

Muslim Education system in the Medieval Period in India

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Abstract: *The present work is an endeavour to evaluate the educational system during the medieval period in India. The main purpose of this research paper is to acquire an understanding of educational system during the medieval period in India. In this particular period, the Muslim system of education was predominant. Transformations were brought about in the system of education. The individuals began to recognize the significance of education and even began to enrol in higher educational institutions. Primary education was imparted in Maktabas, and higher education was imparted in Madrasas. There was initiation of modern and innovative methods and strategies in the teaching and learning processes. Examination and tests were conducted regularly. They were regarded as assessment methods, with the main purpose of evaluating the performance and the learning abilities of the students.*

Keywords: *Education, Maktab, Madrasah, Vocational Education.*

Introduction: The Muhammadan invasions of India have changed not only social, political spheres but also changed education system of learning. The Muslims first appeared in India in the eighth century A.D., but the real storm of Muslim aggression burst over India under Mahmud of Ghazni during the eleventh century. Mahmud Ghaznavi invaded the country and established innumerable schools and libraries with the looted wealth in his own country. Afterwards when the Muslim rulers established permanent empire in India, they introduced a new educational system here. Mahmud was a great patron of education along Muslim lines. He gave large sums of money for the support of learned men and poets. During the medieval period, the initiative for education came from the government and hence there was a centralized system of education. The majority of people in India were Hindus while Muslim Kings ruled the country. These kings did not give enough attention to the education of the majority. The imposition of a foreign language created more troubles in a land of many languages. However, Muslims kings achieved a great deal for education of those who belonged to Islam.

The period under the medieval India comes from about the 10th century A.D. to the centre of the eighteenth century, i.e. earlier than the British rule. The Muslim system of education used to be predominant. The education system in medieval India was once a domain that was once constrained to a few to a giant extent, who have been worried in the management of transmission, it was once something technically that was once within the attain of everyone. The upward thrust of Mohammedanism is one of the most awesome occasions in the history of the world. The whole records of India underwent transformations with the upward push of Mohammedanism. The Mohammedan invasions in India took

place from the beginning of the eighth century A.D. The Arabs and the Turks introduced most of the new customs, cultures and institutions within the country. Out of these, one of the most remarkable was the Islamic pattern of education, which was different to a major extent from the Buddhist and the Brahmanic systems. The transformations that were brought about in the system of education since the ancient times is a reflection that there have been changes and transformations in the social contexts. The system of education in medieval India primarily focused upon Islamic and the Mughal system. The new social realities, particularly the interplay between the democratization of education, emergence of knowledge society and globalization had a large influence upon the educational processes of all societies. In making an attempt to meet with all the challenges and problems, the country also took into consideration, the international dimension of education. National needs and expectations of the international community may seem to have conflicting interests, but the receptivity of change within the country has led to their complementarities. An analysis of the changing conditions reveals that most of these changes are likely to permeate through the educational policies of the next few decades.

The objectives of the present work are as follows:

- To evaluate the system of education during the medieval period in India.
- To analyze the impact of medieval education on Indian society.
- To assess the methods and techniques in teaching system

Foundation of Medieval Educational System in India: It was unfortunate that some of the renowned and prominent institutes of higher learning of the Hindus have been transformation by the Muslim rulers. The most notable example is that of the Nalanda. It was an international centre for learning. In the medieval period of education, emphasis was put upon religion-oriented education. The most notable example is that of Nalanda. It was an international centre for learning. In the medieval period of education emphasis was put upon religion oriented education. The individuals possessed strong beliefs and viewpoints that religion oriented education would inculcate the knowledge, values, morals and ethics among the individuals, which are vital for existence. Elementary education was imparted in the Pathshalas, which existed both in urban and rural areas. There were separate houses for the Pathshalas and there were not any establishment of buildings for them. The students did not pay any specific fees to the teachers for education. The parents in return gave presents to the teachers and the students were required to render a personal service for them. The students made provision of assistance in the administration and management of the institutions. During the medieval period the main purpose of education was to train the students, so that they are able to generate awareness in terms of all important areas and inculcate the traits of morality and ethics. The initiation of education began with the ceremony called Bismillah. This ceremony was similar to Upanayana, which was practiced in ancient India, when the students went to acquire education. The students from the elementary level were trained in terms of

arithmetic, calculations, weights, measures, shapes and so forth. Therefore, mathematics was regarded as essential. Literature was another subject that was focused upon. In addition, the other subjects that were taught in educational institutions included, science, social-science, astronomy, accountancy, public administration and religious education. In some of the schools, students were also given instruction regarding Hindu mythology. In the Hindu mythology, they learnt regarding the Gods and Goddesses. The institutions that provided school education were known as the Maktabas. During this period, women were not allowed to go in front of the outsiders without covering their faces. This was known as the Purdah system. Due to the prevalence of the Purdah system, education among women was not given recognition. The presence of the Hindu religion schools, where Sanskrit was the medium of instruction and the Maqtabas of the Muslim religion, where Persian was the medium of instruction, led to the formation of a new language, Urdu. It was generally written in Persian characters with the words of Arabic and Persian origin. The origination of vocational and technical education were regarded to be major developments under the Muslim period. Ever since the fall of the Gupta Empire, the Islamic rulers built an empire with the central administration.

Characteristics of Education:

The chief characteristics of Muslim education in India are as:

Patronage of the Rulers: The rulers rendered a significant contribution in the spread of education. They initiated educational institutions and universities and also vested financial resources. The wealthy individuals also rendered financial contributions and assistance that were required in the spread of education. The rulers patronized the men of learning.

No State Control on Education: The rulers neither claimed any authority over the educational institutions nor interfered with their management.

Religion Dominated Education: In the words of S.N. Mukerji, “The whole educational system was saturated with religious ideals which influenced the aim, the contents of study, and even the daily life of the pupils.” The pupils acquired knowledge as a religious obligation.

Countryside as the Centre of Education: By and large, educational institutions flourished in the countryside.

Provision of Various Disciplines: Though education was primarily religion-oriented, it included the study of many intellectual activities like mathematics, astronomy, grammar, polity and politics. Art and literature were also encouraged.

Norms of Conduct: Adequate stress was laid on well-defined norms of behaviour, pattern of thought, building up personality and character of the pupils.

Learned Teachers: Teachers took to teaching for love of learning. They were held in high esteem. Prof. S.N. Mukerji has observed, “Learning was prized for its own sake and as a mark of the highest human development and teaching was never handicapped by examination requirements.

Teacher Pupil Relationship: In the Muslim period also the teacher was respected as during the Brahmanic or Buddhist period. There was intimate relationship between the teacher and the pupil, although the practice of living with the teacher was not as common with the Muslims as it was in the case of Brahmanic and Buddhist period. Pupils were expected to serve the teacher and in return got sometimes free food and always free knowledge from him.

Individualised Instruction: Since the number of students with the teacher was limited, he paid individual attention to each students.

Monitorial System: Although a teacher did not have many pupils to teach yet, still the teacher would take the help of senior and advanced students to teach the younger or the junior.

Discipline: Punishments were quite sever, Truants and delinquents were caned on their palms and slapped on their faces. A strange mode of punishment was to make the children hold their ears by taking their hands from under their things while sitting on their tiptoes. Whipping was also quite common. Any form of punishment devised and thought of by ingenuity of the teacher was permissible.

Types of Institutions: Primary education, was imparted in ‘Maktabs’ and Secondary and High education in ‘Madrasahs’.

Islamic System of Education: In the medieval period, the Islamic system of education replaced the Vedic system of education and Buddhist education system. The reason being, it was felt that there was an increasing need for Islamic administration. The Islamic system of education was introduced with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. Islam gives great importance to education, which is the process of teaching, acquiring or learning knowledge. In the Islam religion, education renders a significant contribution in leading to progression and enhancement of every individual, so that he can be successful in securing his future and living an efficient life. The system of education in medieval India was structured on the lines of the tradition of education that was developed under the Abbasids of Baghdad. The scholars belonging to countries such as, Samarqand, Bukhara and Iran looked up to the Indian scholars for guidance. Amir Khusrau, a scholar from the Indian sub-continent, not only developed the skill of writing, prose and poetry, but also formulated a new language, suitable to the local conditions. Some of the contemporary scholars, like Minhaj-us-Siraj, Ziauddin Barani and Afif have written about Indian scholarship. In this period, there were number of subjects that were introduced, these include, logic, mathematics, geometry, history, geography, accountancy, public administration, literature, science, and astronomy. Apart from these, there were also introduction of different strategies and

methods in the system of education, these include, reading, writing, discussing, logical reasoning, research and experiments.

The education in medieval India can be understood only against the background of Islamic education, based on the teachings of the Quran. In the Quran, the important beliefs are expressed in the Allah as the most important principle. The other principles that are understood are, knowledge is regarded as one of the seven major attributes of Allah and education is the prime duty of all human beings. Islamic education emerges from the Mohammedan concept of God, expressed in belief in Allah. While the traditionalists follow the absolute faith Quran and do not acknowledge modern education to a major extent. It is necessary to bring about changes and transformations in education to suit the modern age. The followers of Islam recognized the significance of education to a major extent. In accordance to the prophet, the ink of the scholar is holier than the blood of the martyr.

Muslims regarded general education as an integral part of Islamic education. They ruined the ancient Buddhist and Hindu temples and schools and other educational centres and built Masjid and madrasas. In the Muslim period, learning was held in high esteem. The great Mughal emperors were the patrons of learning and promoters of education. The people, who were well-educated and learned were respected and revered throughout the country. The lawyers, judges, teachers, researchers, educationists, commanders in the army and ministers, all belonged to educated classes. The Muslim system of education began to implement strategies and approaches that even Hindus began to acknowledge it. The main purpose of this education was to adequately prepare the students to sustain their living and cope up with challenges and problems.

The main features of the Muslim system of education were that it was traditional in spirit and theological in content. The curriculum was divided into two categories: the traditional (manqulat) and the rational (maqulat) sciences. Under the traditional sciences, the subjects that were introduced included, law, history and literature. Logic, philosophy, medicine, mathematics and astronomy came under the rational sciences. More emphasis was put on the rational sciences at a later stage as compared to the traditional sciences. Traditional subjects dominated education under the period of Illutmish, which was from 1211-1236 till the reign of Sikander Lodi from 1489-1517. The system of education began to experience a transformation, when logic and philosophy began to get introduced in the system of curriculum.

The System of Education under the Mughals: The Mughal period made immense contribution in the system of education. During this period, the Mughal emperors acquired enormous understanding for learning and recognized the significance of education to a major extent. Pathshalas, Vidyapeeths, Maktabks and Madrasas were the institutions, through which education and learning were spread among the masses. The Mughal emperor, Akbar gave grants to educational institutions, and established

a college near Jama Masjid. During this time, education was not a state subject. Elementary education was provided in temples and mosques. The functioning of temples and mosques in terms of provision of education was dependent upon the donations given by the rulers, wealthy individuals and donors. Sanskrit and Persian were also taught in temples and mosques. One of the main areas that is disadvantageous is, women were usually deprived from acquiring education. The women, belonging to royal and wealthy families received education at home. The Mughal rulers showed interest in learning and literature. During this period, there was prevalence of Urdu language. This language was introduced out of a long term contact between Persian and Hindi, i.e. the Turks and the Indians. The Mughal emperor, Humayun introduced the study of mathematics, astronomy and geography in the madrasas in Delhi. This assisted in causing a reduction in bias in the existing education system. Most of the Indians began to learn Persian and translations were made from Sanskrit to Persian. The subjects like, accountancy, public administration and geometry were added by Emperor Akbar and he instituted a workshop near his palace. The management of all the activities that took place within the workshop was done by Emperor Akbar. The attempt that was made by him to introduce scientific and secular system of education was not much appreciated by the orthodox sections of the society. The efforts and contributions made by Emperor Akbar in the system of education continued for centuries.

Vocational Education: During the Muslim period, there was provision of vocational, technical and professional education. The individuals began to acquire education, on the basis of their skills, abilities and interests. During this period, the individuals were engaged in number of occupations, these include, silk weaving, carpentry, pottery making, dyeing, artworks, handicrafts, working with metals, precious stones, production of garments, jewellery etc. The Mughal emperors took keen interest in artworks and handicrafts. The Mughal paintings are famous even in the present existence. The fine fabrics, shawls, painted wares and gold and silver ornaments of India were the outcomes of professional, technical and vocational education. The individuals, who are engaged in the manufacturing and production of these items, need to possess adequate knowledge and skills. They should possess sufficient awareness regarding how to make use of machines and tools to generate productivity. The commencement of vocational education began with the initiation of the religious ceremony.

The institution, known as karkhana was meant to make provision of technical training. The main objective of technical training was to make provision of knowledge and improve upon the skills and abilities of the individuals, so that they are able to acquire proficiency in the manufacturing and production processes. For instance, if an individual is engaged in the production of a handicraft, then it is vital for him to possess adequate knowledge regarding the use of various materials and proper procedures that needs to be put into practice. All individuals are required to possess sufficient awareness in terms of their job duties. Hence, this knowledge and information is acquired in technical

training. Karkhana provided technical training in handicrafts, based on apprenticeship. They were in fact, manufacturing centres, where apprenticeship would observe and practice artwork, under the supervision of the instructor, who was well-aware of the concepts. These institutions did not require any regular fees. The students would generally give a small present to the instructor or trainer.

Educational Institutions: The educational institutions that were prevalent during the medieval period organized the system of education in such a manner that it generated professionals such as, doctors, lawyers, researchers, educationists, teachers, and so forth. The curriculum and the instructional methods and teaching-learning processes were carried out in an appropriate manner. The educational institutions and the organization of education in medieval India took place in the institutions, classified as follows:

Maktabs: The term '*Maktabs*' is derived from Arabic '*Kutub*' and means a place where writing is taught. These Maktabs were attached to Masjid. Usually when a Masjid was built, the building of the Maktab was also constructed along with the Masjid. The Maktab was the chief place where primary education was imparted to children. Though some of the well-to-do people would engage a teacher for the education of their children at their own houses, yet majority of the children of a locality assembled in the Maktab and received regular education there. In the Maktabs, the children belonging to common groups were provided education. The type of education that was focused upon in Maktabs was primary education. Along with religious education, the students were also taught reading, writing and arithmetic. Therefore, it can be stated, focus was put upon the basic literacy skills. Apart from the basic literacy skills, the students were also provided knowledge regarding religious education. Religious education was considered to be of utmost significance. Another subject that was emphasised upon was literature. General practical education was also given in Maktabs, these included, letter writing, applications and accountancy.

Madrasas: The '*Madrasahs*' imparted secondary and higher education. Often these Madrasahs were attached to Masjid. The term '*Madrasahs*¹' is derived from Arabic word '*Dars*' (a lecture) and means a place where lecture is given. There was difference in principle between the Madrasa and other Masjid. When a particular room was set apart in a Masjid for the teaching purposes it was called a Madrasah. After completion of education in a Maktab, the individuals would move to madrasahs to acquire higher education. During the Muslim period, madrasahs were the centres of higher learning. In a Madrasahs, apart from religious education, the individuals were given training in terms of other areas in order to prepare them practically. Islamic religion was compulsorily taught to all the students. The Mughal

¹ Prof. Ray refers to a publication entitled '*Khulasatu-i-Maktib*' (1688 A.D.). According to it, a set curriculum from the time of Iltutmash was followed. It was mainly theological. The main subjects taught in the '*Madrasahs*' were '*Tasfiz*' (Quranic Exigencies), '*Hadis*' (Traditions of the prophet) and '*Fiqh*' (Muslim Jurisprudence). Beside, grammar, literature, logic, mysticism and scholasticism were taught. pp. 73.

emperor Akbar brought a halt to this tradition. He provided the teaching of Hindu religion and philosophy in many madrasas. The subjects that were introduced in madrasas included medicine, mathematics, history, geography, economics, political science, philosophy, astrology and law. The students, who made use of Sanskrit as the official language, acquired knowledge in terms of Vedanta, Jurisprudence and Patanjali. Abul Fazl has described the educational system, introduced by Akbar in his famous book *Ain-I-Akbari*. During that period, law was based on religious practices and in the education of law, the study of religious principles gained prominence.

Masjids and Khanqahs: Islamic education was diffused not only through Maktabas and Madrasahs but also through Masjid which were founded by rulers and other, and Khanqahs which were started by the heads of religious orders and other pious persons. The Khanqahs which were comparable to the monasteries of Medieval Europe often grew out the tombs of celebrated saints known as dervishes, who, on account of their profound knowledge, were loved and respected by the people at large as their murshids or spiritual preceptors. These 'Dargahs' which could be seen in different parts of Muslim India spearheaded Islamic education and culture among the common people and associated with such venerable saints and scholars as Shaikh Ali Hajveri known as Data Sahib, Sayyid Hussain Zanjani, Khawajah Muin-ud-din Chisti who at Ajmer in 1265 A.D., Shah Nizam ud-din-Auliya who hailed from Ghazni and died in Delhi, after living a long life, in the reign of Ala-ud-din Khalji in 1325 A.D., Hazrat Mahbub-i-Ilahi etc. These Dargahs and Masjids were too numerous to be enumerated and many of them still be seen today as form the very nature of their being places of divine worship, they were more permanent than maktabas and madrasahs. Needless to say, they greatly supplemented the educational work done at maktabas and madrasahs in Medieval India.

Methods: In the Maktabas, teaching primarily took place, making use of oral methods and memorization of the assigned lesson. The Emperor Akbar encouraged writing and made an attempt to bring about reforms in the scripts. In the structure of education, attempt has been made by the emperor to bring about systematization. The education of the students began with the acquisition of alphabets knowledge, then he began to acquire word knowledge and then began to form sentences. In educational institutions, the students and the teachers were meant to follow the rules and regulations and maintain discipline. They were meant to obey the instructions given to them by their teachers and teachers in turn also treated students with kindness and courtesy. The teachers and the students were meant to work in collaboration and integration with each other. The education that was considered prominent was practical education. The students were not required to take any annual or half-yearly exams. They were usually tested from time to time on the basis of the practical situations of life. Military training, artworks, and handicrafts were the subject areas that were considered to be of utmost significance. The women were usually discouraged from the acquisition of education. The women, who belonged to

wealthy and royal households were able to acquire education within their homes. But in maktabas and madrasas, girls and women were also encouraged to obtain education. In other words, spread of education among women began to acquire significance.

Conclusion: The education in medieval India was predominantly based on Muslim system of education. The main objectives of education focused upon religious education, extension of knowledge and propagation of Islam. The characteristics of education are, patronage of the rulers, absence of state control, significance of religion, significance of vocational education, following norms and rules, relationship between the teachers and students, individualized attention, educated teachers, discipline, and teaching assistance. The education was meant to prepare individuals in a manner so that they could earn prosperity and wealth, prepare themselves efficiently to cope up with problems and challenges and sustain their living conditions appropriately. The subjects that were focused upon included, mathematics, religion, accountancy, public administration, astrology, geography, history, economics, political science, astronomy and literature. The languages that were used as the medium of instruction were Urdu, Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit and English. The educational institutions included, Maktabas, Madrasas, Pathshalas, Vidyapeeths, Khanqahs and Karkhana. Vocational education was regarded as significant, in which the individuals were provided with skills and knowledge in terms of various areas, such as, artworks, handicrafts, pottery making, production and manufacturing of various items, such as garments, jewellery and so forth. It can be understood that in medieval India, there were many changes and transformations that took place in the system of education. The education system was free from all restrictions. There was great respect for women and girls, but there were not any satisfactory provisions made to promote education among girls, belonging to the community. Education was limited to women, only belonging to upper and wealthy families. The main purpose of these changes and transformations was to generate awareness among the individuals in terms of the significance of education. Not only individuals, belonging to wealthy communities, but all the individuals, belonging to various categories and backgrounds should obtain access to education. Gradually, the system of education turned out to be more methodical and systematic, due to introduction of policies and strategies.

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