

A Brief History Of Madrasas Under Delhi Sultanate

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ABSTRACT

Madrasa education, rooted in Islamic traditions, has a rich history dating back to the early Islamic era. The term Madrasa literally means “school” and refers to institutions of higher education dedicated to Islamic learning. The first Madrasa emerged in the 9th and 10th centuries in the Islamic world with notable early examples in Baghdad and Nishapur. These institutions were primarily focussed on religious instruction, including the Quran, Hadith, Fiqh and other Islamic sciences. During the medieval period, Madrasas became prominent centers of learning, not only for religious studies but also for subjects such as philosophy, medicine, mathematics and astronomy. Renowned Madrasas, like Al-Qarawiyyin in Fez, Morocco, Al-Azhar in Cairo, Egypt, played crucial roles in preserving and transmitting knowledge across generations and were instrumental in the intellectual and cultural flourishing of the Islamic golden age. In Indian subcontinent the Madrasas gained momentum during the Delhi Sultanate. These institutions contributed to the spread and understanding of Islam and Islamic education in undivided India. In the paper the author has made an attempt to present the brief history Madrasas during Delhi Sultanate.

Keywords: Madrasa, Hadith, Fiqh, Tafseer

Introduction:

The history of Islamic learning in India can be traced back to the period of the first Arab contacts with India. The Arab soldiers, commanders in Sind were not only fighters, but teachers and preachers as well. Besides, a band of Muslims, led by Malik Ibn-i-Dinar reached Cannanore in Kerala; and settled down on the western coast of the state. When Sind acquired prominence, a large number of men of learning and erudition migrated from Arabia to this land and made it their permanent home. Within a short period of time, Sind, Debal, Mansura and Multan became important centers of Islamic culture in India. In the early days, Debal, being a part of India, became a centre of trade and commerce and was gradually thickly populated by the Arabs. There were many Madrasas where scholars delivered lectures on Hadith, Tafsir and Fiqh literature, comparable with Damascus. In addition, classes on Hadith were also held in different mosques of the city. Qazi Abdul Abbas Ahmad ul- Mansuri and Ahmad Bin Muhammad Mansur, were among the eminent teachers at Mansura in the last part of the 10th century AD.²

Multan was the most important centre of Islamic learning after Mansura. Even though the first proper

Madrasa in Multan was established much later by Nasir-ud-Din Qubacha, Abul Hasan Ali bin Amir bin Hakam is reported to have founded a large centre of learning at the great mosque of the city.

Education Under The Early Turks:

(1000-1206 AD): Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi was the most illustrious patron of sciences. He raided India seventeen times but he had no desire to conquer and rule over the country. That is why, perhaps, he did nothing for the promotion of education in India. But he is reported to have bestowed the princely sum of 400,000 Dinars annually on learned men and poets. Since his zeal for education was not confined to mere support of learned men, in Ghazani, he also founded permanent institutions for the promotion of learning. Many great scholars flocked to his court such as al-Biruni, Ibn Sina & Firdausi. According to a chronicler, he founded a Madrasa at Ghazni and supplied it with a vast collection of curious books in various languages. For the maintenance of this establishment, he appropriated a large sum of money besides a sufficient fund for students and learned men to instruct youths in the arts and science.¹ Thus Mahmud, known for his militarism, was also a great

patron of learning and indeed, in the words of a medieval chronicler, 'no king had ever more learned men at his court', then Sultan Mahmud, his son and his successor followed in the traditions set by his father by erecting magnificent public buildings including makhtabs and Madrasas; making provision for their maintenance by rich and adequate endowments, thus maintaining the attractiveness of Ghazni for learned men. He paid particular attention to diffusion of learning, and placing these benefits within the easy reach of the public by establishing educational institutions in several cities of his dominions including Punjab. During his reign, Arabic and Persian literature acquired a rich store of knowledge through interaction with both Sanskrit and Greek literature, Mathematics, astronomy, astrology, philosophy, medicine and pharmacology, which had reached high levels of excellence in India, were the favourite subjects of study with Muslim scholars. Translation of Indian works, including a large portion of narrative literature, into Arabic and Persian provided an added incentive to their eagerness.⁴

The real foundation of Turkish rule in India was laid by Muhammad Ghori (Sultan Shahab-ud-din of Ghor) in the year 1191-92. The later Ghaznavids transferred their capital from Ghazni to Lahore, which became a centre of Muslim learning in the twelfth century. After the Ghori conquest, the seat of political authority shifted from Lahore to Delhi and gradually, by the middle of the thirteenth century, Delhi, became a great centre of Muslim learning in the East. The pattern of education which reached its zenith during the Saljuk and Ghaznavid rule was adopted by the Ghori rulers and spread all over the country from Delhi. Muhammad Ghori established several Madrasas at Ajmer, the first of their kind in India.⁵ Muhammad Ghori's reign was a very stormy one. He could not develop any systematic and planned policy for the spread of Muslim education in India. Yet according to one opinion, the study of Fiqh, was developed in India during this period.⁶

The Ilbarites (1206-1290 A.D.):

Qutb-ud-din Aibak, who was the first of the Ilbarite Sultan of Delhi, built a number of mosques in various parts of his dominion. These became centres of both religious and secular learning. His successor, Iltutmish was the first to establish a Madrasa at Delhi,

which he named Madrasa-i-Muizzi after Shahab-ud-din Muhammad Ghori. A Madrasa of the same name was also founded at Badaun, which became yet another centre of Muslim culture in northern India. Iltutmish also gave good education to his daughter Raziya, while his son, Mahmud, was educated in the most befitting manner.

At an early age, he became proficient in various arts and sciences. Raziya, who fully supported the development of education, encouraged and patronized educational institutions. The existence of the Muizzi Madrasa in a flourishing state during her reign is evidence of her interest in spread of education. However, she could not achieve much in the field due to the short period of her rule.⁷

The period under the next two Sultans, Bairam and Masud, are educationally unimportant except for the patronage of Minhaj-i-Siraj, the author of the *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, the principal of Nasiriya Madrasa in Delhi and the Superintendent of its endowments. Sultan Nasir-ud-din Masud was himself a scholar and during the twenty years of his rule, he found ample opportunities for advancing education. His court was a regular rendezvous of literary geniuses. A Madrasa seems to have existed even at Jalandhar, in Punjab. It was perhaps considered a convenient place being mid-way between Lahore and Delhi. Prayers for Id-uz-Zuha were offered here by Balban and the followers of Ulugh Khan on their way back to Delhi after a successful campaign. Balban also founded a Madrasa and named it Nasiriya after his master. Under Balban, many men of letters thrown out of their homes by the Mongol invasion found shelter in Delhi.⁸

While Balban entertained his learned protégés, his son, Prince Mumammad, in the company of his scholar friends, formed several literary societies, which became a valuable asset to education. Another society of a different type was founded by the second son of Balban, Prince Bughra Khan, for the promotion of music and art. The example set by the imperial house was followed by the nobility and the upper middle class Muslims. As a result, within a short spell of time, numerous such societies sprang up in the Sultanate of Delhi, thus raising the standard of education so high that travelers from distant parts of the world were attracted here to cultivate further their knowledge of literature, music and other arts. The next Sultan

Kaiqubad, ruled only for two years. But during this short span he lowered the high tone of literary culture, thus causing a setback in the progress of education.⁹

The Firoziya Madrasa of Uchh, the Muizziya and Nasiriya Madrasa of Delhi, and Muizzia Madrasa of Badaun were among the most famous educational institutions under the Ilbarites. Several other Madrasas modelled after these also seem to have been established all over the Sultanate. The syllabus comprised Hadith, Tafsir, Arabic Literature, grammar, Islamic law, Islamic theology, mysticism, logic, astronomy and Greek philosophy. The medium of instruction was Arabic.¹⁰

The Khaljis (1290-1320):

After the fall of the Ilbarites, Jalalud-din, became the first ruler of the new Khilji dynasty. He was a great patron of talent. He invited eminent scholars to his parties and listened to them with keenness. But we are not aware of the development or establishment of any educational institutions by him. Instead, he spent thousands on building a magnificent Khanqah in front of his door.¹¹ Among them was Amir Khusrau, who wrote as many as 99 books on various subjects: Amir Hassan, the Saadi of Hindustan; and Shams-ul-Mulk, the minister of Ala-ud-din Khilji, a consummate scholar of high caliber who had the honour of being the teacher of several learned dignitaries of the regime. The inscription on the southern doorway or Alai Darwazah describes the Sultan as 'the strengthener of the pulpits of learning and religion and the strengthener of the rulers of Madrasas and places of worship'.¹²

This led to the resuscitation of many a moribund Madrasas and Maktabas. He established the Madrasa Maqbara-i-Ala-ud-din Khilji in 1317. It is evident that many of the schools and seminaries, especially those established under Ala-ud-din's rule, either closed down or survived in a very poor state because of lack of funds. But this does not mean that education was discouraged, as the place of private schools was taken over by the state schools.¹³

The Tughlaqs (1320-1414 A.D.):

Most of the princes of Tughlaq -dynasty were educated by their elders in the disciplines of humanities and the art of warfare. Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq, the founder of the Tughlaq dynasty and its first Sultan, brought with him peace and order and served as a

good prelude to an epoch remarkable for its educational movements. Amir Khusrau, who during his life, served seven out of the ten Sultans who ascended the throne of Delhi, was the prince poet of his court and received 4000 Tankas per month from the state treasury. About a mile from the wall of the Tughlaqabad fort, the isolated hillock, called Nai-ka-Quila is believed to have been a Madrasa founded by him.¹⁴

Although there may have been several reasons for this, two factors stand out prominently. First, there was the barren and, troublous reign of Mubarak Khalji that carne in between and, second, the 'whimsical' projects indulged in by the second Tughlaq ruler, Muhammad bin Tughlaq himself. Further, all the maktabas and Madrasas, earlier the resorts of thousands of students, were left with only a few of their alumni. The new capital of Tughlaqs, at Daulatabad in the Deccan, could not obviously recreate the literary reputation, tradition and atmosphere which were the invaluable assets to the deserted capital, Delhi. But it must be admitted, that the royal court, throughout the reign of Sultan Muhammad was marked by high literary environment. We also understand that he established a Madrasa in Khurramabad fort under Maulana Idris.¹⁵ On the other hand, according to a report, there were nearly one thousand Madrasas in Delhi during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq. One of them was of Shafietes. The teachers were paid from the government treasury. Education was universal and even a good number of slave girls could memorize the Holy Qur'an and many of them became scholars. Mathematics and natural sciences were also taught alongwith religious subjects.¹⁶

We are not in a position to say that what provisions were made by Muhammad Tughlaq for educating his subjects in his new city. But it is highly unlikely that the literary Sultan would have built his capital without a suitable Madrasa, as Firoz Shah, his successor, did in Firozabad in Delhi. The new capital of Firoz Tughlaq achieved great prosperity and fame as an educational centre, in the long list o Muslim Emperors, Who proceeded him there was none who tried so hard to disseminate education among his subjects as Sultan Firoz did.¹⁷ The Sultan himself wrote in the Futuhat-i-Firozshahi: 'Among the gifts which

God bestowed upon me, his humble servant, was a desire to erect public buildings. So I built many mosques, some Madrasas and monasteries, that the learned and the elders, the devout and the holy, might worship God, in the edifices and aid the kind builder with their prayers. The Madarsa of Sultan Shams-ud-din Iltutmish had been destroyed. I rebuilt it and "furnished it with sandal wood doors....! Repaired the tomb of Sultan Ala-ud-din and furnished it with sandal wood doors. I repaired the wall of Abdar Khana (repository of drinking water) and the west wall of the mosque which is within the college..."

Huffaz had to recite the whole of Quran and pray for prosperity of the Emperor. Apart from suitable provision for stipends and scholarships to successful students, every inmate of the Madrasa, be a student, teacher or a traveller lodging there, received a fixed daily allowance.²⁰

Firoz Shah, thus not only repaired and reconstructed old Madrasas which were in decay but also built many new ones among the Madrasas built alongwith mosques by Firoz Shah, one, known as the Qadam Sharif was near the tomb of Fateh Khan. Another, known as Firoz Shahi Madrasa was at Firozabad. Carr Stephen describes a Madarsa built by Firoz Shah on the side of a tank called Hauz Alai or Hauz Khas.¹⁸ The tomb of Firozshah, according to Saiyyid Ahmad Khan, was also built in the year 1389 by Nasir-ud-din Tughlaq Shah in the village of Hauz Khas. At the site of its north recess there was a painted arrow which led into a madarsa. Adjoining long row of buildings to the north lay the remains of madarsa of Firoz Shah on the southern side of the Hauz Khas or Hauz Alai, as further described by Carr Stephen in the Archaeology of Delhi; 1876.¹⁹

In this Madrasa, renowned masters of many subjects used to lecture on theology and explain to students Fiqh and the commentaries on the Qur'an alongwith all the time-honoured learnings. Both students and professors used to reside in the Madrasa, providing facilities for constant communion among the students themselves as well as between the teachers and the taught. The Madrasa not only emphasized secular studies, but also looked after the spiritual well-being of the students. There was a big mosque attached to it, where the five compulsory as well as extra prayers were regularly offered. The compulsory

prayers were performed in gatherings conducted by the Ulema and Sufis, who, at other times remained engaged in telling beads and praying for the well being of the Sultan. The Madrasas established by Firoz Shah had mosques attached to them and were most probably of the type indicated by the Firozshahi Madrasa. Religious training and pursuit of the Muslim faith were essentials of the academic life of the residents of these Madrasas.²¹

Firoz Tughlaq's rule was followed by a period of successive short reigns of Ghiyas-ud-din-II, Abu Baker and Nasir-ud-din, who could not do much for the cause of education. The subsequent reign of Muhammad Tughlaq was a dark period because of the formidable invasion by Timur. He, however, was not without some respect for literary pursuits. During Tughlaq's rule much stress was laid on the study of Fiqh alongwith the study of Hadith and Tafsir. Though many Madrasas were established throughout the Tughlaq Empire by the rulers and the Amirs, often as adjuncts to mosques, they served only a small section of the people. Hence, they could not be regarded as having served the purpose of spreading education in the country. In fact, the education of the majority of the population was not regarded as the responsibility of the state.²²

The Saiyids and Lodis (1414-1526 A.D.):

Khizr Khan, Mobarak Shah and Saiyyid Ala-ud-din brought the cities of Budaun and Katehar at par with Delhi and Firozabad in their intellectual environment. The mosques and Madrasas in these three cities substantially supplemented the educational achievements of the two imperial cities. The last Sultan Saiyyid Ala-ud-din, lived in Budaun. for about thirty years after Bahlol Lodi, the founder of the next dynasty of the Sultans of Delhi had wrested the city from him.²³ Sultan Bahlol Lodi was an enlightened patron of letters. He founded Agra, and it appears that he also built some Madrasas and maktabas in his kingdom for both the moral and intellectual improvement of his subjects.

Bahlol Lodi was succeeded by his son, Sikandar Lodi, who inferred his capital from Delhi to Agra, in 1504, which soon became important place in every respect. Agra was the new centre of learned world. Men of learning and erudition from Arabia, Persia Bokhara poured into this city in ever increasing

numbers at prospect of receiving better patronage from the ruler of India. These learned men took up residence in the new capital, where they are granted lands and rewards by the state officers. As a result, in course of time, Agra grew into a great educational centre, with several makhtabs and Madrasas where people flocked from far and wide for licking education. Sikandar's reign was remarkable for the fact that the Hindus for the first time applied themselves to the study of Persian'. The origin of Urdu or Hindustani language, which according one opinion, dates from this period, indicates that there must have been close intercourse between the two communities. Sikandar is himself a poet of distinction-under the name 'Gulrukh'. Seventeen accomplished and learned scholars merit remained constantly with him in his private apartments. Sultan also insisted on compulsory education for his military officers. This must have given a new character to the profession of it, which now combined military training with literary instruction.²³

Conclusion:

The Madrasa system during the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) played a significant role in the intellectual and educational development of the region. Promotion of Islamic Education, Madrasas were primarily established to provide Islamic education. They taught the Quran, Hadith, Fiqh and other religious subjects. Development of Scholarly Culture Madrasas became centres of learning, attracting scholars from various regions. They fostered a culture of intellectualism and scholarship, contributing to the preservation and transmission of knowledge. Advancements in Various Sciences besides religious education, madrasas also taught subjects like astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and philosophy. This contributed to the development of these sciences in the Indian subcontinent. Training of Administrators and Judges, This helped in maintaining a knowledgeable and capable bureaucratic system. Cultural Integration in Madrasas helped in the cultural and intellectual integration of the diverse population of the Sultanate by promoting a common framework of knowledge and education. Overall, the madrasa system during the Delhi Sultanate period was instrumental in shaping the intellectual and cultural landscape of medieval India.

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