

Education in Central Asia -With Special Reference to the Czarist Period-

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Abstract:

The paper intendeds to analyze the developments of education in Central Asia under Czarist regime, since educational sector of the region prior to the conquest was confronted with stagnation and degradation. Colonial powers for their administrative and political attainments introduced a parallel educational set up which, during the course of time, paved the way for emergence of native intelligentsia who initiated a revivalist movement for education and stood for the establishment of reformed or Usuli-Jadid schools in the region. Educational sector as such, witnessed significant innovations during period under study, but education as an effective device for social change was used by the Soviets who ruled the region for 7 decades and accomplished herculean task of achieving 99% literacy rate in central Asia.

Key words: Traditional schools, Maktabs and Madrassas, Russian schools, Russko-tuzemnye, New method schools.

The human civilization has passed through various stages, some bright and some dark. The dark stages witnessed stagnation not effecting change that was essential to attain the desired brightness. Humans compartmentalized themselves on the basis of race, ethnicity, institutions, cultural followings, rituals, customs, traditions, religions, etc., and accordingly

looked different from one another; this process, however, enriched them also as all religions directed their followers to acquire knowledge, to become civilized, and be useful for all others.

Central Asia has been home to multivariate cultures and hub of human civilizations; here people came into contact with various ethnic groups like Sakas, Parthian, Huns, Arabs, Turks, Chinese, Mongols, etc. They followed various religions – Manichaeism, Shamanism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Islam – which all contributed to make the region rich in thought, knowledge, culture, etc., through the education that was imparted from time to time. ^[1] The last of these – Islam – strongly emphasized on the education of both men and women. The Prophet of Islam (s.a.w) directed his fellow Muslims to acquire knowledge even though they had to go as far away as China (this journey was extremely difficult those days) and in Islam “A fragment of knowledge is regarded worth more than a life of hundred years.”^[2]

Central Asia in the 8th century was under the political hegemony of Muslims. Muslims preached their set of beliefs, built mosques for prayers; they also established a number of Maktabas and Madrassas, – most of these were located in urban centres like Khwarizm, Merve, Khiva, Bukhara, and Samarkand. ^[3] Here preaching and teaching went together, and a number of Madrassas gained great fame for imparting education of varied nature and quality. Apart from imparting spiritual education of Qur’an, Hadith, Fiqh, Jurisprudence, these Madrassas taught a wide range of subjects like grammar, literature, poetry, calligraphy, philosophy, Arithmetic, Geometry, Geography, History, Chemistry, Physics, Tibb (medicine), etc. ^[4] Indeed, the region produced towering personalities in almost all branches of knowledge, – engineering, natural sciences, Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Medicine, Astronomy, Astrology, and Geography. And fundamentally, the aim of Islamic education was to make

people morally pure, spiritually upright, and to inculcate among them the feeling of brotherhood and piety. Many institutions especially in southern areas (northern stepp region lacked such facilities and hence very little Islamic education reached to these areas especially Kazakhstan) were built that imparted such type of education.

However, the Mongol invasion that caused great havoc to the intellectual heritage of Muslim institutions was not followed by any renaissance. Instead, educational institutions of Central Asia witnessed degradation and stagnation to the extent that in the 19th century education was completely provincial and theological producing only one class of professionals without any concern with other branches of knowledge. ^[5] Critics point out that “The traditional Islamic education practiced in Central Asia during 19th century was at its lowest ebb.” Devoid of any initiative for the development of curriculum to bring any radical change, the institutions were not conducive to accelerate the economic growth of the region. They were simply to satisfy the religious and ritualistic needs of the populace. ^[6]

Traditional system of education in Turkistan [Delivery System] during Czars period

Except of course two Muslim scholars, Sadri-din-Ayin and Mobin Shorish, furnishing a comprehensive and valuable account, very little has been written about the traditional education. Most of the non-Muslim scholars who have written on the traditional education of 19th & 20th centuries have given a descriptive account only of classrooms, pupils, teachers, without any analytical description of the institutional materials and teaching methods in vogue prior to the Bolshevik Revolution in Central Asia.^a

^a Western writers like Henry Land Sell (1885), *Russian Central Asia*, p.122, Eugen Schuyler (1966) *Turkistan: Notes of a journey in Russian Turkistan*,

***Maktabs* or Primary Schools**

The most common elementary education in central Asia was provided in *Maktabs*. Though word *Maktab* means a place for reading and writing, yet rarely writing was taught in *Maktabs* of Central Asia in late 19th century ^[7]. *Maktab* at this time was more like the mosque schools of 10th century, was usually attached to a mosque, and conducted by one teacher called *Maktabdar* or simply mullah.^b Apart from teaching task, the mullah was in charge of all religious rituals and ceremonies of the community. The expenditure of the *Damla*, who was surrogate father of the children inside and outside the *Maktab*, was taken care of, gifts by parents on various occasions apart, by the community.^[8] *Maktabs* worked all the year with two breaks called *tateels*; there was no fixed time for admission; normally a child at the age of 6 was admitted; he started with *quadia* (alphabets) written in Arabic, Persian, Chagatai; and the medium of instruction was Arabic as well as one of the Turkish languages, Tatar, Uzbek or Turkish. The teacher first taught alphabets and phonetics of the language; *alif, be, te, se*, he spoke loudly but distinctly; students repeated and repeated right till they pronounced them correctly.^[9] Sufficient attention was paid toward pronunciation and accent so that the student was able to speak perfectly well whatever was taught.^c ^[12] After alphabets, the students were taught to read the last chapter of the Holy Book and memorise its last seven *surahs* called *Haftiyak*.^d^[13] After completing the *Haftiyak*, the student received the title *Kitabkhan*.^[10] Some students would also complete the

Kokand, Bukhara and Kukdja, p.64, and other travellers have restricted their statements and pointed out that these *Maktabs* and *Madrasahs* were meant for Quranic knowledge only.

^b *Mulla* in Arabic means *master* or *priest*.

^c Since thrust was laid upon the proper pronunciation and recitation only, child was not in a position to read anything printed in their own language even after spending four to five years in a *Mektab*.

^d *Haftiyak* was a compilation of selected short verses from Quran given at the end.

Char Kitab – a collection of prose and poetry by famous poets and writers on Islamic rituals, ethics, and morality.^{e[15]} No attempt was made to understand what was taught, with the result the pupil leaving the *Maktab* after a period of four to six years was unable to write or read except what he had learned at *Maktab*.^{f[16]} This marked the end of *Maktab* education. And this explains the utter surprise of western observers at the low level of literacy in presence of a very good number of *Maktab*s in the region.^{g [11]}

Madrasahs

After completing the primary school course, the Central Asian children could continue their education in institutions called *Madrasahs*; here students gained mastery over a number of books through interaction with reputed scholars – all knowledge was transmitted verbally. However, as students had to pay for their study, only the privileged minority were able to study in these institutions. The *Madrasahs* were established mainly by wealthy persons who provided financial assistance to both teachers and school; some students and teachers received stipends also from the *waqf*.^{h [18]} The supervisor/s and teachers

^e The text was called *Charkitab* due to its four different sections. For details see Adeeb Khalid (1998), *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reforms*, p. 22-23.

^f Sadru-din Aiyani had admitted that despite finishing *Haftiyak*, the *char kitab* and Quran he was unable to read anything except what he had read at school. Adeeb Khalid (1998), *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reforms*, p. 24.

^g V.P.Nalikin, *The regional inspector of Muslim Schools of Turkistan* in 1891 remarked “In spite of a large number of schools, there was a good deal of illiteracy among the population.” Describing the situation of a district near Samarkand another Russian administrator in 1895 pointed out ‘despite 32 primary schools it was impossible to find even eleven people who could read or write in the district, H.Carrere D.Encausse (1963), *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.11, No. 2, London.

^h Alexander Burnes and Meer Izzut-ullah have referred to the allocation of large portion of revenues from *Zakat* and other customs for the support of *Madrasahs* and its students whose income was below one thousand *tanga*, for which students were required to qualify the examination. Alexander Burnes (1872), *Travels into Bukhara: Together with a narrative of a voyage on*

were appointed by the local ruler and Sheikh-ul-Islam was responsible for overall supervision of these *Madrassas*. The duration of the *Madrassa* study was 3-4 years and the curriculum comprised etymology, syntax of Arabic, logic and theologyⁱ [19]: there lay the difference from the *Madrassas* of 13th & 14th centuries where both religious sciences along with natural sciences were taught together. *Madrassas* also taught Islamic law regarding marriage, divorce, and inheritance. There ended the *Madrassa* education and the graduate was appointed *mufti*, judge, teacher, or *imam*. No exact information available about the number of these institutions^j [12] though, they did have an overwhelming influence as religious and political entities.

Russian Schools

Soon after the Czarist conquest, this prevailing traditional education system was augmented by a network of two types of schools i.e., Russian *schools* and Russo-*Native schools*. Realising the importance of education in transforming societies, Kaufman, the first Governor-General of Turkistan, ruled “Neither weapons nor legislations can conquer the region but only education and schools can.”^[13] And accordingly, for that ideological transformation, a new educational policy was formulated by virtue of which *Russian schools* were established in *Turkistan* and here Russian and native children could study

the Indus, Vol. 1, p. 36, London; Meer Izatt-u-llah (1812), *Travels in Central Asia in the year*, (tr, P.D. Henderson), 58, Calcutta.

ⁱ For details of courses studied at *Madrassas* see Mobin Shorish (1986), “Traditional Islamic Education in Central Asia prior to 1917”, in Posse-Turko-Tatary, Present Sovietique, od., Chantal Lemerrier Quelauejay, Gilles, Veinstein and S Enderc Wimbush (Leuven-Paris edition Peeters).

^j While official sources count 189 *Madrassas* in entire Turkistan, all established before Russian conquest, H.Carrere D.Encause has put the number at about 180,[with 15,000,students] and 1,800, [*Madrassas* with 150,000 students] in the Emirate of Bukhara alone, excluding 25 *Madrassas* of the Khanate of Khiva . Edward, Allwarth (1967), [edit], *Central Asia: A century of Muslim Rule*, p.351, Columbia University Press.

together. To minimize the influence of traditional schools, thought to be religious, confessional and political, the new regime, believing that without official patronage these institutions would lose the spiritual and political significance, adopted a diplomatic policy of “non cognizance” towards them all. The new Russian schools encouraged native children to study Russian language, history, and culture besides other general subjects like math, science, and geography; but the percentage of Central Asian children there remained very low, – parents feared their children would lose their mother tongue and would be Russified. Succinctly, few wealthy merchants and nobles only sent their children to these institutions...as depicted by the table below:

Russian Schools	1885	1897	1909	1916
Gimnaziia and Progimnazia	14	14	106	107
Realschule	-	7	4	26
Higher Primary School	145	160	341	272
Teacher’s Seminary	10	7	13	18

Table: Muslims in Russian Educational Institutions of Turkestan (Selected years)

Source: Adeeb Khalid the Politics of Muslim Cultural reforms.

Russo-Native Schools

The gloomy response of the native population to Russian educational institutions led to the experimentation of “*Ruskotuzemnye Shkoly*” generally known as *Russo-Native school*.^{k[22]} Here both Russian and traditional education were imparted in two languages; the aim was to acquaint the Central Asian children with Russian culture in their native language. *Ruskotuzemnye Shkoly* had two parallel sides; here

^k These Russo Native Schools were established first in Kazakhstan and First Russo-Native School in Tashkent was opened in 1884 where thirty nine Uzbek boys were initially enrolled. Khalid Adeeb (1998), *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reforms*, 158. [22]

the Russian teacher taught modern education and the Muslim teacher (Domla) taught the local language, culture, and Islam – the course was for four years.¹ [23] To attract native children to these schools, annual examinations were made public events where high ranking officials acted as chief examiners and awarded prizes to students completing the courses. However, initial results were disappointing as only few local nobles, who acted as patrons, admitted their children; but by the end of the century economic expediency motivated more people to learn Russian and this increased the number of mixed schools. The growth was greatest in Syr-Darya oblast as is indicated in the table below:

Year	Number of Schools	Number of students
1984	12	254
1900	23	722
1908	34	1354
1911	54	2658
1915	65	3410

Table: Growth of Russo-Native schools in Syr-Darya Oblast

Source: Bobrovnikov vivid from Richard Pierce Russian in Central Asia 1867-1917, p. 219.

Jadidst Schools

Apart from Russian and Russo-Native schools, this period witnessed a rapid growth of *new-method schools* also. To Quote Adeeb Khalid, “The *new-method schools* were part of secular trend towards functional literacy in which new domains of cultural practices were elaborated.” Appeared first in Western Europe, these schools reached Central Asia from two sources – Russia and Ottoman Empire – where concern over the low literacy rates due to the difficult Arabic script and poor methods of teaching had strongly emerged. [14] Mubin Shorish

¹ The formal curriculum for these schools was formulated in 1907 with the sole aim to impart functional skills of Russian language in spoken and written. Richard Pierce. 1960. *Russian Central Asia, 1867-1917*, p 220.

also believed that movement did not originate in any single country but began simultaneously in most of the Muslim world.” [15]

First initiated by Tatar national bourgeois within the Russian Empire,^m [16] the movement stimulated the aspirations of *Jadidists* – a group of Central Asian intelligentsia – for reforms in educational system.^[17] To quote Edward Allworth, “Like the Egyptians under British rule, Central Asian intellectuals after mid-nineteenth century from Turguay to Andijan were compelled by circumstances to acquire modern techniques and practical information from the Russians, though wishing passionately to get rid of the Christian influence and alien political domination that followed with these acquisitions.” [18]

Contrary to the traditional method, these *reformed* or *new-method schools* used phonetic method for teaching and emphasis was laid on teaching the sounds of letters so as to impart reading and writing ability. A close look at the syllabus of these schools reveals resemblance with the curriculum of the parochial schools of the developed countries. Contemporary subjects like science, arithmetic, geometry, history, geography, and moral science were given pride place along with reading and writing in Persian or a native language. Religious education also formed a substantial part of school curriculum.ⁿ [19] Though by the 20th century, the *new-method schools* especially in *Turkistan*^o [30] were more a tangible entity than

^m Ismail Gaspirinsky the founder of these schools established first new method school at Backchisarai in Crimea in 1884. *Islam and the Russian Empire: Reform and Revolution in Central Asia*. Helene.Carrere D. Encause(2009) , P82, I. B.Tauris &co ltd, New York.

ⁿ Weekly time table was arranged in the following manner: out of twenty five hours, eleven hours or 44% of the total time table was devoted purely to religious subjects, nine hours to reading and coping works dealing with Muslim ethics, the five remaining hours were divided between arithmetic [two hours] geography [two hours] and the exact sciences [one hour] Sophy Bobrovnik (1911) “Moslems in Russia.” *The Moslem world* 1: 17”.

^o Tashkent especially became a hub of all intellectual activities as it provided asylum to liberal thinkers who were harassed and repressed by Emir and

Maktabas and Russo-Native schools, yet it is difficult to determine their exact number as these were opened in spare rooms of teachers and patrons' houses without formal permission or registration.^p [20]

Czarist attitude towards educational institutions of Central Asia

It is said that the Czarist government not interested in bringing socio-economic changes in the region, had little intention of educating the Central Asians, and was motivated purely by economic interests. "I am not impressed by the wild dreams of philanthropists to civilize the Central Asians, to educate them, and to raise them to the level of the European nation," openly declared one unspecified dignitary. [21] In fact, no extraordinary educational policy was adopted towards Central Asia, with the exception of Kazakhstan. The religious confessional political traditional schools were sworn enemies of the Russian authority but these institutions were not abolished altogether, for political expediency. A diplomatic policy of "non-cognizance" was adopted towards these traditional institutions and it was believed that without official support these institutions were bound to lose their spiritual and political significance. As regards the new-method schools, the regime adopted the policy of pacification. The significant innovation in the Muslim education in fact was initially unnoticed and underestimated by

conservative clergy in other two protectorate khanates. The rapid growth of these new method schools is discerned by the fact that in Tashkent ratio was 6 in to 8 in 1910, while as in Khokand it was 8 in comparison to 2 during same period. Mobin Shorish (1994), "Back to Jadidism", *Islamic Studies*, V. 33.

^p There is a lot of discrepancy between official and non official sources regarding their exact number .Where the former puts the total number of reformed schools in Tashkent and Khokand at only thirteen with 1,100 students, in 1910, the later put the number 31 with 300 students where by making it a leading city in Turkistan. For details, see, Adeeb Khalid, (1998), *The politics of Muslim Cultural Reforms*, p181.

the Russian authorities.^{q[33]} Statistical survey of 1908 had categorically admitted the presence of new-method schools some twelve years back^{r[23]}. Consequently, the rapid growth of new-method schools alarmed the Soviet authorities who therefore abandoned the policy of non-intervention and imposed strong administrative and financial restrictions on these institutions. Jadidists schools were brought under the imperial legislation, which made their registration mandatory; to undermine the influence of the Tatars, who were mostly working in these schools, native language rather than Tatar was declared the medium of instruction; and the criteria of nationality was set for teachers – they had to be either Russian of the same nationality. For opening new-method schools, the Regulation of Muslim Educational Establishments demanded the submission of lesson plan and list of text books to be used in these schools to the Education Inspector of Tashkent.^{s[24]} Despite these restrictions^{t[36]}, it is believed that new-method schools continued and worked impressively^[25] as they received secret education and training in Turkey till the outbreak of World War I. Turkey's joining of Central Powers made these secret societies suspicious in the eyes of Russia, ultimately resulted in closing down these schools.

As regards the efficiency of Russo-Native schools, a considerable dissatisfaction continued throughout the period, though sporadic attempts were made to improve their standard.

^q Barthold denied any information available about new method schools even at the time of revolution. Barthold (1965), *The history of Cultural Life of Central Asia*, p.380

^r To quote E. H.D Encases (1963), at the outbreak of 1917 Revolution 92 New-Method schools were working in Turkistan out of which 30 were in Syr-Darya 30 in Fergana, 18 in Simerchy and 5 in Samarkand. Richard. Pierce (1960), *Russian Central Asia, 1867-1917*, p.220

^s In 1911 censorship was imposed on textbooks since administration received reports of anti-Russian passages in jaded text books. Adeeb Khalid (1998), *The politics of Muslim Cultural Reforms*, p.181

^t Though after 1911 declaration, many schools in Bukhara and Khokand were banned, Jadidists secretly continued to send their students to Turkey for

Critics pointed out that students trained in these schools knew neither Russian nor had any grasp of the subjects taught in Russian. The vernacular side also presented a disappointing picture. To quote Barthold, "It was not created with any sincere intention to educate the young native children in their own language but simply to break the mistrust of natives and to perpetuate the image of the traditional maktab with same staff and traditional methods."^{u[38]} The establishment of Russo-Native schools was in fact not a philanthropic move, it was simply an artificial development to create an elite group to facilitate the smooth functioning of the administration. The Czarists regime in fact followed a very discriminatory attitude towards natives^[26] as is manifest from the meagre budget allocation of 2.3% for health and education in comparison with 86.7% earmarked for military and other administrative functions.^{v[40]} Russian sources claim that schools in Turkistan were far better than those in Russia both in terms of funds and infrastructural facilities but this privileged position was enjoyed only by the Russian minority settled in Turkistan^{w[27]} Most of the native schools were extremely backward and this is at once evident from the fact that one elementary school was meant for 14261 students in Turkistan as compared to 1267 students in the empire as a whole.^[28] Moreover, schools in Turkistan were mainly dependent on the local revenues and the local patron was exclusively responsible for their funding. In 1909, though the Governor- General, motivated by political expediency, pleaded for budget

further education .some significant secret societies of Jadidists in Turkey were *Jamiyati Atfl, Marifati, Barkat, etc*

^u For discriminatory policies of *Czars* towards national minorities see "Education of Muslims in Tsarist and Soviet Russia", Comparative Education review, vol.12, no, 3 p. 311.

^v In the Russian empire as a whole literacy rates was 40%, where as in the Syr darya Oblast it was 95% and in Symerchi oblast the lowest ratio was 60%. Central Asian Review (1963), vol.xi, p ,393.

^w Harry Lipset has pointed out that in 1914 only 160 schools existed in present day Uzbekistan SSR.

enhancement in education, his request was turned down on pretext of paucity of funds.^{x [28]} Disgusted with the progress of Russo-Native schools, a Czarist administrator too remarked that “The development of child in these schools had not achieved the desirable results.” The education of few hundred interpreters, minor officials, and traders was no revolution, for it did not prolong even to intermediate level. [29] The low efficiency of Russo-Native schools is discerned by the low output indicated in the table below:

Year	Total No. School	No. of Native Children	No. of Russian Children	Total	Number of graduated
1886	4	116	-	116	-
1891	22	375	51	426	25
1896	28	650	51	701	15
1901	45	1490	89	1579	79
1906	87	2364	-	2364	-
1909	98	2975	102	3077	-

TABLE: Russo-Native schools in Turkestan

Source: V.T. Kocharov, *Iz istorii organizii razvitiia narodnogo obrazovaniia V do revoliutsionnom Uzbeikstane (1865-1917)* Taskent (1966). Vivid from Adeeb Khalid (1989), *Politics of Muslim Cultural Reforms*.

In some areas, like Fergana, results were so disappointing that not a single graduate was produced in seventeen schools in the year 1907.^[45] True that during the period under review one does not come across any revolutionary change in the educational sector and succinctly the region on the eve of Russian Revolution was still largely an illiterate nation.

The period under study did witness a remarkable development in the intellectual field, that is, establishment of scientific societies, public libraries, museums, and introduction of lithography which inspired the native intelligentsia to establish an independent vernacular press that in many ways

^x Geffory Wheeler remarked the graduates of these schools often worked on railroads as interpreters or in other minor occupation for the Russians.

shunned politics and focused on educational and cultural goals. But certainly there was a stagnation and degradation in the standard of traditional maktabas. As far as Russo-Native schools are concerned, they were confronted with numerous financial and administrative constraints. Jadidists or new-method schools could have played a significant role but could neither replace the traditional maktabas nor could sustain the onslaughts of the Czarist administration that adopted two distinct phases of attitude towards these institutions. As long as the Empire seemed stable and balanced in their favour, they adopted the policy of pacification and non-cognizance rather than provocation towards these institutions. For instance, in Bukhara emirate they supported new-method schools with the intention to minimize the corrupt, authoritarian, and conservative regime of the Emir and his clergy. However, soon they realized that along with some enlightenment, social reforms, and emancipation, these institutions were propagating ideas of pan-Islamism and nationalism, which was posing a serious challenge to the legitimacy of colonization; they therefore, with the outbreak of World War I in 1914, completely banned the new-method schools. Educational sector in Central Asia achieved real success during the Soviet period which perceived education as an effective device for socio-cultural change and declared a crusade against illiteracy.

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