



HISTORY OF CURRICULUM (NISA'AB) DEVELOPMENT AND SECULAR EDUCATION IN MADRASAS

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ABSTRACT

The Madrasa system of education is still relevant and useful in the modern Indian situation. Besides the religious education, Madrasas are imparting secular education, too, which is almost similar and equal to the secular education being imparted in our mainstream primary and secondary schools. The Madrasas are rendering valuable national service, free of cost, by helping in eradication of illiteracy and promotion of education in the educationally most backward section of our society, the Muslim minority, and, therefore, deserve bouquets, not brick-bats. The Madrasas are preservers and promoters of the Muslim's religion (Islam) and culture, and of the Urdu and Arabic languages and literatures in India. These, together, form the 'Muslim heritage' in India and a significant part of what goes as 'composite culture of India' and 'The Indian heritage'.

KEYWORDS : Madrasa, Curriculum(Nisab), Secular Education, Muslim Minority.

Madrasas are not only Islamic religious schools but imparting secular education too. Madrasas in India are mainly of two kinds: Some Madrasas are affiliated to state government like in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal Jharkhand and Assam. Though small but these Madrasas draw salaries and collect grant or assistance from their respective governments. Thus, in addition to Islamic subjects the curricula (Nisab) of these Madrasas are by and large similar and secular as of the state sponsored schools. The community based Muslim religious educational institutions are again of four types-Maktab, Darul Qura'an, Madrasa And Jamia which are the institutions corresponding to schools, high schools, colleges and universities. Common people call all these four types of 'Madrasas', which are funded and run by the Muslim community or Muslim societies.

For centuries after its inception, the Madrasas were the most advanced educational institutions in the world. These were independent charitably endowed institutions that provided fooding, lodging and stipends to both students and teachers. The philanthropist who endowed the madrasa was allowed to stipulate the number of teachers and students that his or her endowment would support as well as the sciences that would be taught there for perpetuity.

Apart from the religious subjects, the non-religious subjects have always been taught in the Madrasas. Among such secular subjects Arabic Language and Literature naturally enjoyed a favoured position because Arabic was the medium of intellectual communication among the learned and also the medium of instruction in Madrasas. In short, it was the language of the Arab civilization. Moreover, the literary excellence of the Quran was surpassed and this had established relationship between *Din* and *Adab* (religion and Arabic Literature). This is why it became a prerequisite for every *Mutakallim*, *Faqih*, *Mufasssir*, and *Muhaddith* to be well versed in *Adab* and Rhetorics in order to be able to fully comprehend the essence of the Prophetic message of Muhammad (PBUH). Renowned scholars like Abu Zakaria al-Khalib at-Tabrizi (1030-1109), Ali bin Muhammad al-Fisihi (d. 1516/1123) and Mawhub bin Ahmad al-Jawaliqi (1073-1145) occupied the chair of Arabic Language and literature at the Madrasas at Baghdad which was a centre of attraction even for those who aspired to specialize in Fiqah or any other branch of Islamic learning".¹

"Arrangement was also made for the teaching of Mathematics in Madrasas. It is said that Abdullah bin Ahmad bin al-Khashshab (1099-1172) learnt *Adab* at the feet of *Mawhub al-Jawaliqi*, *Mathematics* and *Faraid* at the feet of Ibn Abd al-Baqi al-Ansari and al-Marzuqi, respectively. All of them were

teachers at the Nizamiyah of Baghdad. They usually consulted with each other and discussed academic matters among themselves. It can, therefore, reasonably conjecture that the teaching of mathematics was part of Madrasas education".²

"History was also taught in Madrasas, though it did not form of the core or basic subjects of the Madrasa curriculum. It ended upon the personal inclination of the teachers themselves that, if they wished they gave some lessons in History to their students who were, otherwise, admitted there to specialise in some other field. For example, Hafiz-al-Humaydial-Andalusi (1029-1095) and Khalib-al-Baghdadi (1002-1072) taught History to their students. Likewise, Hafiz Shahabuddin, well known as Abu Shaman al-Damashqi (1202-1267) used to give lectures on History books, which were some times attended even by great scholars of the time. One reason why history could not find a place in the courses of studies was the preponderance of the science of *Hadith* from which *Sirah* as a special abject was deduced. And doing with *Sirah*, attention was gradually concentrated on the history of the first century of Islam. In the beginning, *Muhaddithin*, barring a few, generally considered it below their dignity to show interest in *Akhbar* (History). Some of them even expressed their strong disapproval of it if they found any student or teacher interested in it. But afterwards, when the compilation of *Hadith* was completed, History gradually came to be recognised as worthy of attention by the *Muhaddithin* themselves, some of whom made significant contributions to the field."³

"Study of *Falsafah* (Philosophy)... translation of Greek philosophical works...was greatly encouraged by some of the Abbasid Caliphs, but it did not find a place in the Madrasas and Masjids. Muslim society, in general, frowned upon it and considered it as something obnoxious. There were, however, scholars who made a thorough study of *Falsafah*. They kept *Din* and *Falsafah* at their proper places. Some of them even made an attempt to bring about a conciliation between the two. But they did not succeed in producing any thought system out of their intellectual pursuits in this field. Had they been able to do this, they would have certainly created a climate, atleast to some extent, favourable to it".⁴

"Muslims generally displayed an inimical attitude towards *Falsafah* for the main reason that its study created skepticism in the students towards their own religion. However, *Falsafah*, though not taught in Madrasas and Masjids, was not completely banished from the Muslim society. It enjoyed a place of pride in the discourses of the learned who had real and purely academic interest in it and whose houses had become the centres of philosophical studies. It was from these

centre that Ibn-Sina (980-1037 A.D.) Al-Farabi (873-950 A.D.) and Ibn-Rushd (1126-1198 A.D.) drank deep and subsequently flourished as the leadings of what little is today known as *Muslim Falasafah*.⁵

The people of Andalus (Spain) gained notoriety as being obstinately opposed to *Falsafah* and *Falasifah*. The author of *Nafih-al-Tib* on the authority of Ibn Said, al Maghribi, has observed that the Andalusians had interest in all the branches of learning except Philosophy and Astrology. The elite among them were, however, interested in them also, but because of the popular antagonism towards these, they could not publicly express their interest in these subjects. The orthodox theologians were responsible for this situation. On any pretext, they were prepared to dub and declare any individual as *Zindiq*. The rulers themselves feared the orthodoxy that had a hold on the community. There were rulers who would love to study Philosophy but, in order to be popular and to strengthen their position among the masses; they went as far as persecuting the philosophers and burning their books. (Ghunayamah, Op.Cit, p.169). Ibn Rushd, for example enjoyed Yaqub al-Mansur's favour for a time, "But he fell into disgrace as a result of the opposition of the theologians to his writings and after having been accused of various heresies, he was tried and banished to Lucena near Cordova. At the same time, the Caliph ordered the books of the philosophers be burnt, except those of Medicine, Arithmetic and Elementary Astronomy (about 1195). Duncan Macdonald observes that these orders of Almohad ruler, who had hitherto encouraged philosophical studies, probably were a concession to the Spanish Muslims, who were much more orthodox than the Berbers".⁶

"The orthodox theologians, because of their vested interests, supported and sided with the rulers who always expected trouble from the heretical and heterodox groups, some of which were, no doubt politically motivated and which always looked for an opportunity to organise themselves to lead an uprising against the established authority. As indicated above, some of these heterodox also had philosophical background and, in their zeal to oppose and combat orthodoxy further encouraged the forces of disintegration in the society by propagating pseudo-philosophical ideas. Thus, the rulers and the theologians, considering orthodoxy as defence strategy, conspired against the *Falasifah* (Philosophers) in general and vehemently discouraged the study of Philosophy in Madrasas which turned out to be the citadels of orthodoxy. It should, however, be in mind that the *falasifah* devoted much of their attention to the metaphysical concept and it was this aspect of Philosophy which could not reconcile with the fundamental articles of Islamic belief".⁷ Otherwise, other aspects of rational science like Logic, Medicine, Astronomical Sciences, Geography and Arithmetic, were not forbidden and, as Qazi Said (1029-1070) has mentioned in his *Tabaqat al-Umam*, "The people of Andalus were not opposed to these branches learning and the Umayyad Caliphs generally patronised the scholars of these sciences".

"The natural theology of the philosophers posed a potential threat to the revealed content of Islam. The very points of its original achievements in religious thought became the target for orthodoxy's suspicion and attack, i.e. the point where it had sought deliberately and consciously a liaison with orthodox dogma and had hoped for acceptance as valid interpretation of Islam".⁸ Imam-al-Ghazali, therefore, rejected the position taken by the *Falasifah* and pointed out the right course of thought and action in his works, *Al-Iqtisad fi'ilm al-Itiqad*, *Tahafutal-Falasifah* and *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*. The refutation formulated by al-Ghazali won recognition from the renowned Asharite theologians and in course of time came to be accepted as the true basis of intellectual exposition of the

religion of Islam and, by implication, as the backbone of the *Shariah*. The fourteenth century theoretician-historian Ibn Khaldun speaks on behalf of almost the entire orthodox world of Islam of his time when he says: "Thus, as one has seen, the Science (of logic) is not adequate to achieve the avowed intentions (of the philosophers). In addition, it contains elements that are contrary to the religious laws and their obvious meaning. As far as we know, this Science has only a single unit, namely, it sharpens the mind in the orderly presentation of proofs and arguments, and so that the habit of excellent and correct arguing is obtained....such is the fruit of this craft (of logic). It also affords acquaintance with the doctrines and opinions of the people of the world. One knows what harm it can do. Therefore, the student of it should be aware of its pernicious aspects as much as he can. Whoever studies it should do so (only) after he is saturated with the religious law and has studied the interpretation of the Quran and Jurisprudence (*al-Tafsir wa'l fiqh*). No one who has no knowledge of the Muslim religious science should apply himself to it. Without that knowledge, he can hardly remain safe from its pernicious aspects".⁹

Experimental science, namely, Alchemy, Medicine (*Tib*) and Physics were studied; particularly Medicine was taught in Masajid and Madrasas. In hospitals, alongwith instruction in theories, arrangements were made for practical and clinical training. The teaching of Alchemy was not generally encouraged at the Madrasas. This was not due to any religious prejudice but, perhaps, due to the Current view that it was a science that studied the substance through which the generation of Gold and silver may be artificially accomplished, and commented on the operation leading to it. There were people who did try to find out the substance to produce gold and silver. But this was all based on misunderstanding. Jabir bin Hayyan (1815) who is considered the chief systematic writer on Al-Chemy, had it undoubtedly as his special reserve. He wrote several treatises on Al-Chemy. All of them read like puzzles.¹⁰

Medicinal Chemistry (Alchemy) was in vogue, but it is not known whether it enjoyed the status of an independent discipline or was taught as a part of the syllabus of Medicine. There were however, people like Abu Bakr-al-Razi (865-923) who was well versed in *Tib* and Chemistry and taught in hospitals of Ray and Baghdad. Probably he gave lectures on Alchemy also. Some Madrasas were known for lessons in Physics, and Ibn al-Hayatham (965 circa 1038) was unsurpassed in this field. He was as a matter of fact, the Newton of the middle ages. He lectured at al-Azhar and wrote more than seventy treatises.¹¹

True that Arabic was the language of the Arab civilization and hence the medium of instruction at educational institutions. But the doors of these institutions were not closed to other languages. There were teachers who knew languages other than Arabic and explained the difficult portions of the lessons to their non-Arab students in their own languages. Abu Bakr Wajihuddin al-Darir-an-Nahwi (1140-1215) was a teacher of *Nahw* at the Nizamiyah of Baghdad. He knew Turkish, Persian, Greek, American and Ethiopian very well and helped his *Ajami* students through the medium of their own languages. So was the case with Abu Hayyam al-Gharnate al-Nahwi (1256-1344) who taught *Hadith* and *Tafsir* at the Madrasah Mansuriyah (Cairo). He knew Turkish and Persian and also wrote books in these languages which were taught in the Madrasas. The study of *Tib* required knowledge of Syriac and Greek that is why we find that generally, scholars of *Tib* during those days knew at least one of these languages.¹²

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In the Madrasas' regular system, Quran was taught and learnt, and then came the *Hadith*. It was *Sunnah* of the Prophet

(PBUH) and then of his Companions. It was also a routine for the teachers to answer the questions of the devotees and give them proper advice in respect of a good and commendable religious conduct. It was this very tradition, out of which arose schools of higher learning through the *halqahs* of learned teachers who attracted students even from far off places.

It may be concluded that the concept of secularism in the Indian context, is drastically different from the concept of secularism as it developed in the West. Indian secularism is not hostile or antagonistic to religion. It is rather accommodative of religion. The Indian State has no religion of its own, but citizens are free to follow any religion of their choice. The State has simply to maintain equal distance from all religions. State dealings are to be free from all religious considerations, i.e., citizens are not to be discriminated against on grounds of their religious affiliations.

Secular education, likewise, means that in educational institutions wholly maintained by the State on public funds, no denominational education is to be imparted. However, in private and aided educational institutions, especially of minorities, religious education can be imparted under certain conditions. Secular education, comprising mostly the teaching of sciences, social sciences and humanities, is to aim at developing scientific attitude and temper, objective and empirical stance, and a broad humanistic outlook in students. Since Madrasas are private, mostly unaided institutions, running a parallel system of education of their own, they are entitled, under the provisions of article 30(1) of the Constitution, to impart their brand of religious education. However, to the extent to which they teach secular subjects or impart secular learning, they can be regarded as secular institutions as well.

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3. Ibid
4. Ibid.
5. Encyclopedia of Philosophy, MacMillan and Free Press, Vol.I, 1967 p. 226, Vol., III, pp.179-180.
6. The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Vol II, 1927, p.410.
7. Professor Fazlur Rehman, in his brilliant analysis of the subject in Islam. (London, 1966, pp.117-120) concludes that the philosophical system, constructed by the Muslim *Falsifah* (Ibn-Sina, al Farabi and Ibn- Rushd) "was a magnificent creation of the Islamic civilization. In itself it was an impressive achievement, and both in the ethos of its Weltanschauung and in its actual structure it represents a genuine Modern Age. But vis-a- vis is the religion of Islam, it created a perilous situation for itself. It was not so much in the actual doctrines professed by it, taken severally, that the danger lay, but in its overall judgement on the nature of religion, and its implications for the *Shariah*.
8. Ibid
9. Ziaul Hasan Farooqui, Op.Cit.p.26.
10. Ibid
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.pp.26-27.