

## Traditional and Modern Education in Bukhara (1860s-1917): The Policy Juncture

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### Abstract

*This paper explores the nature of conflict that unfolded between the supporters of traditionalist and modernist education in Tsarist Central Asia. The paper explores the viewpoint of each camp and explores the causes of such approach. The paper finds that the conflict or divergence was driven by the desire to ensure the protection of political and economic interests each camp cherished. While the status quo offered traditionalists economic security and political power, the new order and industrialization that came to Central Asia in the wake of Tsarist conquests offered modernists a future in which their political power and economic prosperity was ensured. Both camps diverged in rationalizing education as means to sustaining their world view. However, they also converged in their instrumental approach to education. Arguments that each camp offered to support their vision of education are relevant to the debates between the modern and traditional education in the modern Muslim world, especially Pakistan.*

**Key Words:** Bukhara, Central Asian Education, Islamic education, Modern Education, Traditional Education, Tsarist Russia.

### Introduction

This paper reconstructs the general condition of *Bukharan* Education with a focus on its instrumental use for effecting social, political and economic change or resisting such change by the rival education systems. Traditionalists and Modernists in Bukhara came with their own political, social, cultural, intellectual and economic backgrounds: the active arena they chose for realization of their ideology was education. Struggle for and against change in education became the active area of class confrontation of the incumbent conservative elite and competing reformist proto elites. After the layout of research methodology for this paper, the raised questions are discussed in several steps.

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The first step explains education in general. This portion highlights the instrumental view of education. Only formal education is considered here. The informal means of education are overlooked in the present study. The second step is dedicated to a brief overview of the geographical, demographic, sociological, political and economic facts and figures that generally act as powerful external conditioners in the education process. The third Step focuses on the analysis of the constituent elements of the traditional education system in Bukhara. This portion contains overview of education philosophy, objectives, curricula/method/syllabi (for the collective denotation of curriculum, syllabus and methodology I will use the term *educational practice*) and the opposers and supporters of the conservative education. This step ends with a critical overview of the given statements, facts and figures of the traditional system of education.

The fourth step is the continuation of the discussion of the third step. Here modern education is discussed. The fifth step compares the traditional and the modern education systems in Bukhara. The focus of comparison is to highlight the interests of the supporters of the traditional and modern education systems and to pinpoint the areas where their interest conflicted. The sixth step concludes the discussion. Here major points of each section are presented in an organic finale.

## **Research Methodology**

Historical and analytical methods are used to highlight the competition between the modernist and traditionalist education in Bukhara during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This paper evaluates information from secondary sources for the validation of the argument that education is a tool of propaganda aimed at securing group interest. The sources of this paper are accounts and discussion on the nature of education of Bukhara. The paper also aims to compare these education systems focusing the fact, that group needs and interests translate into a distinctive education philosophy, education aims/objectives and education practice. Keeping in light this construct, the paper finds answers to the following questions:

1. What traditionalist interests were associated with their approach to education?
2. What modernist interests were associated with their approach to education?
3. What were the comparative points in traditionalist and modernist approach to education?
4. How education becomes a tool for realizing group interests?

## **Bukhara and Education as an Instrument of Change**

Education is an important tool of change in society. Bukaran saw a noticeable

change in the social, political and economic areas in the second half of the twentieth century (Plonoskaya & Malashenko 1994, p.38). The general backwardness of the Muslim world had sparked the desire for change everywhere. Polonoskaya and Malashenko (1994) contend that the Emirate of Bukhara was a centre of culture trade, and ideology in the Muslim World of Central Asia. But Western visitors like Vambrey found this holy city full of filth and ignorance. He found only 26 bookstores where printed books were rarity (Vambrey 1996, p.178). In Bukhara the reformists busied themselves in a realistic goal of initiating a chain reaction by starting school where major attraction was to teach to the student how to read and write. With this modest starter, they in short time succeed in making historical gains in political and social change.

*“Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.” (Chesterton 2005).*

In a phase of dynamic change the segregated society does not enjoy a uniform transfer of the social spirit from one generation to another. At such times the contending groups try to preserve and promote their interest codified in the form of education. Interpretation of education in such a context mean nothing else than propaganda (Propaganda 2005). The use of education for furthering the political and social ideology makes education a political tool. This practice has been used in past few centuries by virtually all agents with a social, political or economic agenda. A section of society that has become dissatisfied with the existing system, start thinking about changing it. They use their resources and skills to improvise means through which they could easily attain their goals. One portion of their effort is used to overcome the obstacles that come in the way of their goal. Essentially, they store up some of their resources and efforts for increasing their strength through the creation of a growing circle of like-minded people. The instrumentalist view of education is advocated by John Dewey and his followers (Instrumentalism 2005). Education, therefore, can become a convenient tool of political, social or economic struggle between competing groups. This struggle in a functioning state is commonly seen between a group monopolizing all benefits that we refer to as elite and the group that is struggling to get a share in these benefits that we call proto elite.

If we observe the situation in Bukhara we see that the southward expansion of Czarist Russia was threatening the existence of Bukhara. In the war of 1868 Bukhara received a heavy defeat at the hands of Russia. Russians did not change the political setup in Bukhara. Bukhara became a protectorate of Russia. This situation shattered the equilibrium in Bukhara. The presence of infidels in close proximity as the superiors was humiliating for the ego of some of the peoples in Bukhara among whom we also find some scholars and thinkers. At this stage there was a general backwardness in the Muslim world. Among Muslims we find figures and movements which intended such changes in their order which would enable them to compete with the superior West (Khan 2003). In Bukhara Russian

expansion created a sense of emergency among some sections of the society. These people advocated changes that were felt by the elite as a threat in one or another way. The advocates for change chose the field of education as an important and convenient area of promoting their interest. Their primary focus was to change the social and political order in Bukhara. They chose formal education as a tool to realize their goal. Everywhere children are born with a culture and they are ignorant of the social order. Education is used in planned manner to change the children in such a way that they would be ready to fulfill their planned role in future (Education, 2005). In Bukhara conservatives and modernist/revivalists pitched their tents against each other in the arena of education. They resisted each other bitterly. Their debate in the favor or against the traditional education system is discussed in the next few steps.

### **The Educational Context in Bukhara**

Education process is not a smooth process. It is dependent on the equilibrium of numerous factors. Among these factors those which possess the capacity to affect education on mass level are the social, political, economic, demographic and geographic conditions. These factors though not internal to education like the learning material, teachers and learners define the parameters in which the purpose, the process and the outcome of the education is directly affected. A short review of these factors will be helpful in understanding the nature of the differences of the competing education systems and the nature of their appeal to different segment of *Bukharan* population.

Geographical boundaries of Bukhara were not fixed and defined. It was surrounded by Khanate of *Kokand*, Khanate of *Khiva*, Afghanistan, Aral Sea and *Syr Darya* (Khan 2003, p.15). Ill-defined boundaries meant that writ of the state was limited to a small area in the center. In peripheries there would have been less opportunity of education. Khan (ibid.) contends that lack of census made it difficult to know the population size and their needs of different type. Various estimates made informally state the population around 2.5 million. At that time total population was not more than 7 million. The concentration of population made Bukhara important place of migration for the nomads and the inhabitants of other Khanates.

Political structure of Bukhara after defeat saw a shift to more authoritarian rule. Exaction of higher rate of taxes to pay war reparation economically weakened the economic condition. There was a very small amount of trade which was not sufficient to bolster the economy. This created disparity among people (Allworth, 1967, p.28). Poor and corrupt administration and the monopoly of small circle of people in political offices was making people discontented and was inviting the people with sympathy for the collective welfare to come forward. In this state of affair literacy was confined only to mullahs, royal families. The nomadic people remained largely illiterate (Siddiqui, 1988, p.220).

## **Salient Features of Traditionalist Education System**

There were two types of schools in the traditional education system of *Bukhara*: *maktab* and *madrassa*. The number of *maktabs* was 300 and *madrassas* 200 (Khan 2003, p.38). *Maktabs* were primary level institutions and *Madrassas* were secondary to university level. Siddiqui (1988) finds neglect of mass education among the feudal rulers of Bukhara. In 1920 there were 3000 mosques staffed with 40,000 mullahs.

Education philosophy of the traditional education system was based religious fanaticism. It was demanded from the Muslim to stick to every single point of Quran literally. *Taqlid* or blind following of the traditional practice was the point of excellence for them. Any innovation was sacrilegious for them. The purpose of the existence was the literal observance of Quran and the received traditions of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the four Caliphs. External observance of Islam therefore became the focus of education. No importance was attached to provision of skilled people in medicine, engineering and other professions. Islamic law was most practical side of their vision of education. *Emir Muafir al Mulk* posed himself as the guardian of Islam and he made it sure to exact literal enactment of Islam. He was the proclaimed enemy of any innovation. *Bukharans* considered themselves better than any other part of Muslim world (Vambrey 1996).

The curriculum consisted only of theological contents such as Arabic, recitation of Quran and law. The syllabus of tenth and eleventh century was taught without change. There was no evaluation of the effectiveness of the syllabus. Oral repetition and rote learning was the only available methods of instruction. Corporeal punishments were common practice to keep the students attentive to instruction. The effect of learning was this much that after years of learning in the school the student would soon forget almost all learning within a short time and would become as illiterate as he were before going to school. Little emphasis was laid on writing and reading in native language. Practice of composition was significantly absent from the curriculum. Arithmetic, algebra, general history and geography were absent in this curriculum. The ineffective curriculum was run without educational planning. No central authority was present to direct the activities of educational institutions for the promotion of national interest. Education was imparted as a traditional activity rather than a purposeful activity to achieve an end. The result of education was low literacy rate which was at best below 5% (Vambrey, 1996, p.34). Superstitions and lies were integral part of the curriculum and rigorous learning of twenty years would not enable them even to understand Arabic properly (Vambrey, 1996, p.42).

Main supporters of the traditional education system were the ruling class who had masked their interests behind religious observance. The conservative theologians or Ulema vehemently advocated the virtues of this education system. For this purpose they used state sanctioned propaganda of false traditions and ill-

founded *fatwas*. General ignorance made their rule very smooth, therefore, they did not wish the reform of

### **Salient Features of Modernist Education**

The challenge to the traditional education was posed by two pronged attacks. The proximity of industrially advance Russia with modern means of communication and literacy such as rail and printing press. Second challenge was from the indigenous factor called *jadid* who demanded for reformed schools. Here we will focus on the education system within the schools of *jadid* (New Methods). The number of such school was very small. The first was opened in 1901 and soon closed (Vambrey, 1996, p.95). Similarly a few more were opened but closed due to the opposition of the supporting Ulema of the traditional education system.

This education system was a reaction to the shortcoming of the traditional education. In this education system we find a solid education policy based on a logical philosophy. The philosophy of education at the back of the New Method Schools was to decrease wastage and focus on the purpose of collective and individual wellbeing. The function of education in their view was to free the learners from ignorance, superstitions and dependence.

The practice of education was to teach the skills and knowledge that was useful. In this education system besides *Quran* and *Hadith*, secular learning such as history, arithmetic and technical skill were included. Literacy was focused and writing was integrated in curriculum. This enabled the students in short time to read and write in their mother tongue. Russian language was also included in syllabus to create better employment opportunities for the students. The method of teaching was human and scientific. The model these schools followed were western institutions of contemporary period. Most of the promoters of this education had been in contact with the Western education institutions. They had the knowledge of the virtues of the new methods. Their support of the modern education system and their efforts to establish schools on this model faced huge criticism and antagonism. But their limited efforts succeeded in their political and social aim of increasing awareness and desire for change.

Most of the supporters of this system of education were from the lower middle class, low order merchants and working people (Vambrey, 1996, p.97). They had been clutched by ignorance and they were the direct victim of the corruption of the elite. Their reason for support of the new education system was to put an end to the exploitation of the ruling class. Leading figures of this system also included some of the rich merchants and enlightened people in the ruling class such as *Makhdoom Donish*. Russian authorities initially supported this system of education but later on seeing the evolution of the program from purely academic to a political front they opposed the promoters of this system (Allworth 1967, 195).

## **Modernist and Traditionalist Education: Divergence and Convergence**

The conservative education of the traditionalists apparently dominated because of the back up from the Emir and prevalent popular support for it in the name of Islam. If we analyze the objective of the traditional education which was to resist any change we see the traditional education system failing significantly. The growing popularity and success of the *Jadids* who were the supporters of the modern education system despite heavy censor of the Emir on them was a proof of the inability of the traditional system to oppose change in the society and to keep the people transfixed in the medieval time. Though Russian factor also played a part in the political and social change in Bukhara, the role of the formal and informal influence of the Modern education and its supporters cannot be ignored altogether.

Though the first Russian school established in 1870 but very few took interest in it. It offered secular and scientific subjects. The ruling class took no step to remedy the deplorable state of education (Siddiqui 1988, p.220). The modern Education system was intended for bringing social and political change. Despite the opposition of the ruling elite this education system steadily gained popularity. Even after the ban by Emir, *Bukharan* continued to study in the schools that were in the Russian territory. This education system produced some of the leaders of the political movement that extracted the cherished political reforms from the Emir and then established the Republic of Bukhara. These achievements show the relative success of the Modern Education system in Bukhara.

As a system of education the traditional education system was ill organized and unplanned process based on more than half a millennia old system of learning which had exhausted its utility and badly needed overhauling. The vehement supporters of the new method had themselves suffered in the Traditional Education system of Bukhara. Their urge for change was based on personal and firsthand experience. They tried to address through their reformed system the problems they saw in the old system. Modern Education system was, therefore, technically better organized, more planned and was more objective (educational and sociopolitical) oriented. The cause of its popularity among the merchants and socio-politically marginalized segment of population was due to the potential of their empowerment they saw in it.

## **Conclusion**

This paper overviewed the condition of education in Bukhara as a case of the conflict between traditionalists and modernists. *Bukharan* education was predominantly in the grip of the fanatics who favored a system of education which in this work is referred as traditional. This system of education in the geographically isolated, politically anarchic and socially segregated Emirate of

Bukhara was a means of maintaining status quo. The suffering of the people led to the introduction of the idea of the new method school based on modern education system. Modern education offered a ray of hope (of emancipation) to the marginalized people who yearned for social and political change. Modern education did not establish numerous schools but those few that functioned briefly succeeded in initiating a far reaching movement for social and political change. The major cause of the failure of the traditional education in achieving the objective of resisting change in Bukhara was due to their lack of appreciation for education (as a tool of change).



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