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# Muslim Education in Colonial Mithila: Continuity and Change

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### INTRODUCTION

When British acquired possession of this country they found four types of educational institutions at work, viz. Sanskrit Chatuspati as tol, Pathshala, Madarsa and maktabs. It appears that what English was to the Bengali, Persian was to the native of Bihar. Contrary to the Westernizers, the pre-colonial system was not devoid of value-based morals. We find that men acting under religious convictions and with spirited motives indirectly helped the cause of education. Apart from moral upliftment the vernacular language was also encouraged to help to make judicial administration more effective. Adam writes, "The object is to give the people or to enable them to acquire their own language, knowledge of what may affect their interests in the judicial and fiscal departments of the government [1]". For the Muslim population Persian was the most important medium for higher education. In view of its importance for many years as official language, the Hindus learnt it as a matter of practical necessity. Thus many of the notable Hindus learnt Persian for securing posts under the Government. Referring to Bengal and Bihar in the early nineteenth century Buchanan writes

that the schools for Persian education were nearly as much frequented by Hindus or by Musalmans, for the Persian language was considered as a necessary accomplishment for every gentleman, and it was absolutely necessary for those who wished to acquire fortune in the courts of law[2]. Again the value of the traditional system of learning was also favoured by some contemporary scholars. Khudabaksh writes[3], "nothing is more desirable than to keep the Orientals mere Orientals. Western learning is indeed, a desideratum, but not at the sacrifice of eastern culture". Muslims were encouraged to study their own language and literature. The great orientalist MM Dr. Ganganath Jha has referred to his early instruction in Persian[4].

Gulam Hussain[5] has given us an account of a large number of students engaged in studies. Except in those cases in which the Musalmans resorted to Bengali and Hindi schools, Persian instruction was the only substitute for vernacular instruction. The Persian language, therefore, had strong hold on the native society. When Adam surveyed Urdu was not the medium of instruction in schools. He writes, "although Urdu is more copious and expressive, more cultivated and refined than either, and posses a richer and more comprehensive literature, Urdu school books are wholly unknown. It was in fact, the language of oral instruction for the explanation of Persian and Arabic; but it was never taught or learned for its own sake or what it contained[7]. However in 1839, Urdu became official language in lieu of Persian for the lower and English for the upper scholars of administration[8].

An idea of some of the old and famous institutions of Muslim learning can be had from the replies of the several District officer to a circular letter of the committee of Revenue, Calcutta dated the 3rd March 1783[9]. The places like Biharsharif, Maner, Patna, Arrah, Bhagalpur, Fatuha and Sasaram were centres of Muslim learning. In Bhagalpur and Purnea there were some institutions of Persian and Arabic learning, of course these were the frontier sub-regions of Mithila. The Bhagalpur madarsa was established by Maulana Shahbaz during the reign of Emperor Jahangir. He was a popular academician who supported 200 pupils in getting Arabic and Persian education[10]. In the mid of the 18<sup>th</sup> century there was number of Arabic and Persian institutions in Bhagalpur. There were at least three renowned teachers who instructed the students both in Persian and Arabic, Muhammad Faik of Bhagalpur belonged to a family of which 20 person were called Maulvis. Their very houses were called madrasas[11]. Maulana Shabaz of Bhagalpur was an authority on law during the Aurangzeb's period. Mir Muhammad Rade of Monghyr figured in the syndicate constituted under Aurangzeb's order to complete the famous book on Sunni Muhammadan law, the Fatwa-I-Jahandari [12]. Mulla Abul Hasan of Darbhanga was also a renowned Muslim scholar who helped in the completion of 'Fatwa-I-Alamgiri'. He was a teacher of Zebunisa, daughter of Emperor Aurangzeb. Mufti Jiyaullah of Darbhanga was also a great scholar of his time. Mulla Sheikh Muhammad Ziwan wrote a book in Arabic which was very popular in all the madrasas of this region, Nurul-e-Anwar was name of the book. Although he was a resident of modern Utter Pradesh, he spent most of his time at Darbhanga during Aurangzeb's reign[13].

During the company rule Persian education in Mithila was not unknown. In 1801[14] Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic found prominent place in the curriculum of the college at Fort William established in 1801. In 1811 Lord Minto made recommendations for the establishment of Madarsa at Bhagalpur[15]. Francis Buchanan refers to a number of Persian and Arabic institutions located at Bhagalpur and Monghyr.

#### **Structural Syllabus**

It appears that Persian schools or Maktabs existed almost invariably where there was mosque, besides being located at other places too[16]. The Muhammadan school was known as maktab. The maktabs was either housed in a mosque or in the residential building of some wealthy person of the village. The maktabs was essentially religious in nature. The pupils learned the *Kuran* and other religious books. They also read a little Persian and Urdu[17]. In Persian schools elementary and grammatical works, forms of correspondence and popular poems and tales were chiefly read. Works on rheotic or a treatise on theology or medicine were also met with. In the Arabic schools the course of study was of much wider range[18]. Adam informs that the following works were found in the Persian and Arabic schools of Tirhut. In the Persian schools, Mahmud Nameh, an elementary work; Khushhal-us-Subyam, a vocabulary, Nisab-I-Musallas, a dictionary, Maharuf-ul-Ilaruf, Jawahir-ut-Tarkib and Dastur-ul-Mubtadi, on grammar; Mufid-ul-Insha Eyz Baksh, Mubarik Nemeh, and Amanullah Hossein, forms of correspondence; the poems of Fakmi, and Ruquat-I-Abul Fazl, the letters of Abul Fazl[19].

Apart from the study of Persian literature and Islamic theology, science and theology were also cultivated. It may be reasonably supposed that the students received a sort of rudimentary knowledge in science through those theological studies; the science of medicine was specially studied by many of them. But it is difficult to assert that Muhammadan society in general was quite satisfactory[20].

The subjects studied were elementary grammatical words, form of correspondence and tales of popular poems. Occasionally a treatise or rhetoric or medicine or theology was read. Sadi's Gulistan and Bostan were common textbooks. The students learnt by heart sections of Koran. Adam also refers to formal (elementary) Arabic schools intended for instruction in the formal and ceremonial reading of certain passages of the Koran. The general course of instruction was not very clearly defined or graded[21]. Grammar occupied a prominent place. Then followed rhetoric, logic and law. It seems that after learning alphabets the pupils read Khaluakbari (vocabulary), Pannamah (a collection of moral sayings) of Sadi, Amadnamah, Gulistan, Bostan, Jam-ul-Oawanin, Ruggat Mannullah Hussaini, Bahar danesh, Abul Fazl and Sikandarnamah. Calligraphy also formed an important branch of learning. The subjects taught to Arabic students differed from those of Persian. The external observances and fundamental doctrines of Islam were minutely studied. The works of Euclid on Geometry and Ptolemy in translation were not unknown. Other branches of natural philosophy were also taught. The knowledge of metaphysics was however, regarded as the highest attainment. Munshi and Maulavi were the terms often used to denote one's proficiency in Muslim[22] learning. Buchanan mentions in his journals a large number of Arabic and Persian schools in different parts of Bihar[23].

He who confined his studies to Persian was called *Munshis*. But to be invested with degree of a Maulvi had to get through a very comprehensive course of study in Persian and Arabic. According to the Hunter Commission's report the Muhammadan Maktab paid little attention to practical instruction[24]. They taught Koran but neglected arithmetic. In the Arabic schools, *Mir Zahid Risaleh* on logic, *Akaideh Nisfi*, on the doctrines of Islam; *Kane-ud-Dahaik*; on the sayings of the sacred word of God (the Koran) were taught[25].

The contemporary records acquaint us with actual age of the pupils. It has been observed, "till the age of five or six the boys of rank and family are left entirely to the enunches and women and from the fondness and tenderness of their management they first acquire a delicacy of constitution, a timidity and an early tendency to the pleasures of seraglio. They are then provided with tutors to teach them the Persian and Arabic languages; and at this early stage, they are brought into company where they are taught to behave with great gravity and circumspection to curb every motion of impatience, learn all the punetilious ceremonies of the eastern courts to say their prayer in public and every devotion of exterior, and it is astonishing to see how well a boy of eight or nine years old will acquit himself in company[26]. However in connection in Purnea the Arabic scholars were of advance age. The average age of such students were between 12-1 and 25.4 The average age of the Persian scholars was between 6.8 and 19.3 Thus average age of the Persian scholars was almost on the pattern of contemporary order[27].

We are informed that in the district of Tirhut there were 234 Persian schools and four Arabic schools. Most of the schools were in towns. The number of Persian teachers was the same as the number of Persian scholars. The number of Arabic teachers was six. The average age of all the teachers was 33.9 years. All the teachers were Muslims excepting one Persian teacher who was a Hindu (Kayastha). Most of the teachers got remuneration for teaching. The average monthly income of a teacher was rupees three per month[28].

There were only twenty three school houses. Those schools that had no school houses were accommodated in mosques, *imambaras*, dwelling houses, varandas and out-houses belonging to the patrons or teachers[29]. Yet another interesting account is the fact that out of 569 Persian students only 126 students were Muslims and the rest 443 were Hindus. The caste-wise list of scholars indicates that even Brahmins had started reading Persian. The caste-wise figure has been made available to us by Adam. This is as follows [30]:

Kayastha	-	349
Brahman	-	30
Rajput -	22	
Magadha	-	20
Kshtriya -	06	
Aguri	-	05
Barnwar -	04	
Kalal	-	04
Swarnkar	-	01
Gwala -	01	
Gandhabanik -	01	

In this connection it should be noted here that there was no connection between Hindi and Sanskrit schools of Bihar. But this was not applicable with Persian and Arabic schools as they were intimately connected. The Arabic teacher taught Persian also in the same school and to the same pupils. But Arabic schools were known from Persian schools by having a single Arabic scholar. The Arabic teacher could teach Persian, however, the latter might not teach Arabic as acquiring Arabic knowledge was considered as a specialized study[31]. The average duration both of Persian and Arabic study was about eleven or ten years. The Persian teachers as a class were much superior in intelligence to the Bengali and Hindi teachers. Adam however observes that in comparison to the Arabic teachers of Bengal, the teachers of South Bihar and Tirhut were of great mental activity[32].

Adam's report regarding school going population of Tirhut, though based on only one thana, gives some idea on school going people of Tirhut. The report indicates that average of school going Muslim was very low in comparison to Muslims[33]. For example, the proportion of Hindus to Musalmans was 100 to 9.9. The survey also indicates that persons both male and female, above fourteen years of age were more interested in school education[34].

The table given below indicates the relative proportion of teachers and scholars belonging to each class[35].

Tirhoot	Hindu teachers	Musalman teachers	Hindu scholars	Musalman scholars	
	1	287	470	128	

The average monthly gain of the Persian teacher was rupees 3 in Tirhoot. The lowest gain of monthly gain and the smallest average number of

scholars were found in Tirhoot. The general standard of living was law. Adam writes that both in Bengal and Tirhoot parent teachers were isolated[36].

	In Tirhut, the average age and duration is indicated in the table given below [37]:								
Persian				Arabic					
	Average ag	ges	Duration of study	Average ages			Duration of study		
6.8	10.8	19.3	12.5	12.4 17.5 2		25.4	13.3		

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Adam writes that Urdu was the language of conversation in the daily intercourse of life and in the business of the world. It was the language of oral instruction for the explanation of Persian and Arabic but it was never taught or learned for its own sake.

Except in those cases in which the Musalmans resorted to Bengali and Hindi schools, Persian instruction was the only substitute for vernacular instruction. Those Musalmans and Hindus who had received a Persian education had nearly the same command of the Persian as written language that educated English man had of their mother tongue.

Yet another important aspect which Adam has mentioned is that while there was no relationship between Hindi and Sanskrit schools in Bihar the same was not applied to Persian and Arabic schools. In fact Arabic and Persian schools were intimately connected. However, there was no Arabic teacher who might not teach Persian, there were many Persian teachers who could teach Arabic[38].

#### Scholars

We are informed that Mohmad Imam Shah and Bahram Shah were two learned Arabic teachers of an Arabic school of Darbhanga. They were brothers and authors. They were men of high character and they commanded respect in the society because of their extensive learning. Mohmad Imam Shah for example wrote a book in Persian "Sharh-I-Kholasat-ul-Hisab", a commentary on Kholasat-ul-Hisab, a treatise on arithmetic, and Daira-e- Jadwal-I-Najum, a pamphlet of 8 pages on astronomy. In Arabic he has written "Hashya Sharh-I-Sultan" a commentary on logic, Sharh-I-Kasideh Amali, a work on the doctrines of religion, Risaleh Raffa Yadin' a pamphlet on the sayings of Prophet Mohammad, Durar-i-Mohammadi, a treatise on theology and Siraj-ul-Kalub a comment on sufeeism[39].

Maulvi Bahram Shah the younger brother of Mohammad Imam Shah was also a great scholar of his time. He wrote "*Risalah Tauzih-ul-Biyan*" a commentary on the doctrines of Islam and *Durur-ul-Islam*, a commentary on the law of inheritance. In Arabic also he wrote *Risaheh Ramzul Hidayat*, a note on the doctrines of Islam and *Risalah Ashakar-ul-Mujib*, another small treatise on Islam[40].

In fact Arabic scholars studied the most elementary Arabic works and rest all others read Persian. The only distinction was that while there was no Arabic teacher who did not or might taught Persian, there were many Persian teachers who did not and could not teach Arabic. However the class for which both Persian and Arabic schools existed was the same. In the upper class Hindu and Muslim scholars read together[41].

Bihari Lal one of the great Islamic scholars of Mithila provides several valuable information regarding academic activities of Muslims in Mithila. He gives a list of thirty-five Sufi saints, past and present who flourished on the territory of Mithila. A perusal of the list shows that they had penetrated deep into the country. These saints and their mausoleums were associated with several miracles and some of them were patronized by the rulers of Darbhanga Raj also. Some of the Muslim saints were scholars as well[42]. Hafiz Saiddad Sabir Hussain could recite the holy book Quran from his memory and was well versed in pronunciation and grammar.

Bihari Lal has given extensive extracts from the literary works of Persian, Arabic and Urdu scholars in order to show that, 'this learning was equally welldeveloped in Mithila and had thrown deep roots in medieval times. He starts with Mulla Abul Hasan who was a teacher of Zib-un-Nissa, the eldest daughter of Aurangzeb. As a reward, his son Aazi Zarullah received 101 villages in Tirhut and started living in this area. Among poets in Persian language he refers to Maulvi Shafuddin Hussain and Maulvi Mohammad Saleh Khamosh. Maulana Muhammad Imam Shah was a distinguished scholar who attracted students from far and near. Bihari Lal had studied Arabic under him. Mohammad Bahman Shah was a scholar of Persian learning. Maulvi Ghulam Shah was an expert of Islamic law. Maulvi Litaf Hussain was a well known scholar of Saraf, grammar and figh. Maulana Shah Riyazuddin Hussain was a teacher who could teach difficult works of Persian. He wrote poetry in Urdu and Persian under the pseudonym, 'Mukhis'. Maulvi Hakim Saiyyad Mohammad Murshid Hasan 'Khalsh', who was capable of teaching the most difficult books in Arabic with ease to his students. He himself had received educational training under the renowned contemporary scholars. Maulvi Sayyid Abdul Hai was another distinguished scholar and poet of Urdu. Bihari Lal devotes space to Muslim Hakims (or physicians) who practiced according to the Unani system than to Vaidyas because most of the Hakims were good scholars of Persian and Arabic[43].

In Mithila we also come across with several Hindu, Persian and Arabic scholars during the period under review. Munshi Shambhu Datta Lala Bodh Sen Singh and Lala Gopal Lal were the great scholars of Persian and Arabic learning[44].

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W. W. Hunter's statistical accounts of Tirhut also provide some useful data on the subject under discussion. The number of Muslims attended Government and aided schools had risen from 32 in 1856-57 to 72 in 1860-61 and to 161 in 1870-71[45].

Classification	Num	ber of sch	nools	Number of pupils						
of schools					Hindus		l			
	1856-	1860-	1870-	1856-	1860-	1870-	1856-57	1860-	1870-	
	57	61	71	57	61	71		61	71	
Government	1	1	1	72	77	115	32	9	20	
English Schools										
Government	-	8	14	-	634	524	-	65	45	
Vernacular										
Schools										
Government	-	-	1	-	-	7	-	-	6	
Institution for										
Special Purpose										
Government	-	-	7	-	-	278	-	-	24	
Aided English										
Schools										
Government	-	-	3	-	-	296	-	-	66	
Aided										
Vernacular										
Schools										

Return of Government and Aided Schools in the district of Tirhut:-

The above data clearly indicates that up to 1870-71 Hindu scholars were larger than the Muslims. In 1870-71 the number of Hindu pupils was 1220; where as the number of Muslim pupils was only 161 in 1870-71.

In Darbhanga district or elsewhere there was usually a *maktab* attached to every mosque. The Muslims or Khatibs attached to the mosque and some of the students lived their and studied. Well-to-do Muslims, Kayasthas, Rajputs and Bhumihar Brahmans kept the *maulvis* or Muslim teachers at their own houses for the education of their children. But the teaching in the maktabs was confined to general or primary education.

The Raj English High School was opened in Darbhanga in 1861 with an objective to provide elementary education in English, Persian and Urdu among the children of the native community. However the boys of this school were not interested in English or Persian education. "With them a smattering of English or Persian just as much as will do to become a copyist or mohurrir is all that is wanted towards entering the wide world[46]". A Persian teacher was also appointed in branch school at Kathalwari near by the Raj locality. Maulvi Makbool Ali, a vernacular teacher was teaching Persian[47]. We are informed that the number of Persian pupils was 75 and 71 in 1897. The teaching of Urdu was also made available at this school. The number of Urdu students was 134 in 1897 and 161 in 1899 [48]. It was desirable that Hindu boys should take to the study of Sanskrit rather than to Persian.

Regarding the Darbhanga district O'Malley informs that in 1885 the number of Muslim students in all classes of schools was 8.667 and their percentage to the total number of scholars was 22.2. The number of students decreased in 1895 to 4930 and their percentage to the total number of scholars fell to 16.6. O Malley argues that Muslims of Darbhanga district were more eager to grasp the advantages of education than the Hindus[49]. Considering the fact that the total percentage of Muslims in the district was only 12.11. The number of Hindu students in Primary schools in 1905 was 31329 where as there were 5444 [50] Muslim students in the district. There were only three boarding houses in the district. The third one was attached to Madarsa Imadia of Darbhanga [51]. In 1916 Shafi Muslim high school was established at Lahariasarai. It had 415 students and 17 teachers[52].

We are informed that the percentage of literates in the Darbhanga district was 4% among the Hindus and 3% among the Muslims of the total population. The total number of literates in the Darbhanga district during 1900-1911 of the Muslim community was 10.146 where as of the Hindus was 108,764. The report also informs that the popular age of getting education was between 15 and 20. The highest number of Muslim literates among the Muslims was in Madhubani [53] (at present a district). This assumes significance Madhubani was a prominent centre of Hindi learning in Mithila.

The statistical record, also informs that the number of institutions where Koran was taught was 48 in the Darbhanga district in which there were 495 pupils in 1900 AD. However there was only one Madarsa in the district between 1900 and 1911. This lone Madarsa too was not in flourishing condition. It appears that there was an improving trend in the field of Muslim education. The record says that the number of Muslim pupils was 5146 in 1900 which increased up to 16569 in 1911 [54]. We are informed that the percentage of Muslim pupils was 9-7 between 1892 and 1995 and the total number of Muslim pupils was 4930 in 1895 in the district [55]. The overall percentage of Muslim pupils in the district was 0.30 during the period between 1895 and 1895. We are also informed that that only 9.7 percentages of Muslim pupils among the Muslims were school going. Thus only ten Muslims attended school out of 100[56].

The colonial records also provide useful information regarding Muzaffarpur region. O'Malley informs that the advance of education among the people had been very rapid since the formation of the district in 1875. He writes, "It is satisfactory to observe that, in spite of the fact that secular institution is not very popular among the Muhammadan community in Bengal and that they are generally slower than the Hindus to grasp the advantage of education, the Muhammadans of Muzaffarpur contribute their fair share of the students attending the various schools. In the year 1885 the number of Muslim under instruction in all classes of schools was 2.371 and their percentage to the total number of scholars was 11.4 during 1894-95 and the aggregate was 4,757 with a percentage of 16.8 The aggregate number rose to 4838 during 1904-05 but the percentage fell to 12.6 [57].

Regarding Muzaffarpur district we are also informed that of 31890 pupils studied in the primary schools in 1905. The number of Muslim pupils was 2903. The cost of educating each pupil was Re. 1-3-9 from public funds and Rs. 2-6-0 from all sources. It should be noted that for the middle vernacular schools there were 8 middle scholarships in 1905 of which 2 were reserved for the Muslims[58].

In Purnea the number of pupils in aided vernacular schools was 8744 of whom 5067 were Hindus and 3667 Muslims during 1874-75 [59]. The Muslim education in Purnea region was progressive in comparison to other parts of Mithila. The total number of Hindu literates was 43032 and 31491 of the Muslims. The number of Muslim male literates was 30534 and of female were 957. The total number of female literates in Purnea was 2% among the Muslims where as it was 3% among the Hindus. We are informed that there was only one madarsa in the Purnea district in 1907 which increased up to 3 in the year 1911. In these three madarsas there were 231 pupils[60]. However, there was growing tend for English education in Purnea. There were 533 Muslim literates who acquired elementary knowledge in English. The total number of English literates was 1588.

O'Malley informs that the number of private institutions was 153, including 42 maktabs, 26 Koran schools and Sanskrit tol. There were government aided institutions. There were 65 maktabs with 1218 pupils, and one madarsda with 44 pupils at Muhamadia which complied with departmental standards and were therefore classed as public institutions. At the madarsa instruction was given in Arabic and Persian in which poor boys received free education[61]. O'Malley also informs that the total number of Muslims attended schools of all classes in 1908 was 8996 representing 45.2 percent of the total number of scholars. As the proportion of Muhammadans to the population is 12.3 percent it would appear that they were not behind the Hindus in their appreciation of the advantages of education. However they were not in favour of any higher standard than the primary. Still Muslim education in Purnea, was progressive. The table given below confirms the fact[62].

Type of	1910 1920		0	1930		1940		1950		
institu-	Institution	Scholar	Institutio	Schola	Institution	Schola	Institutio	Schola	Institution	Schola
ions	S	S	n	r	s	r	n	r	S	r
Madars	03	231	03	67	3	48	6	364	9	268
а										
Maktab	134	2749	311	6908	390	26459	399	27078	358	16553
S										

**Madarsa and Primary Schools:** During 1911-12, there were eight madarsas with 282 scholars in Purnra. There were 232 primary schools for boys and 72 for girls with 5345 boys and 1502 girls in them and the total expenditure over them was Rs. 54878.

During 1921-22 there were eight madarsas with 291 scholars in them. There were 240 primary schools for boys and 76 for girls with 5529 boys.

During 1931-32, there were nine madarsas with 311 boys and 3 girls in them. There were 392 primary schools for boys and 87 for girls with 10571 boys and 3037 girls in them and the expenditure over them was 82.334.

In 1941-42 there were 14 madarsas with 813 boys and 51 girls in them. There were 320 primary schools for boys and 132 for girls with 11140 boys and

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4953 girls. There were seven madarsas with 259 boys. There were 278 primary schools for boys and 90 for girls with 10047 boys and 3605 girls in 1946-47. During 1949-50 there were nine madarsas with 446 boys and 4 girls. There were 280 primary schools for boys and 70 for girls with 11494 boys and 3584 girls.

There were 265 Muslim boys in High stage in 1911 which rose up 1499 boys and two girls in 1949-50. There were 274 Muslim boys in Middle stage in 1911 which rose up 4872 boys and 223 girls in 1949-50. There were 7645 Muslim boys and 229 girls in Primary stage in 1911 which increased up to 16973 boys and 2366 girls in 1950-51. There was rise of 1020 boys and 2 girls in High stage, 4609 boys and 228 girls in Middle stage, 9328 boys and 2 girls in primary stage and 1999 boys and 2 girls in all the stages in special schools during the period under report [63].

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