

Book Review:

*HINDUSTAN MAIN MUSALMANUN KA NIZAM-E TALEEM
(MUSLIM EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA)*

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Dr Shamim Akhter Qasmi is a senior faculty member in the Department of Islamic Theology, Aliah University Calcutta, East Bengal, India. His book is full length study of a significant discourse around the Madrasa system in India. Madrasa Education attracts the attention of intellectuals, thinkers and religious scholars across the world particularly after 9/11. A plethora of literature has been produced on Muslim educational system in India. Dr. Qasmi's book is a value addition in this field for Urdu readers. The central concern of this book is to identify the role of Muslim intellectual in a pluralistic Indian society. (p. 10) Qasmi argues that Muslim scholars had never restricted the learning and dissemination of knowledge to a particular class, creed or gender contrary to the Indian context where only a high class was privileged to learning. Muslims scholars have broadened the horizon of knowledge and extended its limits to all human beings irrespective of their racial, regional or religious identities.

Dr. Qasmi divided the book into five chapters. The first chapter is consisted upon the theory of knowledge in Islam. Seeking knowledge is essential for every believer. In this regard, Qasmi referred to many Quranic verses and the Prophetic narrations. He argues that human being is vicegerent of Allah on earth. Therefore, in order to fulfill the requirement of this obligation, one has to equip himself with knowledge and experience for the benefit of humanity and of universe at large (p. 21). It is compulsory for all Muslims to acquire hikmah (wisdom). He argues that hikmah in modern terms is the science in which one discovers and comprehends the realities and specification of things. Further, knowledge is not beneficial unless it serves humanity and society. Through

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hikmat, one decides between the good and evil. The best people are those who are beneficial for others. (p. 24) He further links the knowledge with ethics and good morals as seeking knowledge is valuable only when it is generally advantageous for society (p. 25).

Qasmi notes that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was also founder of a welfare State of Madina where people from all walks of life worked according to their abilities. He attempted to refine their capabilities and advised them to perform their duties in the field of their specialization (p. 26).

Qasmi further asserts that Muslims scholars played a central role in construction of modern scientific knowledge and technology during the medieval period and the Europeans' discoveries are indeed based on the Muslims tradition of scientific knowledge. He provides a detailed account of the early Muslim scientists who worked tremendously in science and technology. One should not ignore the fact that Andalusia was the center of knowledge under the Muslim rule and its impact on Europe was immense. It seems that Qasmi criticizes the dangers and perilous dimensions of modern science because it is based on the theory of knowledge for knowledge rather than knowledge for humanity. The modern science also ignores the ethical value in their discoveries. Qasmi also criticizes the attitude of contemporary Muslims towards knowledge as they are not learning religious and scientific studies enthusiastically. Moreover, those who are scientists do not care the religious and ethical values in their works (p. 38). The modern scientific education is based on the materialism that damaged the spiritual value of human life. He also notes the impact of materialism on society. Individualism emerged that changed the social norms including the role of women in society. He documented the works of early Muslim women, particularly those of Indian origin, who played a vital role in the transmission of knowledge. They were embodiment of knowledge, devotion and faith. They established many Madrasas for children and their impact on the society was primary. This tradition is now in danger because of modern educational system changed the role of women in nation-building. Qasmi elaborates the theory of Islamic knowledge for in a simplistic way for a general reader. He also identifies the key issues that have to be resolved. However, his response to address the dilemma is naïve and not convincing. Moreover, a reader finds unnecessary long quotations from the secondary sources. Their paraphrasing may enhance the quality of work.

The second chapter delineates the Muslim educational system in India under the Umayyad and Abbasid rules. He presents the historical overview of the Umayyad and Abbasids rules in Sindh and records that a number of mosques and Madrasas were established in Sindh and across the Indian

Coastal region. The Abbasids' conquest of Indian region accelerated the process of preaching of Islam in India and new centers of learning were emerged in Mansura, Daybal, Multan, Bawqan and Lahore. A great number of Indian travelled to Arab world and Khurasan for learning and became experts in the field of Islamic studies, particularly in hadith. The names of those scholars have been recorded in historical annals who travelled from India to Arab dynasty for learning (p. 55). Qasmi also records that the hanafi jurisprudence was dominated in Sindh. Moreover, philosophy and logic were the popular subjects during the Abbasid period and their impact could be observed in Indian Muslim tradition. The religious scholars, philosophers and Sufis played a significant role in construction of distinctive and diverse culture in Indian subcontinent. Qasmi's provides extensive information regarding the transition of knowledge in Sindh. However, he completely ignored the contribution of Ismaili Shi'i who played a significant role during the third and forth centuries of Islam in Sindh. Qasmi collects the data of this chapter mostly from the secondary sources which is another weak aspect of his account. The third chapter is focused on the role of Indian Madrasas in the dissemination of Islamic studies. Qasmi argues that Sultan Mahmud Ghaznawi (conquest period in India: 391-418/1000-1027) and his son Sultan Mas'ud (rule: 422-433/1030/1040) consolidated the tradition of knowledge in India. Sultan Mas'ud's contribution in construction of masques, Madrasas and libraries was fundamental. Qasmi also briefly discusses the process of transmission of knowledge during the Sultanate period of Delhi. He argues that the Sultans of Delhi paid special attention to the Madrasas in India. The Lodhis were also ardent to establish the Madrasas. Qasmi also records significant contribution of the Mughals. He praises Akbar's quest for advanced learning. However, according to Qasmi's account, he did not build any Madrasa for systematic learning. Qasmi eulogizes Shah Jahan, and Aurangzaib for their efforts to create a suitable environment for advanced learning. The latter patronized Mullah Nizam al-Din- the author of syllabus of Dar-e-Nizami- and established Dar al-Ulum Nizamiyya in Farangi Mahal, Lakhnaw. The leading Muslim scholars such as Mullah Hassan, Maulana Abd al-Ali, Maulana Abd al-Hayyi were graduates from that Madrasa. The famous Fatawa Aalamgiri was also composed during the reign of Aurangzaib. The tradition of knowledge was built on such consistent foundation that influenced the subsequent generations even in the period of political decadence during the rule of the later Mughals. He mentions the role of Madrasa Rahimiyyah, Madrasa Ghazi al-Din that were established during the period of Shah Aalam. The latter Madrasa was converted to Zakir Hussain College, Delhi in later period. He recorded the leading scholars of 19th century who were graduated from this institute (p.101).

Qasmi asserts that the colonial period brought new challenges for Indian Muslims. Many eminent scholars and Sufi were killed and the ancient traditional Madarasas were locked down. In this miserable situation, the Indian Muslims established religious institutes to preserve the religious tradition in that critical condition. Qasmi briefly introduced the leading Madrasas of this period including Dar al-Ulum, Deoband, Dar al-Ulum Nadwah al-Ulama, and Dar al-Hadith Rahmaniyyah. He admires the contribution of these Madrasas. He also mentions the modern Muslim educational institutes such as Madrasa al-Ulum MOL College, Jamia Usmaniyyah, Jamia Milliyya Islamiyya. It seems that Qasmi does not satisfy with the performance of these institutes and believes that only religious institutes can provide the religious leadership and revive the Muslim identity in India. Qasmi as contrast to the title of chapter focuses only on few Madrasas of Uttar Pradesh and Central Provinces. There is no reference of Khayabadi scholars and their contribution in theology and rational sciences. Moreover, no reference is found regarding the Madarasa of the regions that are part of the present-day Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The fourth chapter provides a detailed elaboration of curriculum of Indian Madrasas. Dr Qasmi notes that Abd al-Hayyi Lakhnawi (d. 1341/1923) classified the curriculum into four categories in historical context. The first category is based on the simple curriculum during the first three centuries of Islam. Subsequently a complex form of curriculum remained in practice in which a student learnt specific books from the experts of these disciplines in their private Madrasas. That tradition continued during the Sultanate of Delhi period. The third curriculum was introduced during the reign of Sultan Sikandar Lodhi by two brothers Shaykh Abd Allah Tulambi and Shaykh Aziz Tulambi who migrated from Multan to Delhi. These scholars introduced the rational sciences in the curriculum. However, the curriculum was revised many times. It was revised during the period of Akbar under the guidance of Shah Fath Allah who introduced more books in philosophy, logic and rational sciences. The fourth curriculum was designed by Mullah Nizam al-Din during the rule of Aurangzaib. Qasmi mentions that there were some other curriculums such as the Curriculum of Shah Abd al-Rahim but that was almost analogous to what has been compiled earlier. Qasmi opines that the curriculum of Dars-e Nizami is still vital although many revisions have been made during the last centuries. He further argues that it is not justified to introduce modern science in the curriculum of Dars-e-Nizami because it will ruin the spirit of religious sciences. Qasmi concludes, the present era demands specializations. Therefore, the introduction of modern sciences in traditional religious system may reduce the ability of religious experts. However, there is a serious question that how one can respond the modern issues and challenges without understanding the

contemporary epistemology of knowledge? The one who can respond these challenges must be well-equipped with both traditional and modern system of knowledge to integrate the past with the future.

Moreover, Qasmi did not talk about the practical dimensions of Madrasa education. It has been established that historically Madrasa education system in Indian subcontinent was not focused merely on religious education rather it contains wide-range of vocational, philosophical and secular subjects. Thus, the Madrasa graduates played a vital role in the State affairs, judiciary, and management. Under the British rule, it has been observed that the Madrasas revised their syllabus and centered their attention on the religious education and they excluded or minimized the rational studies from their curriculum due to the colonial context. This legacy has been continued even in the post-colonial period. The studies conducted in the discipline suggest that Madrasa have already revised their curriculum according the need of time. It is hoped that the author may include these points in the new addition of the book.

The fifth and last chapter elaborates the significance of Madrasas and the value of religious education. Qasmi asserts that the Madarsas are established on the pattern of Suffa where the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stayed from day to night for learning the religious studies. Therefore, a student needs a long stay in Madrasa for learning. He documents that Islam spread across the India and particularly in the coastal area of southern India. Many Muslim Sufis, poets and religious scholars gathered there and they built Madrasas, mosques and khanqahs across the region. Qasimi advises that it is the time to reflect on the past when these Madrasas played vital role in dissemination of knowledge. It is our responsibility to reconstruct the historical image of the Madrasa as centre of Islamic learning. Dr. Qasimi deserves a great appreciation for composing a full-length study based on both modern and pre-modern source of the subject. It provides a fresh understanding of a significant discourse around the Madrasa education.