

General Overview on Educational Institutions in Islamic Civilization

Hamid Alami

Department of Theology, Dezful Branch, Islamic Azad University, Dezful, Iran

Abstract: The scientific condition of the Arabian Peninsula before Islam and even at the beginning of Islam was so disappointing that the number of literate people did not exceed 16 or 17 at the time of Muhammad. Then the first sparks of learning and literacy started with the Quran messages. In this way Quran verses and the Prophet's tradition became the best guides and sources of inspiration for learning and literacy. This book from the one hand encouraged people to think and respect knowledge and make distinction between those who are literate and those who are illiterate (1), and on the other hand, broaden their view point toward learning and made them seek knowledge; since the first Ayah (verse) of Quran started with the words "read in the name of God who created you." (2) It shows that the first steps of learning starts with reading; and knowledge changes the darkness of ignorance to the light of recognition and reading opens the gate of wisdom. Prophet Muhammad with the emphases on learning and literacy encouraged Muslims toward learning and increasing their knowledge and understanding. Because preserving the Suras (chapters) of Quran was very important to him, he had an especial concern over oral and written learning of these Suras among his followers in the mosque. Apart from its religious entity, mosque became an important place for learning and education and Muhammad is considered as the first teacher of Islamic society. (3) In addition to the encouragement found in holy Suras for literacy, establishment of the schools and universities which were done by Imams, created a kind of jubilee among Muslims in the history of Islam and made the act of establishing schools as important and valuable as making a mosque. For this reason after a short time several schools, Maktabas, and mosques opened in Islamic nations. And these schools had a considerable role in the progress and growth of Islamic civilization and helped Muslims come to the pick of their civilization in the first few centuries.

[Hamid Alami. **General Overview on Educational Institutions in Islamic Civilization.** *Life Sci J* 2012;9(4):698-702] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 109

Keywords: learning, mosque, school, Islam

Discussion

In order to study and analyze the ups and downs of educational institutions in Islamic civilization we need to divide it into different historical periods. Since dealing with the whole history of this notion is not possible in this research, the researcher tried to pay attention to a few educational institutions in this study. What is noticeable is that how such a rich culture and civilization could rise and improve in such a shocking speed and cause astonishment in a land where, according to historical references, there was no sign of culture and civilization, except for the Mecca that there were a few paintings of Jesus Christ and Holy Mary there was not sign of science and knowledge. (4) The reason behind this surprising fact in addition to its being from Muhammad and Quran was the universality of Islam. Islam was not limited to a specific land or nation; on the contrary it was universal as God promised to Muhammad "we assigned you as our messenger to all men." (5) That is why people from different land and tribes joined Islam and could cause such a great advance in Islamic culture and civilization. The present research aims to answer the following questions: why mosque turned out to be the first educational and religious

center? Where was the first learning institution at the time of Muhammad? What was the basis of education in Islam? What were the circles and how important they were? What were the angles and how could they appear in Islam?

Research methodology

The present research was done using library resources with analytical and investigative approach.

Introduction

It seems very important and crucial to conduct a research on scientific and educational institutions in order to get the sufficient information regarding the condition of science and education in Islamic civilization and at the same time to evaluate what they have done throw 14 centuries in a vast geographical scope from China to Spain. Since retelling the history of these institutions during such a long period of time and in numerous countries need volumes of books the present research as the title reveals tries to give a to the point and general definition of these centers. And also gives the names of some of the most important mosques and schools in Egypt, Iraq, and Iran.

Mosques

An urgent need to have a meeting-place for social, political, and religious purposes made Muslims think of establishing places called mosques. So, from the beginning religious and praying purposes were not the only reasons for construction of mosques, but mosques acquired special attention and importance in Islamic civilization. Some of these important roles are as follows religious, social, judicial, governmental, educational, supervisor and control, and political center.

In other words, in addition to worshipping and education nearly all the affairs in Islamic government were done in mosques. Moreover Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) had not assigned any other place for those affairs.

The first thing that Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) did when he entered to Qobba (a place near Medina) was establishing a mosque for religious and political purposes. (6) Soon after the mosque in Medina became the first social and political center and a place for cultural meetings and Jihad. Later on, during the successors of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) when they conquered a land they established a mosque in the manner of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h).

Apart from the heavenly value of making mosques because of the simplicity of its structure mosque-makers never faced problems and for this reason a number of mosques were made in one city. Shahiri, the famous Iranian historian, estimated the number of mosques in Bagdad in the third century (lunar calendar) as about three thousand. (7) Even if we consider the figure exaggerated, it shows the importance of making mosques. When the number of the mosques in a city increased the main mosque which is called Jama became the most important one and played a more important role in social and political affairs and was distinguished from the other mosques.

Al-Nabawi and al-Haram mosque in Saudi Arabia, Jama mosques in Koffe and Basra in Iraq al-Aqsa and Qobba al-Sokhre in Quds, Palestine are among the oldest mosques in the Islamic world. Historical records show that schooling circles were active in all of these mosques and in addition to learning Quran pupils learned Hadith, Jurisprudence and literature. (10) Instructors and learners gathered in mosques and sit in a circle for discussion and debate and each learner could join the circle which interested him. Sometimes in special days in a month skillful instructor and learners gathered in Jama mosque of each city at scientific meetings and discussed the subject matters. The instructors of these institutes were controlled by Islamic governments

and sometimes received pension and accommodation. For example in Omavi Jama mosque of Damascus there was a learning circle that its instructors received daily pension. (11)

After a while, when the number of learners in mosques increased considerably, their needs increased as well and beside the mosques other accommodation and trading centers constructed together with schools, Maktabs, and libraries that provided students with their research materials.

Instructors from different religions like Maleki and Shafeie each sat by an especific pillar in the mosque, and had their classes. And in this way circle became an educational method. In this method the instructor sat on a chair or pillow and the learners sat in a circle or semicircle facing him. (12) The semicircle method is still being used in Islamic schools for clergies (Hozeh) in Qum, Mashhad, Najaf and other active mosques in the Islamic world. One of the important characteristics of this method was that the classes were held in a certain place continuously. For example the circle of Hadith in Rosaphe Jama in Iraq was held on Fridays or Master Hanbali's Hadith circle was held in Mansour's Jama after Friday prayer. (13)

Angle

Angle or pillar is a part of the mosque that formed by the development of mosques and got especial attention in the history of education. All the instructors that held their classes in the mosque sat by a pillar leaning to it while facing to Mecca and the learners sat around them. Little by little if the instructor continued his classes under the same pillar for a long time that place was named after that instructor. For example Ibrahim ibn Muhammd Naghotieh 297 (lunar calendar) held his classes under a certain pillar for about fifty years or the angle of Imam Shafeie in Omar inb Aas was an important place for researchers for a long time. (14) It should be mentioned that the custom of sitting in angles started from Jama mosques of North of Africa and little by little entered the Islamic world and it is still in use.

Maktab and Kottab

They are the names of elementary Islamic schools where pupils could learn reading and writing and reciting Quran, for this reason Maktab Khaneh turned out to be a suitable place for teaching Quran and fundamental notions of religious studies. (15) With the development of Islamic nations and the necessity of literacy and education for children learning religious lessons became a public need and mosques become populated. Population of the mosques was not the only reason for separation of

Maktab and Kottab from mosques, the other reason was the age of the pupils. Since little children were under the religious duty-age there was the fear of contamination and disgrace for mosque as a holy place and also it might have caused problems for worshippers. This made the officials of Islamic society to make Maktab and Kottab a place for children to start learning. In some of the narratives it is said that Salman Farsi was the mastermind behind the idea of opening Maktab. (16) This is important for two reasons. First, Maktab started their activity at the time of Prophet Muhamad; second, the opening of Maktab was the idea of a Persian. (17)

Schools

The development of schools in Islamic civilization School is a place with especial logic and purpose which had an important role in the history of education in Islam. Although school with its modern definition and function started in the fourth century (lunar calendar), its educational history dates back to previous centuries. (18) By keeping parts of the educational system of mosques in schools, scientific and educational activities continued outside mosques. And school as a great training center of Islamic world continued training researchers.

The first schools, after a while, changed a lot and gave ideas for new schools. Schools which used new methodologies and new systems opened in the fifth century (lunar calendar). In Islamic civilization schools started their activities with two unique ways, with the supervision of government as state schools or organized by private sectors. Private schools were mostly houses that instructors and pupils met to study, as the name indicates, due to being private these is no record of the first private school. But for sure the instructor in case of being rich opened several schools or other people paid the expenses. It is reported that the first and the best of these schools were found in Neishabour, Iran. (19) According to the historians, regarding the quality of schools and mastery of instructors Neishabour came second after Bagdad. In the second half of the fifth century (lunar calendar) public schools started their activities under the supervision of Islamic rulers. These schools for their scientific system played an important role in Islamic civilization for their scientific advances and introducing new educational system. These schools under the supervision of Islamic state were important centers for propagating and introducing Islamic, political, and even cultural thoughts of the Islamic ruling system. Similar schools of the kind opened during the ministry of the mighty Shafi'i minister of Seljuk dynasty Khajeh Nezam al Molk Tousi 457

(lunar calendar) and they were called Nezamiyeh. (20)

With the help of Abbasi kings Nezamiyehs became famous worldwide. To prove this claim we can refer to Aboshameh, the Islamic historian, saying that "schools that Nezam al Molk built in 475 (lunar calendar) became famous all over the world, you could not find any city of village or even remote islands with little population ruled by Ibn Omar without one of those schools in them." (21)

Once this Iranian minister made great effort in building these schools, important cities of the Islamic world like Balkh, Amol, Neishabour, Harat, Esfahan, Basre, Marv, Mosel, Maghreb, and Andalus had similar schools in them. Egyptian Fatimid, following the Nezamiyeh system, carefully planned and built Maktab, school, learning center, and invited imminent instructors and scientists from other nations and made great advances and accomplishments.

When Al Azhar with abundant facilities succeeded in gathering scholars and propagating Ismailism religion, Abbasid kings in order to propagate Sunni thoughts were obligated to support public Nezamiyehs. Since that time Nezamiyeh's system and method of establishing schools received thorough attention from governments and as a result in any part of Islamic countries public schools were made with the same style. For example Nouriyeh School in Sham, and Ayyubid School in Egypt. Although it is not possible to talk about all the schools in Islamic Empire in the paper, the researcher introduces some of the most important ones.

Great schools of the Islamic world

1. Bagdad schools

There is no authentic information about the time that private schools started their activities in Bagdad; but the first state school opened in the second half of the fifth century (lunar calendar). In 475 (Lunar calendar) Khaje Nezam al Molk Tousi made the first school under the supervision of Islamic state called Nezamiyeh in Bagdad. Although it was a public school, common people could use it two years later. At the beginning only the followers of Shafi'i religion or those who were connected to the Abbasi royal family could enter these schools. During the early years there were no specialized courses of fields of study taught in those schools but later on they invited imminent instructors like Ghazali and started teaching different subjects. For example Khatib Tabrizi was the lecturer of literature and after him his student Abo Mansour Javalighi got the responsibility. Abol Barakat Anbary was the lecturer of the new field of NAHV.

The other important school in Bagdad was called Mostansariieh which was built two centuries after Nezamiieh schools by Abassi king Almostansariieh in 630 (Lunar calendar). The priority of this school over Nezamiieh was that in latter only the thoughts and ideas of the one religion (Shafi'i) were taught but in the first one four different branches of Sunni were taught in four different halls. The amount of public donation, architectural beauty of the internal and external part of the school was remarkable and outstanding.

2. Schools in Iran

Before opening of school it was tried a lot to solve the problem of educational system in Iran. As a result educational activities outside the mosques spread all over the country for all class of citizens. Although training centers and different educational institutes were active in Iran, they could not be called schools for sure. For example Hassan Ebn Fazl who was a famous religious instructor bought a house in Neishabour and taught pupils for several years till his death in 282 (lunar calendar). (22) This is a proof for educational activities outside mosques in Iran, though the word school was not commonly used for calling such places in Iran.

Anyway, there is a record which shows that the first school in Iran and of course in the Islamic world was built in Esfahan by Imam Abobakr ibn Fork in 405 (lunar calendar). He also made another school in Neishabour and started teaching sciences there. Beihaghi school in Neishabour which was built by Abobakr ibn Hossein Beihaghi is considered as one of the oldest educational buildings in Iran. For many years Hadith and Jurisprudence were taught in this school. There was another famous school in Neishabour which was named after Abo Mansour Abd al Rahim ibn Mohammad Bishki 453 (lunar calendar) which was one of the richest school in Iran for its public donation. Saadiyeh school named after Amir Nasr ibn Saboktakin, Sultan Mohamoud Ghaznavid's brother. Abosaad Ismail ibn Ali Monshi Estarabadi school was among other famous schools in Iran. Although there were scientific and training centers in Egypt thousands of years ago, training based on scientific system began during Fatimid dynasty 358-567 (lunar calendar). Fatimid dynasty in order to propagate Ismailism religion did not close the other Sunni circles and during their two hundred years of ruling the classes of other religions were open and active. There were two schools belonged to minister Walakhshi 532 (lunar calendar) and minister ibn Salar 544 (lunar calendar) which were very important in the history of Egyptian education. The presence of these two Sunni schools in Egypt of

Fatimid dynasty is the proof for Fatimid's tolerance with Sunni and other religious groups even the oppositions. The presence of these schools made the condition ready for the opening of Ayyobid schools in Egypt. Sala al Din Ayyobi 589 (lunar Calendar) who defeated Fatimid dynasty and conquered Egypt 567 (lunar calendar) established a Sunni regime in Egypt. After coming to the throne, following Khajeh Nezam al Molk in Bagdad and Iran and Nour al Din Zangi in Shaam established thirteen important and active schools in Egypt. Among them Salehiyeh school received especial attention and glory.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the primary purpose of Muslims was based on literacy and preserving the Ayah of the Holy Quran either in written or oral form. This end chanced the role of mosques as a place for worshipping to an educational center. Since Islam emphasized on the importance of knowledge and science, soon after schools opened in all parts of the Islamic Empire. The number of Maktabs, schools and circles increased gradually. The second step of training Muslims was the practical worshipping and obeying Islamic rules and regulations presented by the Quran. Soon after, with the establishment of the first Islamic regime in Medina, Prophet Muhammad designed a new method of training and educational system which was systematized like other social sectors. Muslims newly established regime in Medina needed economic activity, trade with other tribes, preparing an agreement with them, signing a peace treaty, announcing war and other social and political affairs. This made Prophet Muhammad to think of literacy more than before. Meanwhile, the Quran emphasized that Muslims should keep a written document of their agreements instead of oral promises. (24) This emphasis was a clear message for the Islamic society to pay more attention to education and literacy. And this idea was considered by many rulers throughout history and followed day after day. There were many places assigned and associated with training and education in the Islamic world such as mosque, school, Maktab, learning circle and angle, libraries, hospital, castle, and house of scientists and many other communities that could be a subject for separate study. Here are some of the common features related to some of the schools and training places specialized to certain field of study: elaborate architecture, receiving considerable public donation, owning a lot of land and material property, using eminent instructors and finally giving scholarship and pension to pupils.

References

1. The Holy Quran Sura Az Zumar, Ayah number 9.
2. The Holy Quran Sura Al Alaq, Ayah number 1.
3. Zeydan, Georgy. History of Islamic Civilization. Trans. Ali Joharkalam. Beirut: Dar al Fekr. 1982. p. 625.
4. Jafari, Mohammadtaghi. Beauty and Art in Islam. Tehran: Ministry of Islamic Guidance.
5. The Holy Quran.
6. Benali, Ahmad. Al Mavaez Al Atbar Be Zekrolkhat valasar Maghrizi. Beirut: Dar al Kitab al Elmiyeh, 1998. Vol. 4 p. 5.
7. Yaghobi, Al blan. Ahmad ben Aby Yaghob. Trans. Muhammadebrahim Ayati. Tehran: Bonghah tarjomeh va Nashre Ketab, 1995. p. 21.
8. Abolghasem Abd al Rahman ben Abd Allah. Fotohe Mesr and Akhbarha, ibn Abd al Hekam. Beirut: Darolfekr, 1996. p. 181-188-189.
9. Mohammad ben Umar ben Waghedi. Fotoh al sham. Beirut: Dar al Kitab al Elmiyeh, 1997. Vol. 1, p. 220.
10. Ahmad, Amin. Zahi al Islam. Beirut: Darolketab al Arabi (Bit), 2005. Vol. 2. p. 52-53.
11. Ahmad, Amin. Zahr al Islam. Beirut: Darolketab al Arabi (Bit), 2005. Vol. 2. p. 348-349.
12. Moniraddin, Ahmad. Educational Orgamization in Islam. Trans. Mohammadhossein Saket. Mashhad: Islamic Research Center of Astane Quds Razavi. 1979. p. 70.
13. Abobakr, Ahmad. Mokhtasar al Beldan, ibn Faghi al Hamedani. Beirut: Dar Ahya al Gharath al Arabi. p. 174.
14. Benali, Ahmad. Al Mavaez Al Atbar Be Zekrolkhat valasarMaghrizi. Beirut: Dar al Kitab al Elmiyeh, 1998. Vol. 4 p. 22.
15. Ahmad, Amin. Zahi al Islam. Beirut: Darolketab al Arabi (Bit), 2005. Vol. 2. p. 50-51.
16. Ali ben Abibakr, Noor al Din. Majma al Zavaed va Manba al Favaed Hethmi. Cairo: Bina, 1973. Vol. 9 p.243.
17. Moniraddin, Ahmad. Educational Orgamization in Islam. Trans. Mohammadhossein Saket. Mashhad: Islamic Research Center of Astane Quds Razavi. 1979. p. 59.
18. Benali, Ahmad. Al Mavaez Al Atbar Be Zekrolkhat valasarMaghrizi. Beirut: Dar al Kitab al Elmiyeh, 1998. Vol. 4 p. 22.
19. Ibid., p. 199.
20. Ibid., p. 199.
21. Aboshame, Al Rozatain. Vol.1 p. 22.
22. Abdollah Yaghot, Shahab al Din. Al Maajam al Beldan al Homawy. Beirut: Dar al Kitab al Elmiyeh, 1990. Vol. 3 p. 22.
23. Abd al Rahim, Ebn Khaldon. Moghadame Ebn Khaldon. Beirut: Dar al Fekr, 1981. p. 882.
24. The Holy Quran Sura Al- Baqara, Ayah number 282.

9/25/2012