Chapter I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
Since in the early period of Islam Muslims were mostly preoccupied in the conquest of new territories and the consolidation of acquired ones, they did not develop any system of education in the modern sense of the word. "The public desiring to secure an education, as education went in those days, patronized the mosques where classes centring on the Koran and hadith were given. The earliest teachers in Islam were therefore the Koran readers (qurra). As early as the year 17 (638 A.H.) the Caliph 'Umar sent such teachers in all directions and ordered the people to meet with them on Fridays in the mosques''.

During the Umayyad period education of the formal type was not common. "To the early Umayyad princes the badiyih, Syrian desert, acted a sort of school to which they sent their young sons to acquire the pure Arabic tongue and become well versed in poetry. It was thither that Mu'awiyah sent his son and future successor Yazid. The public considered him educated who could read and write his native language, use the bow and arrow and swim. Such a person was styled al-Kamil, the perfect one''. The ethical ideas of education as gleaned from the literature bearing on the subject were courage, endurance in time of trouble (Sabr), observance of the rights and obligations of neighbourliness (jiwâr), manliness (muruâh), generosity and hospitality, regard for women and

2. Ibid., p. 253.
fulfilment of solemn promises. Many of these will be recognized as the virtues highly prized in Bedouin life.³

Of all the periods of Muslim history undoubtedly the Abbasid period is the most striking and unequalled in depth and variety of talent.⁴ "The material expansion was accompanied by an outburst of intellectual activity such as the East had never witnessed before. It seemed as if all the world from the Caliph down to the humblest citizens suddenly became students, or at least patrons, of literature. In quest of knowledge men travelled over three continents and returned home, like bees laden with honey, to impart the precious stores which they had accumulated to crowds of eager disciples, and to compile with incredible industry those works of encyclopaedic range and erudition from which modern science, in the widest sense of the word, has derived far more than is generally supposed."⁵

It was in this period that a proper educational system was developed ranging from elementary to higher education. Every mosque served as a place for prayer and a place for education as well. The mosque was also the place where eminent scholars and philosophers delivered lectures which attracted a large number of people. Apart from the fact the students of elementary school spent a considerable portion of their time on reading Qurān, they were also taught Arabic grammar, stories about the prophets and Hadith. They were also required to learn some

3. Ibid. 253
4. Ibid., p. 408.
poems which were not inconsistent with the Islamic spirit and to have some rudimentary knowledge of arithmetic. People attached so much importance to education that "Deserving pupils in the elementary schools of Baghdad were often rewarded by being paraded through the streets on camels whilst almonds were thrown at them." However, it should be noted that children of the upper classes and the nobility did not attend the mosque schools. They had private tutors of their own who taught them everything which could enable them to acquit themselves like true gentlemen.

It is often said that the teachers enjoyed a high position in the society, they were held in high esteem. But the picture of an elementary teacher which emerged of the writings of that time was depressing and unedifying. Most of them were considered as ignorant and idiotic persons with no better knowledge of the world. A judge under al-Ma'mun was so much hostile towards this class of teachers that he would not admit teachers' testimonies as satisfactory evidence in court. However, this was not the case with teachers who were associated with the Madrasahs. Their status was quite high and the society gave every respect to them. Education of women was too not uncommon. But generally their education did not go beyond the elementary level. They were considered unsuitable for higher education.

7. Ibid., p. 409.
So far as higher education is concerned this period was notably marked by a number of Madrasahs which were established and which had great reputation for their quality of education. Among these Madrasahs, Nizāmiyah Madrasah was unique in every respect. "The first real academy in Islam which made provision for the physical needs of its students and became a model for later institutions of higher learning was the Nizāmiyah, founded in 1065-67 by the enlightened Nizām-al-Mulk, the Persian vizir of the Saljuq Sultans Alp Arslān and Malikshāh and the patron of 'Umar al-Khayyām. The Saljuqs, like the Buwayhids and other non-Arab sultans who usurped the sovereign power in Islam, vied with each other in patronizing the arts and higher education, perhaps as a means of ingratiating themselves with the populace. The Nizāmiyah was consecrated as a theological seminary (madrasah), particularly for the study of the Shāfīi rite and the orthodox Ash'āri system. In it the Koran and old poetry formed the backbone of the study of the humanities (ilmal-adab), precisely as the classics did later in the European universities. The students boarded in this academy and many of them held endowed scholarships. It is claimed that certain details of this organization appear to have been copied by the early universities of Europe."

It may be stated that the Nizāmiyah College was established to counteract the secular forces which threatened to undermine the authority of the religion. Previously all learning centred round the religion. Now since the Persians had the dominant

hands in the Abbaside Government, it was but natural that this era released forces of emancipation in many directions and the secular education which emphasized over the Greek and Persian learning got better of the traditional education based on religious absolutes. But this too much emphasis over the secular education at the expense of traditional religious education was not all desirable. It were al-Ghazālī and Nizām-al-Mulk who sensed this danger and came to the rescue of the traditional education. Al-Ghazālī exposed the weaknesses of Neoplatonism of Al-Fārābī and Avicenna and made a spirited and stout defence of Islamic orthodoxy. In his defence of orthodoxy he used the logical technique of those Neoplatonic philosophers and exposed them on their own ground. Thus it was through the efforts of Al-Ghazālī and Nizām-al-Mulk that the authority of traditional education was established once for all. Since then traditional education did not meet any serious challenge. It had far reaching effect on the future development of Islamic society. The Islamic society became so much identified with that type of education that for centuries it did not think it to move outside this narrow circle.

There is a misunderstanding even in a knowledgeable circle that the Madrasah system of education was purely religious education and that it was mainly responsible for the decadence and stagnation to which Muslim society was condemned for centuries. It is true that the stagnation that was in the Muslim society was due to the Madrasah system of education. But it is not true that this was due to the fact it was purely religious education. As a matter of fact it was partly religious and partly secular, rather in it
there was accent more on secular subjects than on the religious ones. An honourable place was given to Greek thought and learning. The most unfortunate part of the Muslim history of education was its attachment to the Greek thought to a degree that Muslim society remained caught for ever in the quagmire of deductive reasoning which was not conducive to scientific enquiries and experiments. It was a good luck of Europe that it found Bacon who saved it from dead clutches of the deductive reasoning of the Greek and showed how induction and empiricism could pave the way for scientific progress and development.

When the Muslim power entered India and became well established, it was but natural that the Madrasah system of education which had al-Ghazālī and Nizām al-Mulk as its great spokesmen was introduced. Of course some changes were introduced, but its structure remained more or less the same.

Proper history of education in India begins with the reign of first king of Slave Dynasty Qutabuddin Aibec. During this period we find "hundreds of mosques which like the churches of Mediaeval Europe were centres of both religion and learning". The next king in this dynasty who felt concern for education was Nasiruddin, who probably founded Nasiriyyah College at Delhi.

While Khilji kings were not deficient in promoting the cause of learning, it was Firoz Shah Tughluq who showed unusual enthusiasm for education. His love for education was so much

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so that he had the distinction of opening no less than thirty colleges, besides repairing and reconstructing of numerous old madrasahs. His greatest achievement was the establishment of a Madrasah which bore his name and which was undoubtely a great seat of traditional education and learning. It was housed in a spacious building with a mosque and reservoir attached to it. The main feature of these institutions was that they were manned by teachers of great learning and ability and their salaries were paid from the state coffer. After Firoz Shah it was Sikandar Lodhi who was very much interested in the spread of education among his subjects. It was this illustrious ruler who felt concern for his Hindu subjects also. It was he who for the first time introduced secular education which was imparted to Hindus and Muslims alike. According to Ferighta Hindus who had hitherto never learned Persian, commenced during his reign to study Mohammedan literature.10

From the Sultanate we pass on to the Mughal period when the Muslim culture and civilization reached the highest manifestation. Mughal culture was essentially an elite culture which remained indifferent to anything outside the court. For them Islamic brotherhood had no meaning except that the Muslims should stand by them in case their authority was challenged by the non-Muslims. This was the reason that Mughal rulers, with the exception of Akbar, did not show any interest in the education of the Muslim masses. They felt concern only for the Muslim nobility and aristocracy and because of this concern for this particular

10. Quoted by Law, N.N., Promotion of Learning in India, p. 78.
class that the state was directly responsible for the higher education which was mostly restricted to the children of this class. Elementary education was, however, completely in the hands of private enterprise. "It is interesting to note that though some of the institutions of higher learning (madrasas) were endowed by the state, those for elementary education (maktabs) were by and large left completely to private enterprise.

Today, almost all countries regard the provision of elementary education as a primary duty of the state. Some countries hold that even secondary and higher education should be the responsibility of the state, but in mediaeval India and this was probably the case with all countries in earlier times and the Middle Ages - the State's participation in education was confined to patronage of only a few institutions of higher learning."

The other reason why the state did not provide elementary education was that the nobility did not like to send their children to the mosque schools. Either they instructed their sons themselves or they kept private tutors at their homes who generally lived with their families and watched the progress of their pupils day and night. "Many educated men chose to teach their sons at home. It was under the fostering care of his father, Sheikh Mubarak, that the infant prodigy Abul Fazl, matured into brilliant manhood.... Aristocrats, Hindu and Muslim alike, engaged learned private tutors for their sons and daughters. Readers of Maasir-ul-Umara will recall that many of

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the higher officers were versed in literature, history, theology and the natural sciences.\(^{12}\)

Almost all the Mughal rulers from Babur down to Aurangzeb were men of thorough education and good taste. Illiterate though Akbar was he towered above all of them with his sharp intelligence tempered by his humanistic ideals, great statesmanship and catholicity of spirit. Since Akbar had an undying faith in the unity of all religions, his greatest desire was to secularise the Indian life, and education could be one of the effective ways to this end. But this was not an easy task. He had to meet stiff opposition of the 'Ulama who always exercised a powerful influence both upon the masses and the nobility and who were very much critical of such step. But a determined Akbar was not to be cowed down. He fought his own way and was successful in making the education secular so as to induce Hindu students to attend the maktabs in large numbers. "We see in Akbar, perhaps, for the first time in Mohamadain history, a Muslim monarch sincerely eager to further the education of the Hindus and the Mohamadans alike. We also notice, for the first time, the Hindus and the Mohamadans studying in the same schools and colleges."\(^{13}\)

As Akbar was very much interested in the education of children, he introduced a number of reforms in the elementary education by issuing a directive to the effect that

1. Every school boy should learn to write letters of the alphabet. The shape and name of each letter was to be learned in two days.

\(^{12}\) Beni Prasad, A Few Aspects of Education and Literature under the Great Mughals, Indian Historical Records Commission Proceedings of Firth Meeting held at Calcutta, January 1923, P. 42.

\(^{13}\) Law, Narendra Nath, Promotion of Learning in India During Muhammadan Rule (By Muhammadans), P. 160, P. 42.
A week's practice was considered sufficient for joining letters.

Some prose and poetry was to be learnt by heart.

The teachers should watch the progress of their pupils in regard to their writing and reading.

Every pupil was then expected to study arithmetic, geometry, ethics, agriculture, astronomy, physiognomy, economics, civics, logic and medicine.

The higher sciences were divided into Ilahi (Theology), Riyazi (Mathematics) and Tabii (Natural Sciences).

So far study of Sanskrit was concerned students were to learn Vyakarana (Grammar), Vedanta (Philosophy) and Patanjali (Yogism).

During the time of Jahangir and Shah Jahan the pattern of education more or less remained the same as stated earlier that while the state patronized institutions of higher learning it completely left the elementary education to the private agencies.

As Aurangzeb was himself a theologian of a high order whose study of Muslim theology was vast and deep, he showed an unusual interest in the traditional education. In order to attract students in the traditional schools he issued a directive to the Diwan of Gujarat, Hakramat Khan and also to other Diwans in the various parts of his dominion to the effect that

1. The student who reads Hizan, an elementary book of Arabic grammar, be given one anna daily.

2. Those who study Munsha be given two annas daily.

3. The student of Kashshaf, be given pecuniary help from the state treasury.

15. Law, Narendra Nath, Promotion of Learning in India During Muhammadan Rule (By Muhammadans), p. 188.

and modern. It also shows what and how a prince should be taught. But there is one thing which is not easy to explain. When Aurangzeb doubted the efficacy of traditional education to deliver the goods, why he did not introduce reforms in it so as to reshape the system and make it more useful and effective. Whatever be the case, there is one thing which stands out prominently that in the period of Aurangzeb Maktabs and Madrasahs made a remarkable progress.

Apart from the fact that this period witnessed a great expansion of Maktabs and Madrasahs, it would also be remembered for the curricular reforms which were introduced in the Madrasah system of education; and which, for centuries, remained almost unchanged and static. The man responsible for this reshaping of this system was Mulla Nizamuddin, and this was why that this modified system came to be known as Dars-i-Nizamiyah.17

Some of the salient features of the Dars-i-Nizamiyah are the following:

1. There are only two books prescribed on every subject. But these two books so selected give a difficult reading and if any one masters them thoroughly, for him every other book on the subject becomes easy.

2. Because of the fact that only two books are prescribed on each subject or in certain cases only some chapters are taken a student of average intelligence can easily complete the dars at the age of sixteen or seventeen. Previously the curriculum was so heavy that a student found it difficult to complete the course even at the age of twenty.

17. It should be however borne in mind that this system should not be confused with the system propounded by Nizam al-Mulk.
(3) The books on logic and philosophy prescribed in the course outnumbered the total number of books prescribed on other subjects. It is interesting to note that there is only one book on Hadith which is Mishkat. Since books on fiqh are very few, students of this "dars" do not develop that dogmatic attitude which we generally find in our 'Ulamā. In other words a student of dars-i-Nizāmiyā is generally liberal and free from narrow mindedness.

(4) Dars-i-Nizāmiyā does not attach much importance to the literature and this is why the number of literary books prescribed is very small. 18

Since Mulla Nizāmuddin was an originator of a great system which had far reaching effect upon the Muslim system of education it could be proper to give a brief sketch of his life and character.

Born in Sihālī, a town 28 miles away from Lucknow, Mulla Nizāmuddin was an illustrious son of an equally illustrious father Mulla Qutubuddin Shaheed. Mulla Qutubuddin was a theologian of great repute and saintly disposition and had an institution of his own which attracted a large number of students from neighbouring districts. When Mulla Nizāmuddin was only thirteen years old, Mulla Qutubuddin, who came of Ansari family, was brutally done to death by some miscreants belonging to Uthmānī family which was in long feud with the Ansaris. 19 It was a great blow to the family indeed, but since the eldest son of the deceased was in the service of the Emperor Aurangzeb, he was able to secure a royal firman from the Emperor. According to this firman severe punishment was inflicted upon the men

19. Ibid., p. 92.
responsible for the murder of Mulla Qutubuddin and a spacious house in Parangi Mahal (Lucknow) was allotted to the family of the deceased. There the whole of the Mulla's family migrated from Sihali and made it its permanent home.

Mulla Nizamuddin received his early education from his father and after his death he studied at Dewa and Banaras. It was at Banaras that he completed his education under the well-known scholar Hafiz Amanullah Banarsi. But there is other version of Mulla's education. According to the author of Subhatul Mirjan, Ghulam Ali Azad, he studied at different places in Eastern U.P. and it was at Lucknow that he completed his education under Sheikh Ghulam Naqshband Lucknowi.

After completion of education Mulla Nizamuddin assumed the seat of his father and started his own institution which, within a short time, became a great seat of theological learning in Eastern U.P.

Mulla Nizamuddin led a quiet and contented life, disdainful of riches and men of riches alike. Despite his great talents and learning which could have easily bought him a comfortable life he preferred a life of poverty and drudgery to that of opulence and luxury. Unlike other Ulama, he was the very embodiment of humility which would not allow him to enter into a discussion or debate with any one on any controversial point. If anyone disagreed with his point of view he did not

20. Ibid., pp. 92-93; and also Ansari Muhammad Rada, Ban-i Dars-i Mulla Nizamuddin Muhammad Parangi Mahli Ma'rif August, Azamgarh 1970, pp. 86-87.
21. Nu'mani Shibli, Maqalat-i-Shibli, p. 94.
push it any further, rather he would remain silent.\textsuperscript{22}

Mulla Nizamuddin wrote a number of books which are scholarly and of a very high standard. But Mulla Sahib's reputation does not lie in the fact that he was author of so many scholarly books but because of the fact that he introduced a system of education which even after more than two hundred years, is still followed in most of the traditional institutions of today. Moreover, it was Mulla Nizamuddin who could as a teacher, claim to have produced a number of pupils who distinguished themselves as a great men of learning and erudition over whom Muslim India could justly be proud of.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 97.