanaqah-i Jalal Al- Din Bukhari (Srinagar), Khanaqah-i Baba Haji Adham (Srinagar), Khanaqah-i Sayyid Muhammad Madani (Srinagar), Khanaqah-i Jalal al-Din Thakur (Srinagar), Khanaqah-i Malik Ahmad Yatu (Srinagar), Khanaqah-i Baba Isma'il Kubravi (Srinagar), Khanaqah-i Sopur (Sopur), Khanaqah-iJanbaz Sahib (Baramulla), Khanaqah-iMantaqi (Avantipur) and Khanaqah-i Sayyid Ahmad Kirmam, Narwara, Srinagar.⁴¹

Since in Kashmir the *khanaqahs* were mainly established by those Sufi orders who were simultaneously strict adherents of *Shariah*, the *khanaqahs* also disseminated the basic Islamic knowledge besides being the great centers of spiritual education. That these *khanaqahs* played a significant role in the life of the people is attested by the continual veneration which the people show towards them, though they have long back ceased to play the basic role, and have now become mere shrines.

Persian and Central Asian Context of the Curriculum

Besides the Qur'an and Hadith, we come across a large number of books which were prescribed for higher learning. It is significant to note that most of these works were authored by the Persian and Central Asian scholars. To substantiate this fact we have given in the following table the works we meet in a famous Sufi work of Kashmir, *Dastur al-Salikin* of Baba Da'ud Khaki, which this great saint-scholar of Kashmir had thoroughly read and mastered.

Name of the books quoted by Baba Da'ud Khaki in his Dastur-al Salikin: Khulasat al- Islam, Sharah al- Amali, Kashaf al- Asrar, Kashaf Mirsad al- 'Ibad, Aha'al- 'Ulum, Awarif al-M 'arif, Shumayal al-Atqya, Tafsir-i Kashaf, Risal-i Shaikh, 'Usman Magribi M'a'im al- Tanzyil, Mashariq al- Anwar - Ab al- Albab Tafsir-i Qashir, Kitab al- Haqa'iq, Tafsir al- Ramuz Dastur al- Jamhur Tamhidat-i 'Ayn al- Qaza-i Hamhdani, Kymya'i Sa'adat, Khulasat al- Haqayaq, Risala-i Iqbaliah, Miftah al- Janan, Illah-i Nama, Siraj al- Hidayah, Kanz al- Dhaqa'iq, Risala-i Dah, Qa 'dah, Nafhat al- Ans, Kitab-i Janat al- Firdus, Taj al- Islami, Sajat al- Abrar, Minhaj al- 'Abidin Zad al- Musafirin, Tawtyat-i Kasht, Tasyr al- Ahkam, Fathat al 'Ulum, Tadhkirat al- Auliya Risala-i Wahi Allah, Khulasat al- Manaqib, Irshad al- Muridin, Adab al- Murlidin, Risala-i Abdiah, Risala-i Hamidi, Risala-i S'adi, Sharah-i Lamhat, Risala-i Shab Nama, Nur al- M'ali Irshad al- Muminin, Risala-i Mir Muhammad Hamadani, Risala-i Ramuz al- Wahyin, Fawatah al- Jamal, Kashaf al- Mahjub, Silsilat al- Zahab, Tafsir Zahidi, Bahar al- Haqa'iq, Muqamal-i Khawaja, Khasys al- Nabi, Matvabat al- Jawahir, Pandh Nama, Naqd al- Nasus- Risala-i Zain al M'atiqid, Kanz al-'Ibad, Risala-i Lutfiya Gybiya, Risala-i 'Abid Allah, Naqashbandi Risala-i Waldiya, Tafsir-i Maulana Yaqub Sarfi, Sahah Khazanat al- Talali, Fawa'id al- Salikvn, Risala-i 'Aqa'id Shuma' il al- Atqya, Risala-i Gayat al- Imkan, Shawahid al- Nabuwat Khulasat al- Haqa' iq, Fadha'il

²⁸ *Tabaqat-i Akbari*, p. 627; *Nawadir al Akhbar*, f. 87; *Gauhari 'Alam*, p. 107; Sufi, *Kashir*, II, p. 349.

²⁹ *Ibid*

³⁰ See *Encyclopedia of Islam*, p. 1035.

³¹ *Ibid*.

³² *Ibid*.

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ *Ibid*.

³⁵ Aziz al-Din Nasfi, *Al-Insan-i Kamil*, p. 92. Quoted by Shamas al-Din, in *Shah-i Hamadan: Hayat aur Karmanay*, p. 901.

³⁶ *Ibid*.

³⁷ *Daslur al- Salikin*, Vol. I, p. 11. For the living evidence of the structure of medieval *khanaqahs*, see Khanaqah-i Mulla Akhun, near the shrine of Shaikh Hamzah Makhdum.

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ Sayyid 'Ali, ff. 13a, 22a; *Tuhfat al- Ahabab*, passim; *Chilchilatal 'Arifin*, ff. 80ab; *Asrar al Abrar*, f. 38a.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

⁴¹ See Sayyid 'Aii, *Tarikh-i Kashmir*; *Baharistarii Shahi*; *Tiihfat al- Ahabab*; *Waqa'it-i Kashmir* and *Tarikh-i Hasan*, Vol. I for the information of these *khanaqahs*.

Sahabah Taj al- Masadir, Mantaq al- Tyer Sharah al- Riba'iyat, Nawadir al- Asul, Sharah-i Qasidah Naraziah Mymiya, Risala-i 'Abad Allah Ansari, Nasab al- Syyan Faw'id al- Fawad, Bahar al- Haqa'iq, Asrar al- Abrar, Dhakhriat al- Muluk, Bastan-i Abu al- Layas, Al- Mahzab Jawahir al- Islam, 'Umdah' Farsi, Kifayat al- Islam, Wasylat al- Talib in Risala-i Sharaf al- Sa'adat, Sira al- Hidayata, Mukhtar al- Ikhtiyar.

It is significant to note that each Sultan, noble, 'alim and Sufi' had his own library even in those days when the cost of the books was not only prohibitive but they were also difficult to be procured.⁴² In procuring books from different libraries of Iran and Central Asia the state and the missionaries played a crucial role.

Before concluding a few facts need to be added for a better appreciation of the educational development of Kashmir during the period in question. Persia and Central Asia did not only influence Kashmir's educational system by sending teachers and materials; but what is more, no higher education in Islamic learning was considered complete without visiting and staying at the centres of learning situated in Persia and Central Asia. Secondly, the Sultans were also influenced by the rich tradition of instituting translation bureaus – the tradition bequeathed by a host of enlightened rulers of Persia and Central Asia. The translation bureau set up by Sultan Zain al-'Abidin is a case in point.⁴³ Thirdly, the Sultans extended equal patronage to the development of technological education. Although there were no formal technical schools, the technologists were treated as one of the most favoured subjects. They were settled at the royal headquarters close to the palace of the Sultan and were provided *madid-i ma'ash* grant.⁴⁴ Also, every step was taken to introduce new technologies from different parts of the world after the example set forth by the Persian and Central Asian rulers; and all those who were trained in any special technology on state expenses, they had to diffuse it among others for which *karkhans* were established. In lieu for this service the teachers were provided with the same incentives as were provided to the teachers of *madrasas*.⁴⁵

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⁴² Tuhfat al- Ahbab, transcript copy, op cit., pp. 12-13.

⁴³ Srivara, *Rajatarangini*, English tr. JC. Dutta, p. 146; Haider Malik, *Tarikh-i Kashmir*, f. 120a.

⁴⁴ It is significant to note that as late as the close of the 19th century Walter Lawrence found thirty-six families of paper manufacturers at Nau-Shahr, the capital of Zain al- 'Abidin, Walter Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 380.

⁴⁵ Haidar Malik, p. 49.