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## MADRSA EDUCATION IN MEDIEVAL INDIAN HISTORY, 13<sup>TH</sup> TO 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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### Abstract

In medieval India facility of education was available at least through three means: formal institutions (in the form of *maktabs* & *madaris*), informal institutions (in the shape of individual centers of teachings) and private teachers and tutors (known as *muallim*, *muaddib* or *ataliq*). After the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in beginning of 13th century, the *madrssa* education developed much, and with the expansion of the sultanate series of *madrssa* were established in different parts of the country. This tradition got firmly established and further developed during the Mughal rule (1526- 1857). In fact, it had been a popular practice on the part of Muslim rulers to make arrangements for the construction of mosques and setting up centers of religious education (i.e. *maktabs* and *madrssa*) in the territories that came under their control. Moreover, many *ulema* of the period themselves took up the task of teaching especially the main subjects of Islamic learning in local mosques or at their own houses which had flourished in the form of individual centers of teaching and functioned just like *madrssa*. During the Muslim rule in India the rising number of *madrssa* may be judged from the fact that according to the author of *Subhul A'sha*, in the Tughlaq period (14th century) there had been about one thousand *madrssa* in Delhi itself. It has become a general practice on the part of modern writers on the *madrssa* movement or *madrssa* education in India to trace its origin to the post-1857 deplorable condition of the Indian Muslims or to link it to the degeneration of their religious and social life in that period. But in view of the historical facts it would be unrealistic to say that in India, *madaris* came to be founded after 1857 mainly to cope with the problems of the Muslim society, particularly to provide safeguard against the onslaught of western culture and civilization and to uplift their socio- cultural status. Of course, it cannot be denied that in the post-1857 period, the *madrssa* tahreek was revived and was further strengthened, and a section of the Indian *ulema* devoted themselves fully to this cause and made significant contribution to establish new *madrssa* and expand the old ones under the Waliullah movement.

Key Words: Madarsa, Education, Medieval India, *Maktabs*, *Muaddib*, Muslim Rulers.



**Introduction:** *Madr*sa education is neither by product of any particular historical event or emergent situation, nor does its foundation and functioning solely depend on the state support or patronage of political authorities. This is actually an in-built system of Muslim society which worked for the spread of education among Muslim masses through ages without any break. In case of India, it may be surprising but this is a fact that its origin goes back to pre-Muslim period, as the foundation of the *madr*sa education was laid by the Arab traders initially in the form of *maktab* in south India (especially in Malabar) in the last part of 7th century when they had started residing along with their families in their newly established colonies. During the Arab rule in Sind (8-10th centuries), the *madr*sa education got formal shape as *madr*sa were set up in several towns in this region which had sprung up as centers of Islamic culture and civilization. Many Mohammedan invasions take place during the start of the 8th century AD. Thus, many Muslim rulers built the empire in India. As a result, they introduce a new system of education in India, which is famous as Indian Education during the medieval period. After which, there was a great change in the system of education in India<sup>1</sup>. It should not be overlooked that in medieval India facility of education was available at least through three means:

- Formal institutions (in the form of *maktabs* & *madr*sa),
- Informal institutions (in the shape of individual centers of teachings) and
- Private teachers and tutors (known as *muallim*, *muaddib* or *ataliq*).

As a matter of fact, second type of institutions were found in those days in a very large number, under which *ulama* or learned persons used to impart knowledge or give lecture on different subjects sitting in mosque or at their own houses. This system was in vogue at the primary as well as higher level. It should also not be overlooked that during the Muslim rule in India in big cities and towns there used to be grand and spacious mosques with series of rooms (*hujrah*s) at least on two sides which were meant mainly for the students and teachers. This showed that these mosques also served as *madr*sa or educational institution as has been rightly observed by Maulana Abul Hasan Nadvi. Many *ulema* or theologians, as stated above, performed this work voluntarily considering it noble deed (*kaar-i-khair*) or source of divine reward (*baith-i-thawab*). Significantly enough, examples are not lacking to show that some of the state officials and sufis also showed keen interest in teaching work and daily spared some times for this purpose at their place of work or residence (i.e., *khanqah*) respectively. Maulana Manazir Ahsan Gilani has rightly observed in his famous book – *Hindustan mein Musalmanon ka Nizam-i-Talim wa Tarbiyat* that during Muslim rule in India the conduct of the teaching work did depend on establishment of *madr*sa or formal institution. Wherever any aalim or scholar (interested in teaching) sat and started teaching that became a *madr*sa and students or seekers of knowledge flocked to him availing of his *dars* or lecture. It may be a mosque, a house, a *khanqah*, court, a palace or *deorhi* of a zamindar. This situation was more vividly depicted by the eminent writer and noted educational thinker Allama Shibli Nomani in



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this way: In the old dictum college used to be the name of a person. Wherever he sat down that became a college surrounded by a huge gathering of students or seekers of knowledge. Whatever was uttered by him in day and night that served a lecture and in this way his talking, movement, manners and behavior all formed part of his silent lectures. Gradually, the circle of teachers as well as that of students used to expand, till after some time this living college got developed in the form of university or *Jami-i-Azam*. In present days, (learned) persons are ascribed to a college or an institution and at that time they were ascribed to a person (teacher). Nowadays, universities or colleges are established only in big cities, but in those days living colleges could be established in each town, village and even in huts.

It is quite interesting to note here that some works of medieval India themselves were not free from misconception about the *madrssa*. Surprisingly, it is recorded in *Baburnama* (compiled in 1530 A.D.) that (this country) “has no *madrssa* and no *hammam*” (bathroom). On the other hand, the famous French traveler Bernier who visited India during 1656- 1668 observed (after giving details about social conditions of those days), “A profound and universal ignorance is the natural consequence of such a state of society as I have endeavored to describe. Is it possible to establish in Hindustan academies and colleges properly endowed? Where shall we seek for founders? or should they be found where are scholars? Where are the individuals whose property is sufficient to support their children at college? or if such individuals exist, who would venture to display so clear proof of wealth?. How these statements are to be accepted in view of the fact that thousands of *madrssa* were established in pre-Mughal period as confirmed by the historical sources. Secondly, under the Mughals this tradition got further strengthened (rather than weakened) with the development of the state resources, expansion of the Muslim territories and rising number of *ulama* and scholars<sup>2</sup>.

Another very serious misunderstanding about the *madrssa* of medieval India is that it is often assumed that these institutions were intended only to serve the elite or the wards of the upper strata of society and that there was no scope for common people to be benefited from them. Most probably, under the same wrong impression a Muslim scholar and social activist recently observed in a popular Urdu daily, “that during Muslim rule in India facility of education was confined to elite or upper class of society (*khawass*), as there were no large number of *madrssa* in those days and that it goes to the credit of Macaulay that he opened the door for general or mass education in India.” First of all, it is not right to say that in those days *madrssa* were in a very limited number and these were reserved for the wards of upper class family. In fact, the network of *madrssa* and *maktab* was available in all the cities and towns, even rural areas were not bereft of such institutions. Secondly, even if it is accepted that there were only few *madrssa* and that their scope was limited, it cannot be overlooked that there were other well-established means of education available to common people, particularly numerous informal centers of learning run by individual teachers at their houses or public places. What is more important to point out in this regard is that these informal

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institutions very well served the purpose of madaris as the details of their working show. Besides, we are informed by the contemporary historians that some of the Sultans had made special arrangement for the education of male and female slaves. In the reign of Firoz Shah Tughlaq (1351-1388), thousands of slaves got education and training at the state's expenses not only in traditional sciences (*ulum-i-naqliyyah*), but also in crafts and mechanical works. In the same way Sultan Ghiyasuddin Mohammad Khalji (1469-1500), an independent ruler of Malwa, took special care of providing religious education to female slaves and for this purpose he appointed a number of teachers in the royal *haram*. Such examples suggest that the Muslim rulers of medieval India had interest in the education of different sections of society and further dispel the misgiving that they were only concerned with the education of the elite.

**Salient Features:** The salient features of Islamic Indian education during the medieval period in India are:

**Religious Aims of Education:** The aim of education during the medieval period of Islamic education was the increase of knowledge and the spread of Islamic beliefs, laws, and social customs. Thus, education was based on religion and one of the main aims was to instilled religious-minded in a person.

**The organization of Education:** Maktabs and Madrsa was the main center of education. The teacher teaches elementary education in Maktabs. Whereas, they teach higher education in Madrsa<sup>3</sup>.

**State Patronage of the Rulers:** Education during medieval India, there was an effort of state patronage. Also, these rulers have helped in many ways to the spread of Islamic education. The Muslim rulers built many Maktabs, Madrsa, libraries, and helped scholars. They also gave scholarships to different types of students.

**The pursuit of Various Disciplines:** Though education was primarily based on religion, it also promotes the study of any intellectual activities like mathematics, astronomy, grammar, polity, and politics, Art, and Literature.

**Teacher-Pupil Relationship:** The relation between the teacher and the pupils were based on respect and affection. There was a close relationship between the two, although the practice of living with the teacher was not as common with the Muslims, as it was in the case of the Brahmanic and Buddhist period.

**Discipline and Punishment:** In the Medieval Period, discipline was severe and strict. There was a provision of both reward and punishment. Meritorious students get the facilities of scholarship.



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**State Control on Education:** Indian Education during the medieval period was not only patronized and subsidized by the state but was also guided and controlled by the state. The state schools employed salaried teachers and education was free for poor and bright students.

**The medium of instruction:** Persian and Arabic were the media for instruction. But after the advent of the Urdu language, teaching takes place in the Urdu language<sup>4</sup>.

**Curriculum and Syllabus:** During the medieval period of Islamic education, curriculum and syllabus of education include subjects such as the Holy Quran, history and laws of Islam, Arabic and Persian, grammar, literature, logic, history, etc. Provision for teaching Sanskrit to Hindu children was also there.

**Method of Teaching:** In addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic, the education system also stresses on memorization. The most common method of teaching was oral. The teachers give individual attention to students. Also, the monitor's system common in Maktabas and madrasa<sup>5</sup>.

**Examination System:** There was no formal system of the examination. The evaluation of students was an in-built and continuous process. The promotion was based on the assessment by the teachers themselves. Degrees were awarded for specialized and in-depth study in various branches of learning.

**Vocational Education:** There was provision for vocational, technical, and professional education during the Indian education in the medieval period.

**Women's Education:** During the medieval period, women's education was almost totally neglected. There was no restraint for women to get an education. But it was difficult for them to get an education due to the purdah system among Muslim societies. Girls from the higher families can receive an education. Thus, in general, girls could get education only in Maktabas or elementary stage.

**Aims of Indian Education During Medieval Period:** The aims of Indian Education during the Medieval Period are as follows:

**Spread of Knowledge:** The very first aim of Islamic education was Mohammedanism. According to the Prophet, knowledge is nectar, and salvation is not possible without it. This explains the supreme importance attached to the acquisition of knowledge by the Prophet Mohammed. He preached to the people that the difference between basic duty and wrong action, religion, and irreligion could be achieved only through knowledge<sup>6</sup>.

**Propagation of Islam:** Another aim of education was to spread and propagate the Islamic religion. The spread of Islam was seen as a religious duty and the belief that only a propagator

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of religion could be Ghazi or martyr was common among them. Hence, Islam was prevalent among them. As a result, Islam has spread in India through education on a large scale<sup>7</sup>.

**Islamic Social Morals:** The next aim was to develop a special system of morals based on Islamic doctrines. Also, it aims to teach ancient Islamic laws, social traditions, and special political principles. Morality holds a great place in education.

**Political support or establishment of Muslim Supremacy:** Its other aim was somewhat tinged with political motives and interests. The Mohammedans had entered a land, the civilization culture, and political knowledge of which was far superior to theirs. Hence it became vital for them to create some such political circumstances as it might strengthen their role in the country. In this aspect, we find Akbar's educational and political policy as a concrete step in this direction<sup>8</sup>.

*Formation of Character:* The formation of the character of a person was another important aim of education. Thus, Hazrat Muhammad had stressed on character formation. He said that an individual can be successful in life only if he had a strong character. Hence in the Maktabas and Madrasas, the teachers aim to teach good habits and formation of character in the students.

**Types of Educational Institutes in Medieval Period:** There are various types of institutions in the medieval period are as below:

**Maktabas (Elementary Education):** Maktabas were elementary schools. It was attached to mosques or run by private individuals. In the Maktabas the children learn the fundamentals of the qiraat and Ayats (Prayers) of the Quran. Apart from the study of the Quran the Maktabas also teach basic education in reading, writing, and arithmetic. They also learned Arabic and Persian language and script<sup>9</sup>. Here, the teacher explains the stories of prophets and Muslim "Fakirs" to the children. The education was mostly moral and religious in nature based on the teachings of the Quran. Also, the teacher teaches the knowledge of the art of writing and talking to the children. Admission to Maktabas i.e. initiation into religious education commenced on the day when the Muslim boy is 4 years, 4 months, and 4 days old.



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**Madrса (Higher Education):** After the student complete the primary education, the students were sent to the Madrса. It is a school of higher learning usually patronized by royal families. The Madrса too were usually attached to mosques and special stress was given to the study of religion as well as secular subjects. Also, there were separate teachers for different subjects. Religious education in the Madrса includes the study of Quran, preachings of Prophet Mohammed, Islamic laws, and Islamic history<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, secular education includes the study of Arabic, Persian literature, grammar, logic, rhetorics, history, mathematics, philosophy, astrology, etc. Thus, we can say that both the Maktabs and the Madrса are the center of education during this period.

**Khanqaas:** Khanqaas was the center of elementary education. Only Muslim children can study at Khanqahs. These Khanqahs were entirely reliant on donations.

**Dargahs:** Like Khanqaas, Dargahs was the center of elementary education. In, these Dargahs also only Muslim children can get admission and education.

**Quran Schools:** In these schools, the teachers teach only the Quran. According to DE LA FOSSE, these schools were attached to one mosque, and Muslim students were taught in Arabic script and then they were made to learn Ayats of the Quran by heart. No other subject was taught in these schools.

**Persian Schools:** Persian was the official language during the Medieval period. So the students who want to join government service have to join these schools to learn the Persian language. Students were taught the works of SHEIKH SADI and HAFIZ along with Muslim culture. Hindus could also get admission to these schools. Also, there were Arabic schools where Arabic language and literature were taught. In fact, the private agencies run all these educational institutions and many institutions receive grants from the State governments. Thus education was private in nature during the this period.

**Centers of Learning:** The main centers of learning during the medieval period under Muslim rulers were:



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Delhi: Early Muslim rulers made Delhi their capital. Hence, it became a center of **Muslim Education**. Nasiruddin Mahmood built 'Madrssa-i-Nasiria' in Delhi under the chairmanship of Shams Siraj Afif. Alauddin Khilji also built many Madrsas in Delhi and appointed renowned teachers therein<sup>11</sup>. These institutions had more than 40 learned Muslim theologians and teachers of Muslim Law. Also, Delhi had become a center of literature and Artists during the days of Alauddin Khilji. During the reign of Mohammad Bin Tughlaq and his successor, Firoz Shah Tughlaq, Delhi continued to enjoy the status of an important center of Muslim education. Also, Humayun built an institution for the study of Astronomy and Geography in Delhi. Jahangir & Shahjahan also maintains the status of Delhi and contributes to its educational importance.

Agra: Sikander Lodi made Agra an important center of Muslim education. He built many Maktabas and Madrsas in this city where students from foreign peoples came to study. After Sikander Lodi, Babur and Humayun built many Madrsas in Agra. Also, Akbar made Agra a center of learning education, culture, craft, and fine arts. Near Agra in Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar built many schools<sup>12</sup>. After his death, Jahangir and Shahjahan add many Madrsas and educational institutions and gave financial aids also. But with the downfall of the Mughal empire, Agra has also declined in its reputation.

Jaunpur: During the reign of Turks, Afghans, and Mughals, Jaunpur was also an important place of Muslim education. It had institutions of various and varied types. Here students from far and wide receive education and gained knowledge of history, political science, Philosophy, and warcraft as well. Ibrahim Sharki built many 'Madrsas' in Jaunpur and arranged for their finance. Mughal Rulers from Humayun to Shahjahan tries to maintain it as a seat of learning. During the Mohammad Shah period, he also built 20 institutions in this city.

Bidar: Bidar a city in the south under Brahmani rulers, was a famous seat of learning. Mohammad Gawan built many Maktabas and a big Madrsa. In these institutions, a very learned person was appointed. There was a big library in Madrsa that housed about 3,000 books on Islamic, theology, culture, philosophy, medical science, astronomy, history, agriculture, etc. There were Maktabas in rural areas as well. Through them, Arabic and Persian were spread. There was not a single village under Bahmani rule, which did not have at least one educational institution<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, it was quite natural for Bidar to be a vital place of Islamic education in south India.

Malwa: Malwa was also a great center of Muslim learning under the patronage of the sultan Mohammad Khilji about the middle of the 15th Century. As per Farishta, Malwa was known as Shiraj and Samarkand in literary excellence. It rose to be a great place of great philosophers and literary men who came not only from different parts of the Malwa kingdom but also from other countries.



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**Educational Activities During Medieval Period:** Mohammad Ghori defeated Prithviraj Chauhan in 1192 AD. After the defeat, he laid the foundation of Muslim rule in India. Then he was succeeded by several Muslim dynasties which one after another built their rule over Delhi. These are known in history as the slave, Khilji, Tughlaq, Sayyid and Lodi dynasties. Thus, Muslim education took shape under these rulers and depended on its progress mostly on the attitude and interest of the individual rulers. Some of the famous Muslim rulers who contribute to educational activities in India are:

**Mohammad Ghori:** In the year 1192 Mohammad Ghori founded Muslim rule in Northern India and he replaced Hindu temples with Mosques and Pathshalas with Maktabas and Madrasas.

**Muhammad Tughlaq:** In 1325, Muhammad Tughlaq, one of the most learned and able scholars of his time, ascended the throne. In the regime of such a great scholar, education should have taken long strides of progress. Also, he built a Madrasa in Delhi in 1346. In the time of his successor, Firoz Shah Tughlaq, there was a great advance in the higher education of Muslims. He was an educated man and a patron of scholars. According to the historian Ferishta in his book *Tarikh-i-Farishta*, he built and endowed thirty Madrasas or colleges<sup>14</sup>. Of these, the most famous was the Madrasa-i-Firoz Shahi near Hauz-i-Khas.

**Sayyid and Lodi Monarchs:** The Sayyid and Lodi kings ruled from 1414 to 1526. Sikandar Lodi built Madrasas in all parts of the kingdom and invited qualified teachers from distant places to take charge of the institutions built by him at Agra and other places. He insisted on the compulsory education of even his military officers. Also, he founded Madrasas at Mathura and Narwar which were open to all without any distinction of caste or creed.

**Babur:** Babur, the first of the Mughal Emperors (1526-1530), was a man of refined taste, with a knowledge of Arabic, Persian and Turkish, and a taste for poetry. Thus, he had established his reputation as a scholar by writing his autobiography 'Tuzuk -i- Baburi'. He opened a department "Shuhrat-a-Aam" for providing literary works. This ruler's time was the building of schools and colleges.

**Humayun:** Babur's son Humayun, had a passion for study. During his lifetime he opened many Maktabas, Madrasas, and libraries. In Delhi, he built Madrasas, and the special arrangement was made for teaching Mathematics, Astronomy and Geography, his favorite subjects. When he regained his kingdom after defeating Sher Shah Suri he converted the Sher Mandal into a library.



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Akbar (1556 To 1605): Akbar's reign marks a new era for the education system in schools and colleges. He built Madrsas or colleges at Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Gujarat, and other places. These Madrsas were residential and maintained by the state. In Madrsas, subjects include certain important subjects such as Logic, Arithmetic, etc<sup>15</sup>. This scheme gave a secular bias to the entire educational system of the country. More brilliant students were taught the following sciences: Ethics, Arithmetic, Accountancy, Agriculture, Geometry, Astrology, Economics, Physics, Logic, Natural Philosophy, and History. Besides, state schools and colleges, there were also private educational institutions for post-graduate work in Music, Painting, Philosophy, and Mathematics. Hindu boys began to study with Muslims and went through the same curriculum. For this Akbar made arrangements in his later years for the education of Hindu youths in schools and colleges. Akbar orders a large number of Sanskrit and other books to be translated into Persian. He encouraged Music, Painting, Calligraphy, and fine arts. As he was personally interested in mechanical experiments, he built Karkhanahs which served as centers for Technical and vocational training.

Jahangir (1605 to 1627): Jahangir was a scholar and lover of arts and literary works. Following his father's policy, he did maintain the progress of education in his kingdom. Jahangir patronized painters, artists, musicians, historians, and poets.

Shah Jahan (1627 to 1653): Of all the Mughal emperors Shahjahan was the greatest lover of arts. He was more interested in arts than in education, but he did not neglect education. He encouraged learning by granting rewards and stipends to men of intellectual ability and poets. In 1650, he founded Madrsa near the Jama Masjid of Delhi, the so-called Imperial College.

Aurangzeb (1657 to 1707): Aurangzeb was highly educated and he took interest of Persian, Turkey and Arabic languages. Aurangzeb wrote a book Fatawa-i-Alamgiri. It is based on Islamic education and Islamic laws (like Shariya and Fuqah). During his period Sialkot was special education centre for Islamic education.

**Conclusion:** In brief, the *madrsa* education is very deeply rooted in the medieval period in India this noble tradition originated in the pre sultanate period. As a matter of fact, series of madrsas flourished in modern India are continuation of the same well established practice for which the significant contribution of *ulama*, scholars and rulers of medieval India cannot be forgotten. We can conclude by saying that the Muslim rulers built a permanent empire in India. These rulers introduced a new system of madrsa education. As a result, there was a great change in the Ancient system of Education.



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