

PATRONAGE OF LEARNING: TRACING THE HISTORY OF MADRASSA EDUCATION IN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT UNDER MUSLIM RULE

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***Abstract:** Learning and dissemination of knowledge have been a compulsory trait of, and a pre-requisite for, the success of any civilization. Muslim civilization was not an exception to this basic principle. The forms and structures of Muslim learning institutions have varied from time to time (due to evolutionary nature in the medieval period) and from region to region (due to varying social needs). Muslim rules in and around the Arabian Peninsula patronized madrassa system as a religious responsibility and focused on facilitating the learned rather than institutionalizing the set up. However, Central Asian dynasties, particularly during Second Millennium AD, organized education system on regular basis and established exemplary institutions, which became role model for rest of the Muslim rulers, stretching from Central Asia to Northern Africa and even South Asia. Madrassa education emerged as a major educational system, and even the only authentic education system in some parts of the Muslim World – with almost equal emphasis on all known branches of reasoned knowledge of the time along with revealed knowledge. The paper tries to trace the history of madrassa education in Indian subcontinent under Muslim Rule.*

Keywords: Madrassa education, Muslim dynasties, Islamic learning, Indian subcontinent, Muslim rule, Delhi sultans, Mughal emperors

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Introduction

Human qualities of observation, analysis, and deduction have always been instrumental in solving the problems and improve the prevailing circumstances of the human race. These capabilities are nourished through education. The developed civilizations have always established and maintained educational institutions to hand down their intellectual achievements to their next generations and to provide them a comparatively high pedestal of development. Such efforts, if efficacious, ensure the superiority of a civilization over its contemporaries.

Nations that have excelled in intellect are strong and influential among the community of nations. Muslims rose from the deserts of Arabia and established their influence over the known world of the time. Muslim rulers, either governing different areas under one central Caliphate or enjoying autonomy in their respective areas, did try to preserve and disseminate knowledge to all and sundry. This paper is an attempt to outline the efforts of various Muslim rulers and scholars to establish, run, and improve educational institutions in their respective eras, and to trace the establishment of madrasa education in the Indian subcontinent.

According to Muslim belief, God has sent prophets and messengers in different periods of history to guide the human kind. All prophets, from Abraham to Muhammad (Peace be upon Him), were teachers to their followers, and tried to make them good citizens according to the injunctions of God Almighty. Their followers taught subsequent generations. This process continued through scholars, guides, and teachers.

Sophists are considered among the first recognized teachers of civilized world. People sought them to learn the art of living in a civilized manner. Their education was based upon mythology, geography, astronomy, and values of society. They taught the art of asserting mental and physical superiority. They had their own interpretations regarding politics and society.

Socrates went a step further and introduced fresh perspectives and values of ethics and politics in the Athenian society. His student Plato advocated a political and social order that

could replace the existing democracy, which had killed his teacher. Plato was the first to found an educational institution, known as Academy, to teach these values. He taught his disciples a code of life that he considered best for all mankind. Later, Aristotle, student of Plato and teacher of Alexander the great, established his own institution, Lyceum. He is referred to as the father of Political Science.²⁴ Greeks have contributed a lot towards the progress of mankind in the fields of logic and social sciences. Their pattern of spreading knowledge also served as a model for others.

The advent of Islam marked an epoch the history of Arabia, which was hitherto considered to be in the dark ages. Islam not only changed the lifestyle of the Arabs but also motivated them to seek and impart knowledge. Prophet Muhammad emphasized spread of not only religious but also the worldly knowledge. His followers patronized the spread of education and literacy through one way or the other. To better understand the development of education system in the Muslim world, it is appropriate to go through various phases of its history.

Patronage of Learning in the Muslim World

The madrassas, as we know today, have evolved to its present form in centuries. In the first part, we shall discuss the period when education was imparted in mosques or in the houses of the rich or of the teachers themselves. The madrassas were yet to be established.

Early Days of Islam: Reading and writing were not common in Arabia. Some scholars are of the view that Sufian bin Umia and Abu Qais bin Abd Munaf were the first *Makkans* to learn reading and writing.²⁵ They learnt from a Christian teacher. The first

²⁴ M. Judd Harmon, *Political Thought: From Plato to the Present* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1964), 11-74.

²⁵ Ahmad Shalbi, *Tarekh Taleem-o-Tarbiat Islamia* (Lahore: Idara Sakafat Islamia, 1999), 52.

known teacher in Arabia was from the valley of Alqraa. He taught *Nowisht o Khawand* (writing and reading).²⁶

At the advent of Islam, there were only seventeen people among the *Quraish* who could read and write. Prophet Muhammad appointed learned Muslims as writers of the revelations. These people are known as *Katebeen Wahi* (amanuenses of revelations). Amir Muawia was among the early amanuensis of Prophet Muhammad.²⁷ Prophet Muhammad used the house of Hazrat Arkam as school for the Muslims of Makkah. This house is known as *Dar-e-Arkam*.²⁸ Abdullah Bin Saeed Bin Aas was appointed to teach reading and writing to the Muslims to facilitate the writing of the Holy Quran.²⁹ Prophet Muhammad also sent Ibn Maktoom and Musaab Bin Umair to Madina to teach the Holy Quran.³⁰

Migration of Prophet Mhammad to Madina: Prophet Muhammad established a mosque, *Masjid Nabvi*, when he migrated to Madina. He used the mosque as a school for the Muslims as well; and appointed Saeed Bin Al Aas to teach reading and writing to the Muslims of Madina.³¹ The place Prophet Muhammad usually used was known as *Al Suffah*.³² He used to sit there, and the followers (*Sahaba*) sought interpretations of the injunctions of the Holy Quran. He ensured that they had understood everything well.³³ The followers tried to remember his sayings (*Ahadis*). People in Madina were not much educated; therefore, when seventy Makkans were captured as prisoners of war after the battle of *Badr*, Prophet Muhammad offered them freedom on the condition that they would

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1986), 1123.

²⁸ It was the same place where Omer the Great embraced Islam.

²⁹ Riasat Ali Nadvi, *Islami Nizam-e-Taleem* (Azamgarh: Moaraf Press, 1938), 32.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Syed Suleiman Hussaini Nadvi, *Hamara Nisab-e-Taleem kaisa ho* (Karachi: Majlis Nashriat e Islam, 2004), 66.

³² Suffah, in Arabic, means a place adjoining the house.

³³ *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1123.

have to teach ten Muslim children the art of reading and writing. Most of the educated prisoners availed this opportunity and were freed after they had taught reading and writing to Muslims in Madina.³⁴

Prophet Muhammad appointed Abada Bin Al Samit to teach Muslims at Suffah.³⁵ Muslims from outside Madina, and even homeless students from within the city, stayed at Suffah. They learned reading and writing along with learning the Holy Quran by heart. Prophet Muhammad supervised their learning as well as their food and lodging. Most of the students at Suffah tried to earn their livelihood during their free time; however, there were many who avoided leaving the place so that they may not miss anything said by Prophet Muhammad. These people are known as *Ashab-e-Suffah*.³⁶ Their number varied because people used to come from nearby tribes, get education, and go back to teach others. The number of these students at one time was seventy.³⁷ These people have contributed a large number of Ahadis.

Prophet Muhammad also sent teachers to different tribes to teach the Holy Quran. These teachers also taught the basic principles of Islam. Prophet Muhammad used to say that these people are sent “to teach the Holy Quran and Islamic Shariat.”³⁸ Learning was being given high priority. Prophet Muhammad often directed tribes from far off areas to shift near Madina to acquire Islamic knowledge. Sometimes, empty lands were allotted to these people to set up their camps. This step also had political, military, and social advantages

³⁴ Nadvi, *Hamara Nisab-e-Taleem*, 66.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Abu Hurera avoided leaving mosque fearing that he might miss something said by Prophet Muhammad. People usually provided food and other necessities of life, as Prophet Muhammad had advised his followers to look after these students as his guests. That is why the organizers of present day madrassas declare their students as the guests of the Holy Prophet, and request people to provide funds for their needs.

³⁷ Nadvi, *Hamara Nisab-e-Taleem*, 67.

³⁸ Nadvi, *Islami Nizam-e-Taleem*, 33.

for Madina.³⁹ Prophet Muhammad also monitored other mosques and schools in Madina and frequently visited the mosque and the school at Quba (some two miles in the east of Madina).

Prophet Muhammad introduced the tradition of specialization. He used to refer people for learning something to those Sahaba who had excelled in that particular aspect of Islamic teachings.⁴⁰ He had translators to assist him in his communications with rulers in different parts of the world. Zaid Bin Sabit can be considered as the chief associate of Prophet Muhammad in this regard. He knew Persian, Hebrew, and Roman.⁴¹ Prophet Muhammad also emphasized upon learning mathematics, division of property, medicine, basic sciences, and kinship knowledge along with the Holy Quran and *Sunnah*.⁴² He was strictly against receiving any reward or money as a fee for imparting religious education. He forbade Ubaida Bin Sabit from receiving a bow as a reward from an immigrant for teaching him the Holy Quran.⁴³ Prophet Muhammad had fixed one day in week for guiding women. He used to say that half the knowledge of Islam could be acquired from his wife, Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah.⁴⁴

The Pious Caliphs: After the demise of Prophet Muhammad, the mission of spreading Islamic teachings continued. Hazrat Umer (the second caliph of Islam) sent teachers of the Holy Quran to the Arab and non-Arab regions where people were embracing Islam.⁴⁵ When Abu Musa Ashari was made Governor of Basra, Imran Bin Haseen accompanied him as a teacher of the Holy Quran and *Sunnah*.⁴⁶ After the conquest of Syria and surrounding areas, governors and teachers were appointed to the new territories.

³⁹ Nadvi, *Hamara Nisab-e-Taleem*, 67.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴³ Nadvi, *Islami Nizam-e-Taleem*, 35.

⁴⁴ Nadvi, *Hamara Nisab-e-Taleem*, 75.

⁴⁵ *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1123.

⁴⁶ Nadvi, *Islami Nizam-e-Taleem*, 33.

Abada Bin Samit stayed in Hams, Moaaz Bin Jabal stayed in Palestine, and Abu Darda stayed in Damascus.⁴⁷ The Sahaba of Prophet Muhammad gave sermons in different mosques. Jabir Bin Abdullah delivered sermon in Masjid Nabvi in Madina, Abu Darda in Damascus, and Huzafa Bin Ishaq in Koofa.⁴⁸ Abdullah Bin Abbas used to give sermon on every Thursday in *Kaaba* in Makkah about the translation and explanation of the Holy Quran.⁴⁹

Hazrat Umer established educational groups in different parts of his rule. The number of these groups was approximately forty nine hundred, organized in around nine hundred mosques.⁵⁰ He made learning of the Holy Quran compulsory and regularly updated the lists of *Hafiz-e-Quran* (person who has memorized the Holy Quran) from all governors. Abu Musa Ashari once sent the list of ten thousand people as Hafiz-e-Quran from Basra.⁵¹ He suggested a syllabus and sent it to different areas of his rule. The syllabus included learning physical fitness skills, martial arts, and literature along with the Holy Quran and Hadis.⁵²

The Umayyads (661–750): The Umayyads patronized learning, as Amir Muavia, the first ruler of the dynasty, took keen interest in teaching the younger generation.⁵³ He was the first one to appoint a paid person to teach Islamic practices and traditions. This was done to train *Al Qasas* (the story tellers).⁵⁴ The Umayyads made various mosques in their kingdom, and almost all of them served as places of learning. Abdul Malik Bin Marwan (685–705) constructed the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and ordered to teach the Holy Quran in all mosques built or renovated by him. After his death, his son Walid Bin Abdul Malik became caliph (705–715). He was fond

⁴⁷ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁹ Nadvi, *Hamara Nisab-e-Taleem*, 100.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 78–79.

⁵¹ Ibid., 79.

⁵² Shalbi, *Taleem-o-Tarbiat Islamia*, 61.

⁵³ *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1123.

⁵⁴ Shalbi, *Taleem-o-Tarbiat Islamia*, 168.

of architecture and a great patron of learning. He renovated the Masjid Nabavi in Madina and also built many new mosques throughout his empire. He established teaching facilities in these mosques and provided state patronage to the teachers. The most famous among these mosques was the great mosque of Damascus, which is today known as Umayyad Mosque.⁵⁵ His governor of Iraq, Hajjaj Bin Yousaf, changed the official language of Iraq from Persian (Pehlavi) to Arabic.⁵⁶ Hajjaj Bin Yousaf himself was a teacher at royal palace before becoming a general and an administrator. He encouraged teaching of Islamic education in Iraq and adjoining areas.

Umer Bin Abdul Aziz, grandson of Hazrat Umer and also known as Umer the Second,⁵⁷ appointed many teachers to impart the Holy Quran and Hadis to the Muslims living in far off regions of the empire. He appointed Yazid Bin Abi Habib as Mufti in Egypt – the first known teacher of Islam sent to Egypt.⁵⁸ He ordered his governors to persuade the learned people of their areas to teach Islamic teachings. He was the first one to start stipends for teachers as well as students to relieve them from economic worries.

The Abbasids (750–1258): The Abbasids rose to power and shifted the capital from Damascus to Baghdad. During their era, the Muslim civilization and learning developed rapidly. The systems of imparting knowledge greatly improved, and many new branches of knowledge were patronized. Mansoor Abbasi (754–775) introduced philosophy as part of Islamic teachings. He acquired books from Greece and had them translated into Arabic.⁵⁹ Abbasids were conscious about educating their children and appointed highly skilled specialists as teachers to their children. Haroon ur Rashid is

⁵⁵ *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1123.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1123.

⁵⁷ He is considered as Umer the second due to his piousness, efforts to purify and implement Islam, and services to spread the teachings of Islam.

⁵⁸ *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1124.

⁵⁹ Syed M. Salem, *Hind o Pakistan main Musalmanoo ka Nizam-e-Taleem-o-Tarbiat* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 1980), 105.

known for his services towards promoting art, science, literature, poetry, and religious learning. He appointed Ahmar (a famous scholar of that time) to teach his son, Amin, who became caliph after his father. Haroon directed Ahmar to teach his son the Holy Quran, Hadis, prose, and oratory and to teach him manners of the court. Haroon established a library *Bait-ul-Hikmat* and appointed translators to translate Iranian and Greek literature into Arabic. He appointed Yohna Bin Maswia to translate ancient books on medicine and Ibn Nobakht to translate Iranian literature and philosophy into Arabic.⁶⁰ Haroon's son Mamoon, who also became caliph (813–833), went a step further by acquiring books from Roman libraries through Caesar and got them translated into Arabic. He sent learned people like Hajjaj Bin Matar and Ibn Albatreeq to select books from Roman libraries.

Introduction of Greek philosophy brought much confusion for ordinary people who found labyrinths of philosophical discussions hard to understand. As a result, a group emerged in Muslims, known as *Mu'tazilis* (the Mu'tazilites), emphasizing the importance of rationality in Islam. Wasil Bin Ata, a student of Imam Hassan Basari, was the founder of this group.⁶¹ Another group, known as *Asharia* (the Asharites), soon emerged to counter the teachings of Motzelites. In the beginning, the conflict between the two schools of thought was over the concept of free will and the

⁶⁰ Nadvi, *Hamara Nisab-e-Taleem*, 81.

⁶¹ Historiographers usually consider Wasil Bin Ata the founder of this group. He used to be a member of the Qadarite group led by Imam Hassan Basari. Mu'tazilites became an important school of thought under the Abbasids, and later, called themselves *Ahl al-Tawhid wa al-Adl* (People of Divine Unity and Justice) based on the theology they advocated, based on reason and rational thinking. For details, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 121–24. Also see Hamid Naseem, *Muslim Philosophy: Science and Mysticism* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2001), 1–41; and I. M. N. Al-Jubouri, *History of Islamic Philosophy: With View of Greek Philosophy and Early History of Islam* (Hertford: Authors OnLine Ltd., 2004), 177–81.

Mutazilite concept of God's doing the better and the best things for human beings. Abu al-Hassan Ali ibn Ismail al-Ashari, Imam Baqlani, and Imam Ibn Fok promoted the Asharia teachings.⁶²

Establishment of Formal Madrassas

Initially, the teaching of Islam was mosque based. With the passage of time, it became impossible to accommodate increasing number of student in the mosque. The teachers had to arrange lectures in their houses. With the spread of Islam, people traveled to distant places to get religious education from learned people of good repute. The rulers of Muslim areas usually accommodated these students and provided food and shelter to them. This practice convinced the rulers to arrange residential facility and reading place in close proximity.

Masjid (mosque) was the first place to be used for Islamic teachings. In the second stage, residential facility, *khan*, was attached with the mosque to facilitate students from other cities.⁶³ At the third stage, teaching and residential facilities were combined in a single unit based on a single trust *Waqf*.⁶⁴ Muslim rulers financially supported scholars and teachers to teach in the madrassas. It was essential to train experts who could facilitate the business of administration.

The first madrassa, Al Karaouine University, was established by a woman, Fatima Al Fihri, in Fes, Morocco, in 859.⁶⁵ Al Karaouine University played an important role in establishing

⁶² The Asharites derived their name from the founder of the school of thought, Abu al-Hassan Ali ibn al-Ashari, a distinguished theologian and an enthusiastic Mu'tazilite himself. He fell out with his Mu'tazilite tutor Abu Ali al-Jubbai over certain theologian problems and ended up presenting a new school of thought in Islam. For details, see Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy*, 124–26; Al-Jubouri, *Islamic Philosophy*, 181–85; and Naseem, *Muslim Philosophy*, 1–41.

⁶³ *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1123.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Salem, *Taleem-o-Tarbiat*, 131.

cultural and academic relations between the Islamic world and Europe in the middle ages.

The movement of establishing madrassas was almost universal throughout the Muslim world. Almost all Muslim rulers patronized education through establishing madrassas. In the following paragraphs, those dynasties are discussed which have played an important role in establishing and maintaining madrassas in the Muslim world.

The Samanid Dynasty (874–999):⁶⁶ During the Abbasid Dynasty, many areas became independent. Most of them, however, accepted Abbasid suzerainty; Samanid Dynasty in Central Asia was one of them. Saman, a nobleman from Balkh, converted to Islam. His son Asad founded the Samanid dynasty.⁶⁷ Nasir ud Daula Abu Al Hassan Sammi Joori was the first one to establish a madrassa in Nishapur (now in Iran). He made it in honor of Abubakar Bin Fork, a renowned scholar of the time.⁶⁸

The Fatimid Dynasty (910–1171): This was a Shia dynasty in Egypt of Ismaili Shia rulers. They established a new education system and fixed salaries for teachers and others related to the educational institutions.⁶⁹ They emphasized upon their interpretation of Islam and had a separate syllabus for royal palaces. There was an educational institution in the royal palace where the sons of ministers and senior officials were educated and trained to serve the

⁶⁶ Different historians cite different dates of the Samani dynasty; cf. R. N. Frye, "The Samanids," in *The Cambridge History of Iran: From the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. Richard N. Frye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), vol. 4, chap. 4; Kamoludin Abdullaev and Shahram Akbarzadeh, *Historical Dictionary of Tajikistan* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010), 315–16; and Gerhard Bowering, ed., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 485.

⁶⁷ Salem, *Taleem-o-Tarbiat*, 131.

⁶⁸ Nadvi, *Hamara Nisab-e-Taleem*, 84–85; also see Nadvi, *Islami Nizam-e-Taleem*, 45.

⁶⁹ Shalbi, *Taleem-o-Tarbiat Islamia*, 194–95.

caliph.⁷⁰ The Fatimids built Al Azhar Mosque in Cairo, which was completed in 988.⁷¹

The Ghaznavid Dynasty (962–1187): Samanids were replaced by Ghaznavids in some parts of their empire. This dynasty ruled in Khurasan (now in Iran) with Ghazna (now in Afghanistan) as its capital. Alp Tigin was the founder. Mahmood of Ghazna (971–1030) is the most well-known ruler of this dynasty. He was a great patron of arts and literature. He invited many scholars to educate his people. His brother Amir Nasr Bin Sebuk Tigin founded a madrassa *Saeedia* in Nishapur.⁷² Another famous madrassa *Baheqia* was already there in Nishapur. Mahmood also established a madrassa in his capital, Ghazna.

The Seljnk Dynasty (11th to 14th Centry): Samanides were replaced by Ghaznavids in some parts and by Saljuks in some other parts of the empire. The Seljuks ruled Central Asia, Middle East, parts of Anatolia, and the Punjab. They spread Islam in Central Asia and also patronized Persian art and literature. They captured Nishapur from Ghaznavids in 1028–29, Ghazna in 1037, and ultimately, defeated Masud I of Ghaznavid dynasty in the battle of Dandanaqan in 1039.⁷³ This victory made them a strong and stable power in the region for a long time. They conquered Baghdad from Shia Buyids in 1055 after the approval of Abbasid Caliph. Seljuks paid special attention to spread Islamic teachings. Sunni ideas were promoted to counter Shia ideas, which had spread during Shia Buyids control over Baghdad and surrounding areas.⁷⁴

Nizam al Mulk al Tusi was a counselor to the king and a great lover of knowledge and learning. He served Ghaznavids in his

⁷⁰ Ibid., 64.

⁷¹ For further details, see Heinz Halm, *The Fatimids and their Traditions of Learning* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1997); and Michael Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids: The World of the Mediterranean & the Middle East in the Tenth Century CE* (Koln: Brill, 2001).

⁷² Nadvi, *Hamara Nisab-e-Taleem*, 84.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Shalbi, *Taleem-o-Tarbiat Islamia*, 104–5.

early days and then joined Seljuks. He established large number of madrassas in different cities of his country. He was given the task of spreading Islamic teachings throughout the country. He performed his job so well that his madrassas became a model for the coming generations in the whole Muslim world. He started the practice of fixing salaries for teachers in madrassas.⁷⁵ He also established madrassas in almost every village of his country. It is said that wherever he heard about a teacher in some part of his country, he established a madrassa there. He also introduced the tradition of donating property and making a trust of the property linked with the madrassas to facilitate the expenditures. Famous among the madrassas he established were in Baghdad, Balkh, Nishapur, Hirat, Isfahan, Basra, Maro, Amal, and Moosal.⁷⁶ He is considered as the founder of madrassas on present day format.

The Zengid Dynasty (1127–1250): This dynasty was established by Imad ud Din Zengi, who ruled parts of Iraq and Syria. His son, Noor ud Din Mahmood Zengi, strengthened the empire and expanded the territories as well. He is also famous for his victories in Crusades. He established many madrassas throughout his rule. There is a long list of madrassas established by Noor ud Din Zengi. He established a madrassa, Al Nooria Al Kubra, in Damascus with a huge building, having rooms for teachers and students. The list of the trust property of this madrassa is very long and comprehensive, showing the interest of the founder in promotion of learning in his area.⁷⁷

The Ayyubid Dynasty (1174–1334): The Ayyubid Dynasty was founded by Saladin (Salah al-Din), who conquered Egypt for the Zengid King Nur ud Din by defeating last Fatimid ruler. After the death of Noor ud Din in 1174 Saladin declared war against his son and captured Damascus. After this, Saladin gained control over entire Syria and even conquered the Jezireh in Northern Iraq. His greatest victory was the defeat of the Crusader states at the Battle of Hattin and conquest of Jerusalem in 1187. He signed a treaty with

⁷⁵ Nadvi, *Islami Nizam-e-Taleem*, 45.

⁷⁶ For details, see Shalbi, *Taleem-o-Tarbiat Islamia*, 104–7.

⁷⁷ For details, see *ibid.*, 107–18.

Richard I of England and died in 1193. He established many madrassas in his rule on the pattern of *Nizamia* of Baghdad, founded by Nizam al Mulk al Toosi. He established separate madrassas for religious education and worldly education. He even established madrassas for medicine as well.⁷⁸ Many courtiers and ministers of Saladin also established madrassas to spread both religious and worldly education.

The Ottoman Empire (1299–1922): The Ottomans did not concentrate much on reforming education system in their early period. Later they established a dual system of education controlled by the state. Second Ottoman Sultan, Orhan Bey (1324–1360), established first madrassas at Iznaik (Nicaea) in 1331.⁷⁹ The members of the Royal family established several madrassas, which were run through Waqf. The scholars were invited from all parts of the then Muslim world.

Sultan Muhammad Al-Fateh established the very first comprehensive educational complex, *Fatih Kulliyesi* (Fateh complex) in Istanbul. It offered education at various levels from elementary to specialization in religion, as well as, natural sciences, including astronomy, logic, and mathematics. Sultan Muhammad Al-Fateh also patronized the learning of Physics and got the world map drawn in Arabic, based on the information given in Ptolemy's Geography. Suleman the Magnificent (1520–1566) established *Sulimaniya* complex, which was an advance medical university of its time.

The Ottoman education system had two setups. The first was the madrassa system for the Muslims. The students were educated according to the Islamic tradition. These madrassas produced two types of graduates: first, the scholars of Islamic knowledge capable of imparting religious education and issuing *Fatwa*; and second, the state officials trained to carry out the official business of the state. The education was free, and financial needs of the madrassas were met through charities.

⁷⁸ For details, see *ibid.*, 108–9.

⁷⁹ Helmut K. Anheier, Stefan Toepler, and Regina List, *International encyclopedia of civil society* (New York: Springer, 2010), 3:964.

The second setup was free-boarding school for the non-Muslims, especially Christians. 3,000 students of ages between 8 to 20 years were recruited annually. This school was situated within the royal palace, Topkapi.⁸⁰ The famous architect of sixteenth century Sinan was also one of these children.⁸¹ The later reforms were introduced in 1773, when modern warfare and technology were taught and separate schools and colleges were established to impart scientific knowledge.⁸²

The Ottomans established elementary schools for small children of six to seven years. The education was free along with residential facilities and meals. They were taught the Holy Quran, Arabic language, and mathematics.⁸³ Intelligent students were sent to madrassas where they studied mathematics, astronomy, and natural history. Medicine and geography were also in some madrassas.⁸⁴ These madrassas were located in large cities and were linked to big mosques. Students interested in higher studies were assigned to an expert teacher in that subject. The teacher, when felt that the student had mastered the subject, used to issue a certificate to that effect.⁸⁵

Madrassa Education in India Subcontinent (962–1526)

When Muslims entered India, it was divided into small kingdoms. The Hindus were in majority and had their own education

⁸⁰ “Climbing the Educational Ladder in the Ottoman Empire,” accessed May 20, 2011, <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=64254>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “The Ottoman Empire,” accessed May 20, 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/434996/Ottoman-Empire/44407/Reform-in-education>.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ For a detailed account of education system of the Ottoman Empire, see Emine O Evered, *Empire and Education under the Ottomans: Politics, Reform, and Resistance from the Tanzimat to the Young Turks* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

system. The Muslims introduced their own education system and their language as official language. Initially, the madrassas were opened by rulers to train people who could carry out state business in the official language. The rulers however did not interfere with syllabi of the madrassas.

The Ghaznavid Dynasty (962–1187): Saboktekin, father of Mahmood, established his rule in Afghanistan and parts of the Punjab. Mahmood succeeded his father in 997. Sultan Mahmood appointed Malik Ayaz ruler of Lahore in 1021. He was the first Muslim ruler of the Punjab. Lahore was burned during the battle. Ayaz started rebuilding the city. He promoted literature and education in his rule. Sheikh Ismail settled in Lahore in 1005. He was one of the first teachers of the Holy Quran in Lahore.⁸⁶

Sultaus of Delhi (1206–1526): When the Muslims established their independent rule in India, they declared Delhi as their capital. Many dynasties ruled under this label: the Slave Dynasty (1206–1290), the Khilji Dynasty (1290–1320), the Tughlaq Dynasty (1320–1413), the Sayyid Dynasty (1414–1451), and the Lodi Dynasty (1451–1526). In 1526, the Delhi Sultanate was absorbed by Babar who established Mughal Empire in India in 1526.

Muhammad Ghori captured Delhi and established his rule. He conquered Ajmer in 1190 and established a madrassa there.⁸⁷ He established another madrassa in Delhi in 1192.⁸⁸ This madrassa was named after him, *Moeezia*. Qutb-ud-din Aybak was a general of Muhammad Ghori. He declared his rule in India after the death of his master Muhammad Ghori. He was the first Sultan of Delhi and founder of the Slave Dynasty. He established a mosque in Ajmer, *Arhai Din Ka Jhompra*. There was a madrassa linked with it as well.⁸⁹ Nasir ud Din Qabacha, successor of Muhammad Ghori in

⁸⁶ Ghulam Sarwar, "Khazinat al-Asfia," in *Islamic Thought and Movements in the Subcontinent (711 1947)*, ed. S. Moinul Haq (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1979), 113.

⁸⁷ Nadvi, *Hamara Nisab-e-Taleem*, 88.

⁸⁸ Salem, *Taleem-o-Tarbiat*, 71.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

Multan and surrounding areas, established a madrassa in Multan for Molana Qutb ud Din Kashani, a famous Muslim scholar. It was the same madrassa where Sheikh Bahaud Din Zikria Multani received his education.⁹⁰ The Sultans spread madrassas in far off areas of their rule. Their courtiers (*Amirs*) also established madrassas in their areas, *Jagirs*. They gave stipends to teachers and students and donated properties for madrassas as trust. Sultans and their courtiers did not interfere with syllabi of the madrassas. It was on the discretion of teachers and scholars (*Ulema*) to decide what to teach and what not.⁹¹

After Qutb ud din Aybak, Sultan Altamash emerged as a strong ruler. He was not much concerned with promotion of learning, but his court was joined by many learned people from Central Asia because Changez Khan was playing havoc in those areas, and people were migrating from there. However, he built a madrassa to promote education. He also arranged a separate educational institution to teach his son Mahmood in Loni.⁹²

Ghayas ud Din Balban was a strong ruler who ruled India for a long span of time. He had the privilege of hosting fifteen princes from Khurasan. His court became full of learned people. His son, Prince Muhammad, grew up under the guidance of Amir Khusro. The prince invited many scholars from the Muslim world and arranged places where they could teach Persian language. He also invited Shaikh Sadi Shirazi, but he refused to come due to his old age.⁹³

Jalaluddin Khilji and his successors could not do much for the promotion of religious education in their rule. It was Firoz Shah Tughlaq who strived hard to establish educational institutions for both religious and worldly education. The famous historian Farishta has given a list of thirty madrassas established by Firoz Shah.

⁹⁰ Nadvi, *Islami Nizam-e-Taleem*, 46.

⁹¹ Salem, *Taleem-o-Tarbiat*, 73.

⁹² N. N. Law, *Promotion of Learning in Muslim India*, (Lahore: Hijra International Publishers, 1985), 20–21.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 26.

Famous among them are madrassa *Qadam Sharif*, adjoining the tomb of his son, Fath Khan, and *Firoz Shahi* madrassa in his new Capital, Firozabad. He established another madrassa in 1352 near *Hauz Khas*, built by Alauddin Khilji in 1295. The tomb of Firoz Shah is located in this madrassa. Maulana Jalaluddin Roomi was one of the teachers in this madrassa. He taught theology, *Fiqah* (Jurisprudence), commentaries on the Holy Quran, and time-honored traditions. It was a compulsory boarding madrassa, and students and teachers were given daily allowances to meet their expenses.⁹⁴ Hindus also started learning Persian and Arabic in this era to perform governmental duties effectively.

Sultan Bahlol Lodhi founded Agra and made some madrassas in his rule as he enjoyed the company of learned people. His son, Sikandar, succeeded him and shifted the capital from Delhi to Agra. He was a poet himself and loved reading books. He hired learned people to translate different books. Among many translations *Tibbi-Sikandari* is one of the greatest books on medicine. He ordered his military officers to get educated. This gave a boost to learning and motivated the courtiers to promote learning through establishing madrassas for both religious and worldly knowledge.⁹⁵ It is said that Urdu started developing during this era due to interaction between the Hindus, who could speak Persian and Arabic, and the Muslims, who could speak Hindi.⁹⁶ His son Ibrahim Lodhi was neither a successful ruler nor a fan of learned people. He caused the downfall of his empire.

Small Muslim Kingdoms of the Indian Subcontinent:

Before going into the details of the Great Mughal Empire, it is appropriate to go through the histories of small Muslim kingdoms which had developed in different parts of India during the rule of Sultans of Delhi. Some of them even existed during the reign of Mughal Empire.

⁹⁴ For details, see *ibid.*, 56–57; 60–63.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 73–78.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 75–76.

The Bahmani Kingdom existed from 1347 to 1526. Muhammad Shah's (1463–1482) famous minister Mahmood Gawan established a great madrasa in Bidar (Deccan). This was a great place of learning and remained so till Aurangzeb captured Deccan, and the madrasa was destroyed by artillery shells. The ruins could be seen even two centuries later with a minaret standing more than hundred feet high.⁹⁷

Sultan Mahmood Khilji was a famous ruler of Malwa kingdom. He loved reading and established many madrasahs. He built a magnificent madrasa attached with Masjid Sultan Hushang in Mandu.⁹⁸ Farishta was of the opinion that Malwa had developed so much in literature that it could be compared with Samarqand and Shiraz.⁹⁹ Nasir Khan was the second ruler of Khandesh Kingdom at the end of Fourteenth century. He established a madrasa in his capital, Burhanpur, and invited learned people to deliver lectures there.

Ibrahim Sharqi was a famous ruler of Jaunpur kingdom. Jaunpur became known for its importance as a place of learning because Western India was passing through a period of instability under the Sayyeds. It was the same place where Farid Khan (Sher Shah) received his education almost a century later. A mosque and a great madrasa were established by Bibi Raji, wife of Mahmood Shah (son of Ibrahim Sharki) in the middle of Fifteenth century. She named it *Namazgah*.¹⁰⁰

Bengal has been a great place of learning during Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries. Governor Ghayasuddin (1212–1227) built a mosque and a madrasa in Lucknauti. There is a place called *Darasbari* (college or madrasa) near the village Umarpur. It was built by Yousaf Shah. Hassan Shah built a madrasa at Ghurashahid in Gour.¹⁰¹ Mir Jafar of Bengal (1757–1765) established a madrasa

⁹⁷ Ibid., 80–89.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 96–97.

⁹⁹ Farishta, quoted in *ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 99–101.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 106–10.

in Katra in Murshadabad (Bengal).¹⁰² Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah was a ruler of Golkandah kingdom in Deccan at the end of Sixteenth Century. He built a beautiful mosque and a glorious madrassa in Hyderabad. This madrassa is known as *Chahar Minar*. It had residential rooms for teachers and students.¹⁰³

Most of the madrassas, established by small Muslims kingdoms in India, were a great source of spreading Islamic education in their adjoining areas. The young Muslims traveled from far off areas to receive quality education in famous institutions.

Madrassa Education in India Subcontinent (1526–1857)

Zahiruddin Muhammad Babar (1526–1530): He was the eldest son of Omar Sheikh Mirza, ruler of the Fergana (in present-day Uzbekistan). Babar had spent a major part of his life in fighting for his rule in Fergana and Samarkand. He invaded India and defeated Ibrahim Lodhi in the First battle of Panipat in 1526. He established what is known as Mughal Empire. He was a learned person and started the tradition of patronizing learned people. His successors continued this tradition in one way or the other.

Nasiruddin Muhammad Hamayun (1530–1556): He loved books and respected learned people. He even died while coming down through stairs in his library. He established a madrassa in Delhi. Sheikh Hussain worked as a teacher there. Shaikh Zainuddin Khafi, a courtier, built a madrassa and was buried in it. A madrassa was established in the tomb of Hamayun.¹⁰⁴

Sher Shah (1531–1545): Though Sher Shah was not a Mughal yet he provided a basic framework of administration, which the Mughals followed later on. He was a great patron of learning. He built a magnificent madrassa at Narnaul (thirty two miles in the west of Bawal, near Jaypur). It was built at the tomb of his great grandfather in 1520.

¹⁰² Ibid., 112.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 95–96.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 133–35.

Akbar the Great (1556–1605): Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar is known as Akbar the Great. Some of his courtiers established some madrassas to promote learning. A madrassa was built by Maham Anga (the wet nurse of Akbar) in Delhi in 1561. Akbar founded a madrassa, *Khanqah*, in Fatehpur Sikri (his new capital). Most of his attention was devoted towards the development of *Ibadat Khana*, where representatives of different religions met and tried to find out similarities among their faiths. This idea persuaded Akbar to introduce his own faith, *Din-i-Ilahi* in 1581.

Nuruddiu Jahaugir (1605–1627): He was a learned man and loved learning and constructing buildings. He repaired many madrassas. He even restarted abandoned and ruined madrassas. He issued orders:

Whenever a well-to-do person or a rich traveler dies without any heir, his property would escheat to the Crown and be utilized for building and repairing madrassas, monasteries, etc.¹⁰⁵

Shihabuddiu Shah Jahau (1628–1658): He built a mosque in Delhi, *Masjid-i-Jahan Numa*, commonly known as *Jama Masjid* in 1656. A madrassa was established on the southern side of the mosque. This madrassa was, however, demolished after the War of Independence 1857. His interest lied more in promoting singing and painting.

Muhyuddiu Aurgzeb Alamgir (1658–1707): He was a learned person himself and did a great effort in gathering Islamic rules (Sharia) in his famous compilation, *Fatawa-e-Alamgiri*. He strived hard to spread Islamic education. He sanctioned generous amounts of money for the repair of madrassas. He ordered stipends for teachers and students. His courtiers and governors also established madrassas. Akramuddin Khan Sadr built a madrassa in Ahmadabad in 1697. Qazi Rafiuddin Muhammad established a madrassa near *Qaziun Ki Masjid* in Bianah in 1670.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 175.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 188–89.

The Later Mughals (1707–1857): Aurangzeb had a stronghold in Indian subcontinent, but his successors could not continue the rule in the same manner. The rulers were either indulged in battles for succession or spending time in the company of singers and dancers. The courtiers and governors, however, established some madrassas to patronize education.

Two madrassas were established by Bahadur Shah's (1707–1712) courtiers. Ghaziuddin, father of Asaf Jan (founder of Nizam Dynasty in Deccan), was a favorite courtier of Aurangzeb. He established a madrasa in Delhi near Ajmeri Gate. The other one was founded by Khan Firuz Jang who was later on buried in his own madrasa in 1711.

Muhammad Shah (1719–1748) made efforts to promote education with an emphasis on scientific education, especially astronomy. Nawab Sharafuddaulah, an Amir, built a madrasa in Delhi in 1722. Nadir Shah took books from royal library along with other valuable things during his invasions. Shah Alam II (1759–1806) established new library and started collecting books. During his reign, Hassan Raza Khan, minister of Asifuddollah of Oudh, founded a madrasa in Farrukhabad.¹⁰⁷

During this period, two great reformers tried to reform the lives and ideas of the Muslims in India. Shah Waliullah Dehlvi (1703–1762) was a famous scholar of his time. He introduced numerous reforms in madrasa system and its syllabi to acquaint the madrasa graduates with other branches of knowledge.¹⁰⁸

The second great reformer of that time was Mullah Nizamuddin Sehavi. He lived in Farangi Mahall,¹⁰⁹ a famous madrasa in Lucknow. Mullah Nizamuddin introduced his own syllabi which was named after him, *Dars-i-Nizami*. This syllabus

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 198–99.

¹⁰⁸ Nadvi, *Hamara Nisab-e-Taleem*, 92.

¹⁰⁹ This place was allotted to Sehavi's father by Aurangzeb Alamgir. Originally, it belonged to a Dutch and was known as Frank's quarter. That is why it was known as Farangi Mahal (palace of a foreigner). See Law, *Promotion of Learning*, 188.

was later on adopted by *Darul Uloom Deoband* (established in 1867). As it had a great emphasis on Arabic grammar books, it was eventually adopted by almost all the madrassas of Indian subcontinent in the wake of British cultural invasion. The madrassas teach their course under the same name even today.¹¹⁰

The Mughal rulers after Aurangzeb could not do much for the promotion of madrassa education. The religious scholars and saints, however, continued fulfilling the educational requirements in Indian subcontinent. Their main emphasis was on reforming personal character according to the injunctions of Islam. They provided a model for both Muslims and non-Muslims. Almost all the saints arranged madrassas under their guidance. They were usually concerned with teaching the Holy Quran only. Higher studies could be continued in properly arranged madrassas only. Most of these madrassas were either established by rulers or government officials directly or were financially supported by them. The teachers enjoyed complete freedom in running these institutions. Rulers did not usually interfere with the syllabus or teaching methodology of the madrassas. However, some rulers interfered in the affairs of madrassa to promote their personal ideas. Nawab Saadat Khan Nishapuri was appointed *Subedar* of Oudh, Benares, and Jaunpur. He visited Jaunpur and felt humiliated when no scholar visited him. He felt annoyed and confiscated the properties and discontinued the stipends of scholars and teachers of madrassas.¹¹¹ Such events impelled the Ulema to establish madrassas without major governmental support. That is why almost all madrassas are run by public charity now-a-days.

Conclusion

Learning has always been a primary concern for Prophet Muhammad. He emphasized the significance of learning and imparting knowledge on several occasions. He himself arranged and managed facilities for imparting edicts of Islam to both the converts and the followers. Later on, the followers of Prophet Muhammad

¹¹⁰ Nadvi, *Hamara Nisab-e-Taleem*, 93–94.

¹¹¹ Law, *Promotion of Learning*, 103–4.

continued disseminating knowledge in various parts of the then Muslim world. The Muslim rulers, in various parts of the world did whatever they could to patronize education.

Reformers like Nizam ul Mulk Tusi formalized the madrasa system and gave a model to the rest of the Muslim world to follow. His format of combining mosque, class rooms, and hostel under one set up is followed even today. People like Shah Wali Ullah successfully taught both revealed and reasoned knowledge even till the British landed in the subcontinent and established their influence and empire. With the arrival of British, madrasa system went through several changes, which cannot be covered in this paper and would be dealt with in another one.

Cultural, economic, and political influences of the colonizers convinced the Ulema to adopt a rigid syllabus, Dars Nizami, with too much emphasis on Arabic grammar books and no place for other branches of reasoned knowledge. While it ensured the safety of Arabic language and literature, the branches of reasoned knowledge like mathematics, physics, medicine, astronomy, astrology, and philosophy could not get due attention. This invalidated the madrasa graduates, and they were unable to cope with the changing requirements of rapidly modernizing society. They had no other option but to hone their religious ideas and whet the sentiments of people for their success sake.

Despite several drawbacks, the madrasa system in the Indian subcontinent has been playing an important role in the society. The religious rituals were, and still are, headed, supervised and performed by the madrasa graduates. How some madrasahs were exposed to ideological mutations of a chaste form of Islam to speculate a generation of Muslim extremists; and how the madrasa system, which was to promote learning, started churning out terrorists, are the questions which would be dealt in another paper.