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Progress of Madrasah education in Midnapore before Independence

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Abstract:

In the pre-colonial period in Bengal, the basic centres of education were the patshalas, maktabas, tols and madrasahs, some of which were more or less religion-based. Instruction in these schools was given in the vernaculars. In maximum, the aristocracy did not send their children to these schools and preferred to educate them at home. Educating a girl child was not of much importance during the period though the Zamindars often had their daughters home-schooled. But at the same time, there was no objection about co-education. According to data or sources, this type of elementary education system was popular throughout the pre-colonial Bengal. I have analysed in this paper the condition of the maktab learning and the state of the Muhammadans especially in Midnapore during the 19th and 20th centuries in colonial Bengal.

Keywords: Education, Madrasah, Muhammadan, Midnapore, Bengal, Government.

Introduction:

Apart from the Maktab education, which was for primary learning, the madrasahs were the centres for higher learning of the Muslim pupils. While maximum pathshalas basically had a secular nature, the maktabas had a religious one. But the higher learning centres had a character of religious-based applicable both for the Hindus and Muslims.

The maktabas were schools in which the elements of Arabic, Persian and Urdu literature were taught; the higher branches of Arabic and Persian literature, philosophy, and law being exhaustively studied in the madrassas,.....In both, considerable attention is devoted to the Koran.¹

Midnapore and Madrasah Education: Initial Period:

There was no systematized Muhammadan law, Persian or Arabic educational institutions

during the first decade of the 19th century. H. Strachey, the then Judge and Magistrate of Midnapore analysed the condition of Midnapore as follows, “In Midnapore, I cannot discover any schools or seminaries where the Mahomedan or Hindoo laws are taught.....Persian and Arabic are taught for the most part, by molavies. Most men of this description, have a few scholars in their houses, whom they support, as well as instruct. Thus Persian and Arabic students, though of respectable families, are considered as living on charity; and they are total strangers to extravagance and dissipation. There was formerly a Mussulman college in Midnapore, even yet the establishment exists; but no law is taught. There are a number of private individuals who teach pupils in the manner I have above described. And the students at the sudder station, living in the families of the amlah or of the pleaders, perhaps occasionally pick up a smattering of the Mahomedan law.”ⁱⁱ But this condition changed later on.

Though for the benefit and to give importance to classical learning of the Muhammadans, at first Calcutta Madrasah was founded as a centre of higher learning, but it served the purpose for only particular sections of Mussalmans. Within some decades in Bengal, the number of Government Madrasahs were three - Calcutta, Hooghly and Chittagong. Besides these, there were many madrasahs prevalent all over Bengal, for the betterment of the Muhammadans.

Midnapur Madrasah and its evolution:

Among the Madrasahs of Midnapore, the Midnapur Madrasah was basically ‘an Anglo-Persian school’ or ‘properly speaking, a middle English school’, endowed by Mohsin Fund annually. According to the local self-government system Midnapore Municipality also supported financially the Madrasah of Midnapore. In the year 1891-92, Midnapore Madrassa received Rs. 130 from the Midnapore Municipality in addition to the maintenance grant from the Mohsin Fund. But it has never passed any students at the Entrance examination owing to the incompetence of its staff.ⁱⁱⁱ

Though its progress was not satisfactory as per expectation, The Midnapore Madrasah was perhaps an exceptional one. This institution gave importance to English language instead of entirely going by the syllabuses of a Madrassa, which was why its character was not totally a religious one, and many Hindus were also the students of this Madrassa.

Potashpur Madrasah:

Another well-known madrassa was in Potashpur. Perhaps, this Madrasah was established at the time of Pathan invasion in Midnapore in the 17th century. Even when the Marathas captured this area they endowed two hundred bighas rent-free land, some maund of salt one rupee per day for its maintenance.^{iv} This madrasah was also received endowment from Government.

Again in the 20th century, about the Muhammadan education, L. S. S. O’Malley stated that “There is one madrasa situated at Pataspur with 65 pupils, 9 maktabas for girls, and 142 maktabas for boys with 3,864 pupils.”^v

Other Madrasahs:

In Tamluk block, at south Bangan, one Muslim fakir named Sheikh Nabiruddin founded one mosque and a madrasah adjacent to it.^{vi}

Other important centres of Muslim learning in Midnapore were: Mirzabazar Madrasah established by Suhrawardy family, Chanserpur, Kanakpur, Pratappur, Jafuli, Srikrishnapur of Chandrakona, Ballamgarh of Ghatal, Dogachia and Banpura of Keshpur, Hidgli, Kolaghat and many more.^{vii}

Apart from different madrasahs in Midnapore, the pupils of this district also enrolled in different madrasahs of other districts even in Calcutta Madrasah, Hooghly madrasah, Sitapur madrasah.

Within a few decades, Muslim pupils increased rapidly as compared to Hindus, though limitations continued as earlier. The maximum percentage was mainly confined in primary schools and in special schools including makhtabs and madrasahs. In the year 1920-21, in all types of public and private Institutions in Bengal total Muhammadan pupils were 925,844 whereas Hindus were 972,296. But maximum percentage of Muhammadans still were under special school and primary school instruction, 71.1 and 53.3 respectively, whereas in Arts Colleges it was 11.6, in high schools 17.6 and in middle schools 28.4.^{viii}

“...the popularity of the senior and junior madrasahs.”^{ix}—this term has proved that the Muhammadans had the same desire as earlier to educate their children in the Madrasahs. So the number of Madrasahs were also increased, on the 31st March 1926, total numbers of Madrasahs were 467 with an enrolment of 42,527 pupils.

Condition before Independence: During the thirties and forties:

As per Bengal Govt. report, we have found seven aided junior Madrasahs, among them, three were in Tamluk subdivision- 1) Ghanserpur Junior Madrasah, p.o. Kalomal, 2) Dhekua Junior Madrasah p.o. Kukrahati, 3) Gumgorh Junior Madrasah, p.o.-Nandigram, two were in Contai- 1) Darua Junior Madrasah p.o. Contai and 2) Potashpur Junior Madrasah, p.o.- Potashpur, One in Midnapore Subdivision- Midnapur S.M.I. Junior Madrasah, p.o.- Midnapore, and one in Ghatal subdivision—Kristopur Junior Madrasah p.o. Sandhipur.^x

During the year 1939-40, total number of Madrasahs received aid from Govt. for boys in Midnapore was 08, local inhabitants also had donated amounts, Maulvi Serajuddin Ahmed, B. A., of Krishtopur, Chandrakona donated amounts of Rs. 1,500/- for the upkeep of the Madrasah of Kristopore Rahmania.^{xi}

At the time of our Independence, in the year 1947, in Bengal, total numbers of Madrasah schools were 183, among them in Midnapore, there were 15. The maximum numbers of Madrasahs were in 24 parganas -38, Murshidabad -24, Hooghly-23, among the 14 district in Bengal, Midnapore

had the fourth position with 15 Madrasahs. There were a total of 1,102 students in Midnapore, among whom 1,062 were boys and 40 girls.^{xii}

Though the co-education system was not banned in Muslim society, and though a large number of Madrasahs and Maqtabas were established in both rural and urban areas, but the girls rarely got themselves admitted there, as co-education was strongly opposed by the Muslim society. So, in the Madrasahs, the participation of girls, was a rare case.

Limitations in Madrasah Education:

The educational system of Muhammadans in Bengal was not systematic. The madrasahs were also included in it. "The means employed by the Mahomedan population of Bengal to preserve the appropriate learning of their faith and race are less systematic and organized than those adopted by the Hindoos,.....",^{xiii} the system continued throughout the British period with some modification and modernisation by the British Government.

Another matter of differentiation between the Hindu and Muhammadan learning was clearly stated by Hunter, "The relation between teacher and pupil is much more paternal in the Hindu than in the Muhammadan college. In the case of the Muhammadan madrasah the personal attachment between the teacher and his pupils is not so marked. This difference may be attributed to the distinct characteristics of the two religious systems. The Brahman commands more personal veneration than the Maulvi. The diverse character of Hindu and Muhammadan endowments reflects the destination. A Muhammadan educational endowment, whether of landed or other property, is made in favour of some institution founded by a pious Maulavi; whereas the Hindu endowment, though it carries with it the solemn obligation of teaching, is made in favour of a great Pandit and his personal heirs. The Muhammadan pupil, who is educated or even supported by the endowment, does not feel personally bound to his teacher in the same way as the Hindu pupil does to his spiritual guide from whom he derives both instruction and maintenance. The character of the instruction, however, in both institutions whether Hindu or Muhammadan, is essentially, though not exclusively, religious, as will appear from a detailed survey of higher indigenous institutions in the various Provinces of India."^{xiv}

Development and modernization:

But within such limitations, maximum Muhammadans habituated themselves with the maktab and madrasah learnings. One remarkable achievement in the field of Madrasah education was that, "The Board of Central Madrasah Examination was constituted, with effect from the 1st July, 1931, for a period of 3 years."^{xv}

The British Government's intention was to modernise the curricula of the institutions with the support of the Muhammadan community. They wanted to modify the syllabuses of the maktabas or madrasahs, or wanted to parallel their syllabuses as per the existing school syllabuses "...the revision of the syllabuses of studies for classes 1 to 1B of the Reformed Madrasahs with a view to

bring them into conformity with the primary syllabuses, the Madrasahs which desire to come under the scheme of free primary education should be allowed to follow their own course in the said classes on condition that arrangements are made in those classes for the teaching of the ordinary primary curriculum to those children whose guardians so desire.”^{xvi}

But as it was not mandatory to participate or to accept the new curricula, every type of madrasahs were existed, i.e., High Madrasahs (new type), Senior Madrasahs (old type), Junior Madrasahs (new type), Junior Madrasahs (old type)-all together 169 in number, and there learnt 17,923 number of pupils.^{xvii}

Conclusion:

In 1947, the year we achieved Independence, in West Bengal, the earlier condition in different stages of instruction prevailed as earlier among the Muslims. In University and Arts Colleges, Professional Colleges, High School stage, Middle School, Primary stage, Special schools, unrecognized schools out of total number of Males 27,239; 9,539; 119,372; 106, 865; 871,652; 51, 246; 14,146 respectively, the Muslim pupils were 3,233; 1,164; 15,534; 14,914; 213,021; 20,484 and 2,327. As well as among total female pupils of 2,757; 167; 9,334; 11,658; 228, 469; 4,436; 2,271 respectively, the Muslim females were 149; 13,658; 811; 46,301; 2,183; and 361.^{xviii}

Hence, to orate, the conditions of the Muhammadan population throughout the British period was basically directed or guided by religious perception, within their socio-economic backwardness, what was reflected in their participation in primary stage or special schools or unrecognized schools including madrasahs and maktabas. The higher the educational level proceeded; their participation became lower than the earlier stages, though by their progressive attitude towards education and initiatives of the Government, they gradually, though slowly, habituated with the modern-revised educational progress.

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