

HIGHER EDUCATION DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD IN INDIA

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Abstract

Higher education or education in general did not get the attention in ancient India. Most of the ancient educational institutions lost their importance for want of support from the State. The growth of education during this period was mainly determined by the nature of the ruler from time to time. Most of the educational institutions including higher learning used Arabic and Persian as the medium of instruction. Moreover, religion was at the root of all study. Every „Maktab“ and „Madrashah“ had attached a mosque and there were separate classes for the students of sciences other than religious, so that secular education might go hand in hand with religious instruction. The Muslim rulers established institutions for Muslim learning at Delhi, Jullundur, Firozabad and other places and Imperial Library at Delhi. Mohammed Ghori was the first Muslim king of India who deemed it his duty to impart education properly. Muhammad Bin Tughlaq was, without any doubt, the most educated of all Muslim rulers who ruled in Delhi. Education during the reign of Firoz Tughlaq advances because the Sultan was an eminent educationist who strove jealously for its propagation. Higher education was mainly imparted in „Madras“ and Monasteries. Learned men like Muaiyyan-Ud-Din Umarni, Sheik Nizam Uddin Auliya of Delhi, Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, attracted scholars and students alike and this type of private teaching can be regarded as post-graduate education in Medieval India. The college of Jaunpur, which Hassan Shah endowed, might have in time led to notable contributions.

Key Words: ‘Maktab’ Madrashah, Bhagavata, Quran, Monasteries, Tughlaq, etc

Even though the Khalifate, at Bagdad was able to establish a large empire. Hundred years after the death of Prophet Mohammed, India was not affected much by this Muslims power till the end of the 11th century A.D. This was true that in 712 A.D. Mohammed Bin Kassim gained Khalifate a foothold in Sind, but the sway of Muslims power was not extended beyond Multan till the invasion of Sultan Mohammed of Ghazni, Mohammed led a number of expeditions to the north-western provinces of India and plundered the riches of the state and temples. But his nose merely raids of devastation, looked upon by the Hindus of the time as acts of God, like plague, before which they fled. It had little effect on Indian history except as a for-runner of the more ambitious and more successful efforts, hundred and fifty years later of Mohammed Ghori, who displaced the successors of Mohammed Ghazni.

The successors of Mohammed were weak and they were crushed by his power by the princes of Ghour, a small principality in the mountainous region of Afghanistan South East of Heart. Mohammed Ghori marched into India in the year 1191 and defeat from the ruler of Ajmer and Delhi. But in 1192 India was once again invaded by Ghori, and this time Prithviraj, the ruler of Delhi had to bow before the Afghan ruler.

The history of North India after this historic success was only a record of warfare. The successors of Ghori, established a kingdom in Delhi, and until „Babur“s conquest of Delhi in 1526, the history is “one of dull monotony of wars of succession, murders of nobles and leading men and a few able men succeeded by weak and licentious potentates”.

The period between 1210 and 1525 can only be elaborated as a period of conquest, destruction and loot. Higher education or education in general did not get much attention in ancient India. Most of the ancient educational institutions lost their importance for want of proper support from the State. If in architecture and building early Islam made a noble contribution to India, the same cannot be said in the field of learning, science or poetry. In fact the period from 1200-1525 is one general barrenness in Islamic history, when by the barbarian invasions of Turks and Seljuks. The college of Jaunpur, which Hassan Shah endowed, might led to notable contributions but it existed for short time. Perhaps, the reason is that Indian Islam had not involved a language of its own and was tied to literature of Persia. K.M Panikkar says in regard to this as:

The Muslim rulers in Delhi and in provinces naturally encouraged literary activities in Persian, which they understood and liked better. The growth of education during this period was mainly determined by the nature of the ruler from time to time. The emperor's taste was the barometer of the then literary atmosphere. [Panikkar: 129]

Most of the educational institutions including higher learning used Arabic and Persian as the medium of instruction. Moreover, religion was the root of all study. Every „Maktab“ and „Madrashah“ had attached a mosque to it and in every mosque there were separate classes for the instruction of students in sciences other than religious, so that secular education might go hand in hand with religious instruction. Some rulers of this period encouraged local talent. For instance, Maladhar Basu's Bengali translation of the Bhagavata was undertaken by order of Nazrat Shah and Kavindra Parameswar's translation of the Mahabharata was undertaken at the command of Paragal Khan, a General of Hussain Shah. Amir Khusrav, an Indian who wrote in Persian, “declared with pride that Delhi developed into an intellectual competitor of Bukhara, the famous university of Central”. The Muslim rulers established institutions for Muslim learning at Delhi, Jullundur, Firozabad and other places found libraries, the most important one being the Imperial Library at Delhi.

Sultan Mohammed Ghori was the first Muslim king of India who deemed it his duty to impart education in India properly. At Ajmer he set up some schools and Missionaries for spread of Islamic culture and eradication in that province. His successors Qutub-Uddin-Aibak, Iltutmish and Raziyya and Balban were all patrons of learning. The slave kings were all

patrons of learning. The slave kings were succeeded by another dynasty which now stepped into the throne of Delhi with the accession of Khilji. Ala-ud-din Khilji, a remarkable ruler of this dynasty seems to have been an enthusiastic friend of learning. We are told by Barni that the most wonderful thing which people saw in Ala-ud-din's reign the multitude of great men of all nationalities, masters of every science and experts in every art. The capital of Delhi by the presence of these unrivalled men of great talents had become the envy of Badgad, the rival of Cairo, and the equal of constant in opal.

The new dynasty which was set up after the disintegration of the Khilji's was that the Tughlaq, Muslim education was patronized by Tughlaq dynasty also. Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq the founder of the dynasty was a patron of learning. In spite of his strange characters and fanciful projects, Mohammed-bin-Tughlaq himself was a "man of accomplishments freely patronized poets, logicians, philosophers and physicians, and held discussions with them in his court". Soon Tughlaq declared himself as the Sultan of Delhi after the tragic death of his father Ghiyas-ud-din, in 1325, under the title of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq. Muhammad Bin Tughlaq originally named Fakhr-ud-din Muhammad Junna Khan. He was second and most remarkable ruler of Tughlaq dynasty. According to Dr. R.C. Majumdar,

No ruler in medieval India has evoked so much discussion concerning his policy and character as Muhammad Tughlaq. Muslim chronicles, with exception describe him a blood thirsty tyrant and severely condemn his various measures... [Majumdar: 80-81]

He was the first Sultan to have the vision to see India as a whole country, and not just as a sort of cake for every ambitious aspiration to carve a kingdom out of it. He was also relatively liberal and he permitted Hindus and Jains to settle in Delhi. Muhammad was, without any doubt, the most educated of all Muslim rulers who ruled in Delhi. He had complete command over Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Sanskrit and could comprehend, speak and write all these languages. He was an authority on the subject like philosophy of medicine. According to one of the critics, the Sultan was highly learned. He had mastered philosophy and logic and was fine calligraphist. He was no mean poet; he appreciated the excellence of poetry and conversed with Persian poets and critics about their production. Muhammad was a deeply religious man and had learnt *Holy Quran* by heart. He used to quote verse of the *Quran* during his conversation. Mohammed Bin Tughlaq's successor Firoz Shah, though a weak and irresolute ruler, patronized education. Education during the reign of Firoz Tughlaq made mighty advances because the Sultan was an eminent educationist who strove zealously for its propagation. He sent out eminent teachers to reside in different part of his dominions for the sake of imparting instruction to the people at large. This was undoubtedly a far reaching reform in the system of education. It led to an extensive diffusion of education and produced a large number of capable scholars. Firoz Shah, himself the author of "Fatuhat-i-Firuz Shah" show great zeal for the cause of education and established several colleges with mosques attached to them.

The Tughlaq dynasty broke up under the successors of Firoz Shah and Sayyad and Lodi kings ruled Delhi for some years. The Lodi dynasty produced one remarkable personality, Sikandar. Sultan Sikandar was himself a poet, and gave considerable

encouragement to learning. After the break-up of Delhi Sultanate a number of kingdoms especially of Muslims developed in the neighbouring State of Delhi. Most of the rulers of these small independent kingdoms, like that of the Bahamini Kingdom and dynasties like those of Bijapur, Ahamad Nagar, Golkonda, Malwa, Jaunpur, Bengal and Multan were also patrons of literature.

During the reviewperiod, Majumdar and other say in this regard that:

The Muslims were minority in India and they received education only from these institutions, established by the Muslim rulers of this period. At the same time the educational institutions developed during the Hindu period, declined during this period due to lack of support from the rulers.[Majumdar: 402]

During the Muslim period elementary and secondary education was provided in „Maktabs“ and in Arab schools respectively. Higher education was mainly imparted in „madras“ and monasteries. Learned men like Muaiyyan-Ud-Din Umarni, Sheik NizamUddinAuliya of Delhi, MuinuddinChishti in Ajmer, attracted scholars and students alike and this type of private teaching can be regarded as post-graduate education. AtmanandMisra says in regard to financial improvement as thus:

The financing of education during the period under review showed no improvement over that of the previous period either in respect of resources made available to education or in the manner of administering them. The state did not pay much attention either to start fresh educational institutions or to finance properly the existing educational institutions. A proper and well defined system of higher education in this period was almost conspicuous by its absence.

To sum up it can say that during the medieval period in india Muslims rulers imparted education in Maktab“ and „Madrashah“ attached with mosque and separate classes for the students of sciences other than religious, so that secular education might go hand in hand with religious instruction. Higher education did not get much attention ancient India most of ancient educational institutions lost their importance for want of proper support from rulers. Education during the reign of FirozTughlaq advances because the Sultan was an eminent educationist who strove jealously for its propagation. He sent out eminent teachers to reside in different part of his dominions for the sake of imparting to the people at large. This was undoubtedly a far reaching reform in the system of education. It led to an extensive diffusion of education and produced a large number of capable scholars.

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