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, khanqah, 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 knowledge had given a considerable importance to education by opening maktabas, madrasas and khanqahs, 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), na’ah (grammar), adab (belles lettres), riwaytiyya (mathematics), til (medical science), ilimimal (astronomy), fara’id (laws of inheritance) and tasawwuf (Islamic mysticism). For imparting this education there were three types of institutions, namely, maktaba (primary school), madrasa (college) and khanqah (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. It is hardly necessary to repeat that major contribution to medieval Islamic learning was made by the Persian and

1 The Surah-i-hijra, 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.


4 Ibid.

Central Asian genius. 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.  

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. 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 Kshmir- make an interesting reading.  

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- Rashíd’ 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. 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. 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 Kshmir the patrons of education–the Sultans and the missionaries, who established schools and acted as teachers-belonged to Persianate zone, the educational system of Kshmir 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.” The great saint of Kshmir, Sayyid Ali Hamdani articulated the same views and forcefully advocated the policy of what may be called “catch them young.” 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. 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 ‘Iraqi, Mirza Haidar Dughlat and Suhrawardi saints under the leadership of Shaikh Hamzah Makhmd.  

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 Saljuq minister, Nizam al- Mulk. After him madrasa assumed the leading position for teaching Islamic sciences, eclipsing all other institutions save khanaqah which, however, imparted only Sufi learning. In Kshmir, 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. 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 opened a college in his new capital Qutub al-Dinpura. This college existed till the establishment of the Sikhrule in Kshmir when, owing to the lack of patronage it had to close down. Another famous madrasa founded during the period was Madrasa Urwatal-Wasqq. Sultan Sikandar also founded a madrasa in his newly founded capital Sikandarpura. According to Tarikh-i Kabir Mul‘a Afzal Bukhari was its principal; and he was given village Nagram as madad-ima‘ash grant. 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. Besides this we come to know many other madrasas opened outside Srinagar in Zainagar and at Sir (Dachipara). Sultan Hasan Shah founded Madrasa-i Daru ‘sh Shifa at Pakhrabah on the Dal Lake. Sultan Husain Shah Chak improved the Daru ‘sh- Shifa, and also opened

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6 Ibid. 
7 See fn. 3. 
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. 
14 Aba Rafi al-Din Ahmad, Nawadir al Akhbar, f. 29b; Sayyid Ali, Tarikh-i Kashmir, fn. 10 
15 Tuhfat al Abhab, transcript copy, Research and Publication Division, Department of J&K Libraries, Srinagar. 
16 Baba Nasib al- Din, Nur Name, Research and Publication Division, Department of J&K Libraries, Srinagar, ff. 415a-417ab. 
18 For details, see Makdisi, op.cit. 
20 Nawadir al Akhbar, f. 29b. 
21 Sayyid Ali, f. 6b; Waqital-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. 
27 Ibid. p. 349.
a madrasa called Madrasa-i Husain Shah to which he assigned the revenues of Zainpur. These madrasas, it may be mentioned, used to have both library and hostel facilities for which waqf grants were provided.

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. The first half of the 11th century is one of first developments and organization. The Sufi Abu Sa'id Abil Khalr drew up a code of ten rulers for the people in the Khanaqah. He was considered by the next generation as the first to have regulated the communal life in the khanaqahs. During the second half of eleventh century khanaqahs spread far and wide with Saljuq expansionism. Around the same period they reached the territories of the Ghaznivids and then the Ghurids.

Khanaqah was a teaching, learning and meditating center as well as the home of the Shaikhs and the talib (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. 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 asriyat and concentrate on dhikir. 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. 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 one could not step outside of the khanaqah without proper permission. The students were provided free food, lodge and other basic necessities. It is therefore, understandable to see khanqah (kitchen) a necessary concomitant of the khanaqah.

The khanaqahs were maintained with the help of waqf grants bestowed by the state as well as by nazir wa niaz, zakaat, sadqat and khairat of the people. 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 vilyayts. 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 Simnini (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-i Janbaz Sahib (Baramula), Khanaqah-i Mantaqi (Avantipur) and Khanaqah-i Sayyid Ahmad Kirmam, Narwar, Srinagar.

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 not even a few of these books were authored by the Persian and Central Asian scholars. To substantiate this fact we have given in the following table the books 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**


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28 Tabuqat-i Akbari, p. 627; Nawadir al Akhbar, f. 87; Gauhari 'Alam, p. 107; Sufi, Kashir, II, p. 349.
29 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
37 Dastur al-Salikin, Vol. I, p. 11. For the living evidence of the structure of medieval khanaqahs, see Khanaqah-i Mulla Akhn, near the shrine of Shaikh Hamzah Makhdum.
38 Ibid.
39 Sayyid 'Ali, ff. 13a, 22a; Tuhfat al-Ahbab, passim; Chilchilatal 'Arifin, ff. 80ab; Asrar al Abrar, f. 38a.
40 Ibid.
41 See Sayyid 'Ali, Tarikh-i Kashmir; Baharistarii Shahi; Tihsifat al-Ahbab; Waqa'i Kashmir and Tarikh-i Hasan, Vol. I for the information of these khanaqahs.
It is significant to note that each Sultan, ‘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. 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 ul-Abidin is a case in point. Thirdly, the Sultans extended equal patronage to the development of technical 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 maddid-i ma’ash grant. 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.

REFERENCES


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 Haider Malik, p. 49.