

# Educational Practices and Challenges In Madrasas During The Late 19th And Early 20th Century Under The Turkestan General-Governorate

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the general state of madrasas in the Samarkand region, including their quantity and income, at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. The exact number of students enrolled in these madrasas is provided based on historical sources. The study examines the geographical distribution of madrasas within the Samarkand region and explores the reasons for the disproportionate allocation of students among them. Additionally, the article provides detailed information about the learning process in the madrasas, including the academic subjects taught and the books used. An objective assessment is offered regarding the achievements and shortcomings of the educational process, as well as the quality of teaching materials. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the educational practices of Samarkand madrasas during this period, comparing them with those of madrasas in other regions.

**Keywords:** Zarafshan District, General Governor, Mutavalli, Mudarris, Imam, Muezzin, Hujra, Inspector, Uyez, Adna, Ausat, A'lo.

## Introduction

In global experience, the educational system has always been one of the key criteria determining a country's level of development. Understanding the history of the educational system lays a solid foundation for the stable development of each nation's culture.

Before the Arab conquest, the educational system in our region was primarily based on Zoroastrian principles. Starting from the 8th century, a new educational system characteristic of Muslims began to form in Movarounnahr. This system developed into a unique two-stage structure comprising schools and madrasas, which first emerged in the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th-8th centuries. By the 9th and 10th centuries, it had spread widely across Central Asia and the Volga region.

Some students who completed their studies in schools continued their education at madrasas. The earliest recorded information about madrasas, considered the highest stage

of the Muslim educational system in our region, is found in Narshahi's History of Bukhara. According to this source, the "Farjak" madrasa in Bukhara burned down in 937. However, other sources confirm that the renowned scholar from Samarkand, Imam Moturidi, studied under Muhammad ibn Fazl Balkhi at the "Raboti Ghaziyan" madrasa in the same city. Considering that Imam Moturidi passed away in 931, it becomes evident that the "Raboti Ghaziyan" madrasa in Samarkand predates the "Farjak" madrasa.

## Methodology

The term "madrasa" translates as "place of teaching", "school", or "place of study". During the Middle Ages, the madrasas in our region, including those in Samarkand, played a significant role as centers of learning not only in Movarounnahr but also across the broader Muslim East.

Students in madrasas were referred to as mulla (literate), tolibi ilm (seeker of knowledge), tolib (student), or shogird (pupil). The duration of study stages was not specifically defined. Students progressed to the next stage after studying the prescribed books for each level and passing an examination administered by the mudarris (teacher). Typically, students spent 3-4 years at each stage, although the first stage often required 8-10 years of study. This extended duration was largely due to the challenges of mastering Arabic language and grammar, which were considered particularly difficult.

Archival data indicating that students spent long periods in each stage have been contested by K.Y. Bendrikov. According to his findings, the total duration of study in madrasas spanned 16-18 years. Naturally, questions arise regarding the sources of income that sustained students during their extended periods of study. An analysis of historical sources reveals that students in Samarkand madrasas relied on the following means of subsistence:

1. revenue from waqf (endowments);
2. income from their own teaching activities;
3. financial support from their parents;
4. patronage.

Examinations to complete a study stage were conducted by a commission composed of the mudarris, mutavalli (administrator), a'lam (scholars), qozikalon (chief judge), and local governors of the area where the madrasa was situated. The lengthy study periods in madrasas were largely influenced by the organization of the educational process and the teaching methods employed.

Lessons in the madrasas typically began early in the morning after the fajr (dawn) prayer. The duration of each lesson depended on the volume of material covered, the teacher's explanations, and the preparedness of the students.

In the madrasas of Samarkand, education was conducted four days a week-Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. The remaining days were allocated for reviewing the lessons and for rest. No classes were held during the month of Ramadan, on festive days such as Eid, or during vacation periods. The summer break lasted from the end of May to the end of September. Out of 365 days in a year, the academic process in madrasas lasted approximately 30 weeks, equating to nearly 120 days of instruction.

It is also worth noting an important point regarding the number of madrasas. For instance, according to data from 1913, there were 94 madrasas operating in the Samarkand region, with a total of 2,205 students enrolled. Given that the region's male Muslim population was recorded as 519,893, it can be estimated that roughly one out of every 59 eligible males attended a madrasa.

The curriculum and educational processes in all madrasas across Turkestan were nearly identical, and the students in Samarkand's madrasas followed these same programs. The traditional educational practices of Central Asian madrasas were established as early as the 11th-12th centuries, and the subjects taught in madrasas remained largely unchanged for several centuries, adhering to the old methods. For example, textbooks such as *Shamsiya* (on "Logic"), written in the 13th century; *Aqoid* (on "Foundations of Islamic Teachings"), written in the 12th century; *Mantiqut Tahzib* (on "The Arabic Interpretation of Greek Philosophy"), written in the 16th century; and *Shariat* (on "Islamic Jurisprudence"), developed in the 8th–9th centuries, were predominantly used. These works were primarily written in Arabic.

There were no strictly defined rules or schedules in the educational process of madrasas. For various reasons, many lessons were canceled or skipped, and classes did not start at fixed times. In Samarkand, for instance, studies in 1911 began in the second half of October.

The organization of the educational process in Turkestan's madrasas was primarily the responsibility of the madrasa mudarris (teachers). After the regulation of 1894, some measures were taken to improve the functioning of madrasas. According to V. P. Nalivkin's report, a set of rules governing the activities of the mudarris was issued by the regional chief inspector. The ultimate goal of the Russian Empire's officials was to establish full control over the operations of madrasas.

In Samarkand madrasas, the structure of student groups depended on the number of students and the size of the madrasa. In larger madrasas, each group consisted of 6–10 students, and in some cases, up to 20 students. Each group was led by a head, often appointed from among the mullazoda (students of advanced standing). These leaders supervised the group's learning process and organized students' turn-by-turn sessions with the mudarris.

Not all students of Samarkand madrasas lived on the premises; some had to commute distances of two to three kilometers daily. Besides class time, students typically spent two to three hours on each lesson. On average, madrasa teachers, especially experienced ones, taught for four hours daily, between eight and twelve hours depending on the workload.

Graduates of madrasas were authorized to teach Quranic exegesis (tafsir), prophetic traditions (hadith), and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). Those who successfully completed their education were granted special certificates (sanad). For example, a certificate issued to Shamsiddin Muhammad from Balkh, confirming his graduation from the Mirzo Ulugh Beg Madrasa in Samarkand, serves as evidence of this practice.

The madrasa curriculum was divided into three stages, starting with the study of Arabic. Initially, students studied *Avvali Ilm* (The Beginning of Knowledge) as a

foundational course. This book, structured in a question-and-answer format, introduced the basics of Islam and was taught in Persian. Students were required to memorize it within a few days. Following this, they studied Bidon, a Persian text on Arabic grammar and morphology. In the second year, students progressed to Arabic grammar texts such as Zanjani in Arabic and Muizziy in Persian, revisiting concepts covered in primary schools. From the third year onward, Arabic grammar was studied in greater depth.

Due to the complexity of Arabic grammar, mastering it typically required 2–4 years. Even after completing grammar, students remained at the introductory (adno) level, studying texts such as Fiqhi Qadimi and Mukhtasar al-Wiqaya. These Persian-language books covered Islamic law and addressed both religious and civil aspects of Islamic jurisprudence. The curriculum was divided into two independent sections: fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and mushkilot (complex issues). Only highly capable students mastered both sections, while others focused on just one.

After mastering Arabic grammar and the basics of logic, students in madrasas chose between two divisions: law or general knowledge. Most students limited themselves to studying Islamic prayers and laws. Graduates of this track could work as scribes in administrative offices or as mosque imams. The comprehensive theology and law division was pursued only by those intending to become mudarris (teachers) or assume higher positions.

Although knowledge of Arabic grammar was beneficial for Muslims, it required a considerable amount of time to learn (2–4 years). Despite the possibility of developing a simplified textbook to reduce this duration, no reforms were made to this course by the mudarris. Similarly, the fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) course involved studying multiple books by different authors, which, while largely identical in content, required significant time and effort due to their complexity.

## Result and Discussion

In Samarkand madrasas, more time was allocated to teaching Arabic grammar than to other subjects. Once students mastered Arabic grammar, the curriculum was divided into two tracks: general education (mushkilot) and jurisprudence (fiqh). Students could choose either track based on their interests or complete both.

At all levels of madrasa education, the primary textbooks were directly taught by the mudarris, while supplementary materials were left for independent study by the students. In Samarkand madrasas, the general knowledge curriculum attracted less interest from most students. In this division, mullas studied not specific disciplines but individual books on metaphysics, cosmography, and astrology authored by Arab scholars during the Islamic Golden Age. Some of these books also included narratives from ancient Greek philosophy.

Mathematics was one of the subjects taught in madrasas, but it was limited to inheritance-related calculations. Students also read collections of historical, geographical, and theological stories. Some mullas studied works by Arabic, Persian-Tajik, and Turkic poets, while others with particular interests read medieval medical texts. However, subjects like physics, chemistry, and biology were not taught in madrasas.

For example, in 1912, six students in the first division of Namozgoh Madrasa in Samarkand studied *Hidaya*, *Sharh Wiqaya*, and *Hikayat*. Five students in the second division studied *Sharh Mulla* and *Sharh Wiqaya*, while 13 students in the third division studied *Mukhtasar*, *Awamil*, and *Mukhtasari Wiqaya*. At Naqib Madrasa in Kattakurgan, there were 46 students in total. Six students in the advanced level (*a'lo*) studied *Aqoid* and *Sharh Mulla*, ten students in the intermediate level (*awsat*) studied *Sharh Wiqaya*, *Sharh Muwaqqat*, *Mukhtasar*, and *Wafiya*, and 30 students in the elementary level (*adno*) studied *Qafiya* and *Mukhtasar*. In 1913, Khalifa Mir Yunus Madrasa in Khojand had six students. According to 1910 records, Sherdor Madrasa had 120 students, with each spending an average of 10–15 years studying.

Overall, the duration of madrasa education was considerably long. Although regulated by official decrees, it could extend up to 21 years in some cases. Most students showed little interest or motivation to study books from the *mushkilot* (philosophical) curriculum. According to a directive issued to head *mudarris* in September 1899, madrasa students, teachers, and staff were required to know the names of the Emperor and his family members.

This directive was part of the Russian Empire's efforts to increase the number of its supporters among madrasa graduates. One significant issue in madrasa education during this period was the introduction of the Russian language and the development of new Russo-Muslim curricula. According to a memorandum from the regional chief inspector of education, "Our proposal to establish schools for teaching Russian to madrasa students has been approved by the governor-general. These schools will be built and funded by the state treasury. Until these schools are constructed, you, as *mudarris*, must send students interested in learning Russian to Russo-native schools." Following this directive, each *mudarris* was required to officially report the number of students from their madrasas who were sent to Russo-native schools.

According to a report by the Turkestan regional chief inspector of education, Kerensky, dated September 27, 1899, the number of madrasa students willing to learn Russian and attend Russo-native schools was increasing. He noted that additional facilities would be required in October to accommodate these students. Students from Samarkand madrasas were also sent to Russo-native schools. For instance, *mudarris* Mulla Muhammad Iso Khoja from Sherdor Madrasa sent 18 students; Mulla Abdul Qayum Mahsum Rahmatullayev from Tillakori Madrasa sent five students; Mulla Torakhoja Momin Khojaev from Orifjonboy Madrasa sent four students; Mulla Abdullah Nishonov from Shaybani Khan Madrasa sent three students; Mulla Yormuhammad Khoja Muhammadiy from Mirzo Ulughbek Madrasa sent five students; and similar figures were recorded for other madrasas.

These details were compiled by Sherdor Madrasa's *mudarris*, Mulla Iso Khoja Shirin Khojaev, and submitted to the third regional inspector. According to the report, 52 madrasa students expressed their willingness to learn Russian and attend Russo-native schools. Additionally, the *mudarris* indicated that lessons in madrasas officially began on October 1



and lasted until May 1, and he guaranteed that more students would be sent to these schools as their numbers increased.

Based on the above points, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, lessons in Samarkand madrasas were not conducted in local languages (Uzbek and Tajik); instead, the primary textbooks were in Arabic. The lack of instruction in local languages, insufficient oversight of students, and the short academic year negatively impacted the quality of education. This is further evidenced by the fact that the primary textbooks had not been updated since the medieval period and that time management within the curriculum was not clearly developed.
- Being a madrasa student was considered prestigious, and because students received stipends from waqf (endowment funds), some continued their studies for extended periods, occasionally up to 21 years.
- Textbooks and other learning materials were handwritten, making them inherently expensive, and financially disadvantaged students found it difficult to purchase them. This, too, can be considered a factor that negatively impacted the educational process.
- The academic qualifications of madrasa teachers (mudarris) were inconsistent, with significant disparities in their expertise. Consequently, students often selected madrasas based on the knowledge level of the teachers. The significantly higher number of students in madrasas such as Sherdor, Tillakori, Mirzo Ulughbek, and Shaybani Khan illustrates this clearly.

In conclusion, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, madrasas in the Samarkand region served as the primary centers of learning. Scholars who graduated from these institutions made significant contributions to the subsequent development of science. However, it should be acknowledged that the focus of these madrasas was primarily on religious studies, while secular sciences were significantly neglected, which had a detrimental effect on the development of science and education. Additionally, the absence of pedagogical methods in teaching further reduced the quality and effectiveness of lessons and contributed to the prolonged duration of the educational process.

## Conclusion

Moreover, the lack of encouragement for scientific and technical discoveries in the region, along with the limited financial support allocated to madrasa students, hindered progress in the field. Analyzing the activities of madrasas reveals that these institutions were not designed to train specialists in specific fields. Instead, their curricula were centered on mastering complex religious sciences. Therefore, it is logical to interpret the madrasas of Samarkand during this period as intermediate and advanced religious educational institutions.

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