

The Role of Madrasa Education in Inter-Cultural and Cross-Cultural Exchange

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Abstract

Madrasa is the living form of an educational system which thrived in the past. It remained unaware of the swiftness of progress and development which came about in other walks of life and the education that was being imparted through it was also kept away from any change and innovation. As a result, the *madrasa*, to some extent, fell prey to marginalization, fundamentalism, and a sense of deprivation and its education could not maintain its cherished traditions. The educational system of the *madrasa* can be analysed in view of a number of aspects. Some of these aspects might be questionable, but a number of them are worthwhile. One of these aspects is the atmosphere of mutual cooperation that a *madrasa* can provide. Teachers and students belonging to different cultures and traditions come together in a *madrasa* and develop an intercultural communication pattern. They form cultural groups that work together to rectify their deprivation and remove misunderstanding between them. Their education in a *madrasa* allows them to take part in joint activities, improve their knowledge, and get an access to some service. In this way, the *madrasa* education initiates a social mobilization which encourages social groups that are knit together with the fabric of culture to take part in the religious, political, and revolutionary movements of the country.

Keywords: *Madrasa, Al-Şuffah, Al-Karaouine, Niżāmiyyah, mobilization.*

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Introduction

Over the last few decades madrasas have remained the focus of national and Western media. They have been linked up with the upsurge of global wave of terrorism. The education imparted through these religious institutions has been thought by Western think tanks to be promoting fundamentalism and extremism. Their narrative became intensified after 9/11 attacks. A counter-narrative is needed to highlight the positive role of madrasa education in bridging the gaps between different cultures. Citing examples of classical Muslim *madāris* of the past, the role of madrasa education in bringing about intercultural and cross-cultural exchange has been highlighted.

According to Lane (1968), the word *madrasa* has been derived from the root words *dāl*, *rā*, and *sīn*. *Daras al-Kitāba* means he read the book as though he opposed it until it became easy for him to remember it; or he read it repeatedly (or studied it) in order to remember it; or he made it easy to remember by much reading; or he read and learned it. The infinite nouns are *al-dars*, *al-dirāsah*, *al-darāsah*, and *al-dirās*. The word *madrasa* means “a place of reading or studying where persons read or study (a college, a collegiate mosque, an academy). It is also called *midras* and *midrās*. The plural of *madrasa* is *madāris* and that of *midrās* is *madārīs*.

Seeking education has been the cornerstone of all Islamic teachings. The first revealed Qur’ānic verse alluded to it: “Recite in the name of your Lord who created.” (Qur’an 96:1). The Holy Messenger extolled the virtue of those who strive to seek knowledge: “Whoever follows a path in the pursuit of knowledge, Allāh will make easy for him a path to Paradise. The angels lower their wings in approval of the seeker of knowledge, and everyone in the heavens and on earth prays for forgiveness for the seeker of knowledge, even the fish in the sea. The superiority of the scholar over the worshipper is like the superiority of the moon above all other heavenly bodies. The scholars are the heirs of the Prophets, for they did not leave behind a dinār or dirham, rather they left behind knowledge, so whoever takes it has taken a great share.” (Al-Tirmidhī, Ḥadīth: 2682)

Al-Ṣuffah: A Cross-Cultural Hub

The Apostle of Allāh established the first institution of Islamic education in his mosque and devoted his care and attention to it. *Al-Ṣuffah* was the first *madrasa* being established in Madīnah which had brought together different cultural traditions at one place. The culture of Abyssinia, Persia and Byzantine had mingled up with that of Madīnah, Al-Thaqīf, Al-Kinda and Al-Ghifār. People possessing varied cultural tendencies had grouped together pursuing one system of education guided by one great teacher. After completion of their training, they went forward to play a significant role in the formation and organisation of the society.

A *madrasa* with a diverse cultural dimension can play an important role in the formation of a politically organised unit. The first *madrasa*, *al-Şuffah*, gives a classical example in this regard. Although the members of this *madrasa* used to learn Islamic teachings here and were living a life of spiritual pursuit but they also served as a guarding unit which was always available to protect the newly built mosque and guard their leader who lived in a house next to their mosque. They were fully devoted to him and were ready to obey his order at any cost----devotion and obedience being the essential prerequisites of a politically stable state.

Salmān al-Fārsī: A Collector of Different Cultural Traditions

A classic example of cross-cultural exchange due to the company of students in a *madrasa* is seen in Salmān al-Fārsī who was a seeker of truth, a collector of different cultural traditions and was inclined to the research of religions. Hailed from a Persian town Işfahān, he was devoted to the Zoroastrian religion in his early years, and gained the status of the steward of the fire. From here, he continued his religious quest and went to Syria to embrace Christianity. He stayed in Syria with different priests and was directed by the last of them to the place of the Prophet of Arab. During this journey, he was sold to a Jew who eventually brought him to Madīnah along with him. He was, then, released from slavery by the Prophet (peace be upon him), who gave his master a specified amount, and planted date palms for his liberation (IbnSa‘d, 1990). Such was the diversity of cultures which he witnessed and brought them in Ḥijāz along with him. He imbibed in him the traditions of Persia and Syria and exchanged them with people of Ḥijāz.

One particular incident can be cited to indicate his effect on the pattern of the warfare of Madīnah. At the Battle of Khandaq, a ditch was dugged around Madīnah to save it from the Quraysh’s attack on his advice (IbnSa‘d, 1990). This was a stratagem employed by the Persians in cases of fear of affliction at the hands of a large crusading army. He taught this war technique to the Arabs who were unaware of it before. The *madrasa* of Madīnah allowed this Persian to prosper in the company of the Arabs. He learned from them and developed into a prominent figure as much as that he was a part of the committee which was deciding on matters of defense. In return, he also advised a stratagem which caused them to defend their homeland against the attack of the enemy.

Salmān al-Fārsī also impacted the Arabian society with his language. Imām al-Nawawī (n.d.) states about him that he had translated some portion of the Holy Qur’ān into Persian language. Thus, his was the inaugural rendering of the Qur’ān into a foreign language. Exchange of language and sharing of knowledge of different Divine Books were also a part of the intercultural exchange that was evident in the *madrasa* of Maḍīnah. Salmān, who stayed with Arabs learned Arabic and excelled in the knowledge of Qur’ān, could also read Hebrew literature and had knowledge of the Torah as well. Abū Dā’ūd reports this in the following tradition:

“Salmān narrated: I read in the Torah that the blessing of food consists in ablution before it. So, I mentioned it to the Prophet (peace be upon him). He said: The blessing of food consists in ablution before it and ablution after it” (Abū Dā’ūd, Ḥadīth: 3761).

He exchanged manners and etiquettes of living with his brother in Islam, Abū Dardā’. He divided his time into a pattern so that he could eat, sleep and pray properly. He instructed him: "Your Lord has a right on you, your soul has a right on you, and your family has a right on you; so you should give the rights of all those who have a right on you." This instruction was later approved by the Holy Messenger as being a truth (Al-Bukhāri, Ḥadīth: 1968).

Sālim Mawlā Abī Hudhyfah: A Collector of Persian and Arab Traditions

Hailed from Iṣṭakhr in Persia was a slave who arrived at Makkah and embraced Islam. This Persian slave was freed by a woman from Anṣār Thubaytah bint Yu’ār and adopted as a son by a noble of Quraysh Abū Hudhayfah b. ‘Utabah. He was called Sālim Mawlā Abī Hudhyfah. He took part in all major battles in the lifetime of the Holy Messenger till he died while fighting against Musaylmahal-Kadhhab (Ibn Sa’d, 1990). Sālim was a Persian who was adopted as a son by an Arabian noble. A Persian by birth who grew up in an Arabian house had gathered in his self two cultural traditions. The same was shared by him later in his *madrasa* al-*Ṣuffah*. He rose to a high level of education that the Messenger said to his Companions to learn Qur’ān from him (Al-Nasā’ī, Ḥadīth: 174).

Sālim was also a classical example of how Islam has denied unjust class divisions and false social distinctions. Difference in ethnic and social background had no value in their eyes. They had become one being tied together with the string of brotherhood and fraternity which Islam proclaimed as being the hallmark of its message. This is obvious from the fact that he used to lead in the prayer a party of the Emigrants which included ‘Umar b. Al-Khattāb before the arrival of the Messenger of Allah (Ibn Sa’d, 1990).

Şuhayb b. Sinān al-Rūmī: A Bearer of Arab and Roman Cultures

Another peculiar example of how education at a *madrasa* permits cross-cultural communication is seen in Şuhayb b. Sinān al-Rūmī, another student of *al-Şuffah*. His father Sinān b. Mālik was the governor of Uballah, a city that lay on the banks of River Euphrates. He was called al-Rūmī although he was an Arab. He had told himself while replying to the question of ‘Umar that he was a person who belonged to Al-Namir b. Qāsiṭ from the people of Al-Mawṣil but was captured by the Romans when he was a child. Later, returned to his people and nation and identified his lineage (IbnSa‘d, 1990).

Evidently, he was a bearer of two cultural traditions. Despite being an Arab, he was captured and enslaved by Byzantines. He spent twenty years in the land of Byzantine where he used to speak Greek and forgot Arabic. IbnSa‘d (1990) mentions that Şuhayb grew up in Rome and became ‘*alkan*’. IbnManzūr explains that ‘*alkan*’ is the person who cannot speak Arabic properly due to the influence of a foreign language on his speech (Ibn Manzūr, 1993).

This is significant as it shows the influence of a culture on another. An Arab child was brought up by non-Arabs who forgot his mother tongue and started speaking a foreign language. Later, he managed to escape from Rome and came to Makkah where he became a representative of ‘Abd Allāh b. Judān. Here, he learned his own language again. After migration, his education at the *madrasa* of *al-Şuffah* further allowed him to learn Arabic from his Arabic fellows so much so that he has narrated *aḥādīth*.

After ‘Umar’s martyrdom, when there was no caliph and discussion was going on about this matter, Şuhayb used to lead the *Şalāt* and, in a way, he was leading the Muslim community during that period (IbnSa‘d, 1990). This shows that people from varied cultural backgrounds were well integrated in the Muslim community.

Bilāl b. Rabāḥ: A Bearer of the Traditions of Abyssinia

Bilāl b. Rabāḥ was another student of *al-Şuffah*. Rabāḥ, his father, was an Arab slave while Ḥamāmah, his mother, was a former princess of Abyssinia. Unfortunately, she was captured after the event of the Year of Elephant and put into slavery. Born in Makkah, he was a slave of Ummayah b. Khalaf. After embracing Islam, he accompanied the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) on all of his military expeditions. He became the first caller to *Şalah* and treasurer of Islam. He

went to Syria after the Prophet's death and left calling the *ādhan* (IbnSa'd, 1990). He was a bearer of the traditions of Abyssinia which transmitted to him via his mother and of the Arab which came from his father. Such cultural variations were kept with him in Madīnah and were later taken to Syria.

Even when he was in Syria his relation with the culture never failed. He always kept in his mind his brother in Islam Abū Ruwayḥa b. 'Abd Allāh al-Khath'amī and designated his name as the recipient of his pension while he was engaged in the Syrian campaign during the Caliphate of 'Umar saying that the Messenger (peace be upon him) had connected them in brotherhood. He was the one to call for prayer while standing at the roof of the House of Allāh (IbnSa'd, 1990). This example shows how students of the *madrasa* of Madīnah became ideals to rise above racism and go beyond the differences of cultures to make their prominence in the society.

Cross-cultural relations are also evident through the exchange of gifts. Al-Najāshī the Abyssinian gifted three spears to the Holy Messenger (blessing be on him). He gave one of them to 'Ali, another to 'Umar and kept one with him. The spear which the Prophet chose for him was kept in the care of Bilāl (IbnSa'd, 1990). Perhaps this was done because he was an Abyssinian himself and the gift was also sent by an Abyssinian chief. It means that the Prophet (peace be upon him) was keeping in mind the cultural affiliation of his students and had regard for such affiliation.

There is another way by which *madrasa* has played its role in bringing different cultures together. That is by the way of marriage of a student of *madrasa* having a certain cultural background with a woman belonging to a different culture. This is seen in case of Bilāl b. Rabāḥ. He was an Abyssinian but his marriage was arranged by the Prophet (blessings be upon him) to a woman of BanīAbī al-Bukayr who were reluctant in marrying their girl with a person of Abyssinian lineage (IbnSa'd, 1990).

Abū Hurayrah: A Transmitter of the Knowledge of *Aḥadīth*

The students of *Ṣuffah* used to stay in the Mosque of the Prophet and gained a vast share of knowledge from him. They became masters of knowledge and contributed to the spread of the science of Qur'ān, *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. Hailed from Yemen, Abū Hurayrah al-Dawsī's stay at this *madrasa* allowed him the opportunity to listen to the Allah's Messenger (blessings be upon him), so he is the narrator of the maximum number of *aḥadīth*. IbnḤajar (n.d.) cites Imām Bukhārī who states that eight hundred scholars narrated *aḥadīth* from Abū Hurayrah. Hence, this student of the *madrasa* of Madīnah impacted a large portion of the society. His hundreds of students took with them a magnificent tradition of knowledge wherever they went.

‘AbdAllāh b. Ma‘ṣūd: An Expert in Fiqh

‘AbdAllāh b. Ma‘ṣūd, a close servant of the Holy Messenger, who used to carry his shoes, belonged to Banū Hudhayl, an Adnanite tribe of Ḥijāz, which was an ally of BanūZuhra of Quraysh. When he embraced Islam, only five Muslims were already included in the fraternity. From the Messenger, he narrated a number of *aḥādīth*. Umar used to say that he is a protected place filled with *fiqh* (IbnSa‘d, 1990). Due to his expertise in *fiqh*, he was deputed by the second Caliph ‘Umar as an instructor, a judge and a treasurer of Kūfa alongwith ‘Ammār b. Yāsir who was deputed as an *amīr* over them. (Al-Baghwī, 2000). He wrote to the Kufans:

“I have sent to you ‘Ammār b. Yāsiras an *amīr* and ‘AbdAllāh b. Ma‘ṣūdas a teacher and vizier. They are honourable comrades of Allāh’s Messenger who took part in the combat at Badr, so obey them and listen to their command. I have given you preference over myself by sending Ibn Mas‘ūd to you”(Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, 1992).

Owing to the presence of this student of the *madrassa* of Madīnah the highly developed and cultured territory of Kūfa soon developed into an important centre of learning. In Kūfa, the presence of Ibn Mas‘ūd and ‘Ammār b. Yāsir another student of *Ṣuffah*, gives a classical example of cross-cultural exchange that occurred in the early Islam. Here, the Arab culture had blended with the Persian allowing the knowledge and etiquettes of the Arabs to be introduced to the Kufan population.

‘Ammār b. Yāsir: A Political Activist

The students of the *Ṣuffah* also took part in the political movements and military expeditions of their time and mobilised the society to a great extent. The role of ‘Ammārb. Yāsir can be cited to affirm this. His father Yāsir belonged to Qaḥṭān from Yemen. He migrated to Makkah and married Sumayyah, a slave-woman of a man from Banū Makhzūm. When ‘Ammār was born to them, his mother was freed by her master. That’s why he is considered a freed slave of Banū Makhzūm. He took part in the Battle of Badr and other expeditions. While digging at the time of Battle of Trench, he was praised by the Prophet who prophesied that ‘Ammār would be killed by a group of rebels (Ibn Sa‘d, 1990).

He fought bravely in the battle against Musaylmah at Yamāma during Abū Bakr's reign and one of his ears was cut in this battle. The second Caliph 'Umar deputed him as the governor of Kūfa and praised him. Before the Battle of Camel, 'Alī deputed him to Kūfa in order to win over the Kufans for the upcoming combat. In the battle, he participated from 'Alī's side till the battle ended in their favour. In the Battle of Ṣiffīn, 'Ammār was in charge of the Kufan infantry, and eventually, he was killed by the forces of Mu'āwiya (IbnHajar, *n.d.*). The expeditions in which 'Ammār took part give enough evidence that the education which he received at *al-Ṣuffah* was also teaching him political wisdom and military valiance. Madrasa education may include political science as a subject to make students able to play their role in the politics of the country and they can effectively mobilise the society for this purpose.

Abū 'Ubaydah b. al-Jarrāḥ: A Military Commander

Military commander like Abū 'Ubaydah b. al-Jarrāḥ was also a student of this *madrasa*. He always remained in the leading unit of Muslim's army during the Apostle's lifetime and after him in the rule of the pious caliphs. He guarded the Prophet from the attacks of Qurayshite soldiers in Uhud's battlefield and lost two of his teeth while extracting pieces of armour that had penetrated into the Prophet's cheeks. He was sent with the delegation of the Christians of Najrān to guide them in the matters of religion (IbnSa'd, 1990). The Holy Messenger (Allah's blessings be upon him) said about him: "In every nation there exists a man worthy of all trust and the trustworthy of this nation is Abū 'Ubaydah b. al-Jarrāḥ." (Al-Bukhārī, Ḥadīth: 3744).

He was appointed as the commander-in-chief in Syria by 'Umar. He would have been 'Umar's choice for the caliphate if he had not died earlier than him (IbnSa'd, 1990). His expeditions contributed a lot to expand cross-cultural relations. His efforts for the cause of Islam provides strength to the argument that the scope of the education imparted at a *madrasa* should expand so that the students today can join the mainstream politics and get themselves enrolled in the army for military services.

Al-Ṣuffah also gives an idea of how the financial need of a *madrasa* can be met with. The Apostle of Allāh used to feed them on alms brought to him. Once his daughter asked a maid for her service but he refused saying that he had to feed the poor of *al-Ṣuffah*. The *Ṣuffah* Companions were poor people and the Prophet said, whoever has food for two persons should take a third one from them (*Ṣuffah* companions). And whosoever has food for four persons he should take fifth or sixth from them." (Al-Bukhārī, Ḥadīth: 602) Here, the students who had come from different regions were getting a chance to sit with the people of Ḥijāz, discuss their issues with them and share with them the reports of their culture and traditions.

The importance of intercultural and cross-cultural mobilization due to *madrasa* can be ascertained by the fact that any criticism on the cultural diversity found among the students of *madrasa* was highly condemned by the Prophet of Allāh. “Once during the time of the Prophet, a hypocrite named Qays b. Mutatiah had come upon a study circle in which were Salmān al-Fārsī, Ṣuḥayb al-Rūmī and Bilāl al-Ḥabashī, and remarked: The Aws and the Khazraj have stood up in defence of this man (Muḥammad). And what are these people doing with him? Mu‘ādh was furious and informed the Prophet of what Qays had said. He was very angry at this. He entered the mosque and the Call to Prayer was given, for this was the method of summoning the Muslims for an important announcement. Then he stood up, praised and glorified God and said: Your Lord is one. Your ancestor is one. Your religion is one. Take heed. Arabism is not conferred on you through your mother or father. It is through the tongue (i.e. the language of Arabic), so whoever speaks Arabic, he is an Arab” (Milānī, 2013).

Al-Qarawīyīn: A Medieval Madrasa

The establishment of *al-Ṣuffah* laid the foundation on which the *madrasa* of the medieval period came into being. One of the oldest of them, al-Qarawīyīn, also known by its westernized name, Al Karaouine, gives an example of a typical educational institution of the Muslim World. Al-Qarawīyīn Mosque was founded with an associated *madrasa* in 245/859 by Fāṭima al-Fihri in the city of Fes, Morocco (Zanāṭī, 2007). Known by the name Umm al-Banīn, Fāṭima was a Tunisian whose family migrated with her community from Qarawīn to Fes in the early 9th century. She had inherited a large amount from her father and spent it on the construction of this mosque (Al-Zarkaī, 2002). The mosque was named after her native land and she wanted to provide her community with an education centre. This shows that the cultural values of her land were entrenched in her and she had introduced them to the inhabitants of Fes. She is a typical example to cite that along with men Muslim women also took part in promulgating *madrasa* education and mobilised communities to allow cross-cultural exchange.

From the time of its commencement, the al-Qarawīyīn soon developed into a place of prestige and high standing. The *madrasa* initially taught Qur’ān and *fiqh*, however, it gradually extended its syllabus to other subjects including the natural sciences. Scholars and students from all over the Muslim world were attracted to the al-Qarawīyīn owing to the calibre of teaching imparted and diversity of subjects offered. It drew the Muslims and Europeans close and allowed a bilateral cultural exchange and transfer of knowledge.

Sources list a number of notable scholars who taught at al-Qarawīyīn, such as Ibn al-‘Arabī (1165-1240), Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1378), Nūr al-Dīn Al-Biṭrūjī (d. ca.1204), Ibn Harazim (d. ca. 559/1163), and al-Wazzān (d. ca.1556). Al-Idrisī (d.1166 CE) is said to have settled in Fes for considerable time suggesting that he might have worked or studied at *al-Qarawīyīn*. Among the great scholars who studied here included AbūAbullah al-Satī, Abū al-‘Abbas al-Zwawī, Ibn Rushayd al-Sabī (d.721/1321), Muḥammad b.al-Ḥājj al-‘Abdari al-Fasī (d.737/1336) and Abū Madhhab al-Fasī.

Due to this *madrasa*, academic relations also established between the Islamic world and Europe during the medieval era. The Jewish philosopher IbnMaymūn, also known as Maimonides, (1135-1204) had been a student here and was taught by ‘Abd al-‘Arab b.Muwashah. The Christian Gerbert of Aurillac, who became Pope Sylvester II also studied here. The Belgian Nichola Louvain, Flemish Nicolas Cleynaerts, and the DeutchJacob Golius also studied Arabic here (“Al-Qarawiyyin Mosque,”n.d.).

Al-Azhar: A Classical Madrasa

Another example of a classical *madrasa* is *Al-Azhar* which began as a mosque established in 959 in Cairo, Egypt, by the Fatimid commander Jawhr al-Siqillī for his master al-Mu‘izz. The Fatimids belonged to the Isma‘īlī Shiite sect and came from al-Maghreb (present day Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) to conquer Egypt. At that time intercultural exchange occurred between the conqueror and the conquered. The Sunni and Shia versions of Islam also mixed up here. Al-Mu‘izz appointed at this *madrasa* ‘Alī b.Naumān to teach Isma‘īlī jurisprudence while the population here was mostly Sunni. (“History of Al-Azhar,”n.d.)

The progress of this institution waxed and waned since its foundation. The Fatimids were its founders. Then it fell into eclipse under the Ayyubids in the second half of the 12th century. Under the Ayyubids the teaching was delivered according to the Sunni beliefs. Later, it was revived under the Mamluks and then thrived under the Ottoman rule (“Al-Azhar University,” n.d.). It has been the center of interest for the ruling dynasties although these belonged to different cultures. A number of notables had been produced by this institution which had attained the role of a university but was originally a *madrasa* associated with a mosque.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, a new office emerged in *Al-Azhar*- the office of *Shaykh al-Azhar*. Most of the early *Shaykhs* belonged to Maliki school of thought who used to come from the Upper Egypt to Cairo. However, in 1770s most of them followed the Shāfi‘ī’s jurisprudence (Hathaway & Barbir, 2013). This shows the influence of mobilization on the overall thinking of the ‘*ulamā*’ of a particular region. The development of *Al-Azhar* gives a lesson that if a *madrasa* is maintained nicely, its education is upgraded and brought in coherence with the modern research, both in the religious and secular circles; it can achieve higher status as an institution and produce notable figures of the time.

Nizāmiyyah: A Phenomenal Medieval Madrasa

One of the phenomenal institutions of the Medieval Islam was the *madrasa Nizāmiyyah* of Baghdād. It was founded by the great Seljuq vizier, Nizām al-Mulk, in 457/1065. Later, he created a system of state madrasas, called the *Nizāmiyyahs*, in various ‘Abbāsīd cities at the end of the 11th century (Fischer, 2003). Under the patronage of the state, proper facilities were provided to both, the students and the teachers, resulting in the success in the promulgation of religious education. Many notables were associated with this *madrasa*. A great Muslim thinker, Imām al-Ghazālī (450-505/1059-1111) was invited from Tūs to Baghdād to teach here. He taught there from 1091 to 1095 when he left teaching for his mystic journey (Beverley, 2010). Imām al-Ḥaramayn, al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1084) taught at the *madrasa Nizāmiyyah* of Nishāpūr and among his students were al-Ghazālī and ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī (Ozervarli, 2006). Shaykh Sa‘dī also studied at the *madrasa Nizāmiyyah* of Baghdād (Mutahhari, 2011).

In addition to be a system of higher learning in Islamic sciences, the chain of *madrasas* also served to unite the Sunni population and prevented the state from the threat of Shiaism. These *madrasas* also served to produce the learned men, the ‘*ulamā*’, jurists, and teachers who would spread to different parts of the country to share culture and traditions and teach people according to the instructions of the Shāfi‘ī school.

Ottoman medreses: A Madrasa System of Turks

The Ottomans inherited the *madrasa* system of the Seljuk Turks called “*Ottoman medreses*.” In Iznik, the first Ottoman *madrasa* was built in 1331 by the second Ottoman monarch Gazi Orhan Beg. Famous religious scholars like Dā’ūd al-Kaysarī, Tāj al-Dīn al-Kurdī and ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Aswad used to teach here (Irzik & Güzeldere, 2005). When an Ottoman sultan established a new *medrese*, he would invite scholars from the Islamic world. While scholars travelled from Persia to the Ottomans, the flow of knowledge and exchange of culture also occurred vice versa. Many Ottomans also travelled to Egypt, Persia and Turkestan. This mobilisation of the students and teachers of the *madrasas* of the medieval period became one of the major causes for interconnecting people.

Conclusion

Madrasa education has played a significant role in the intercultural and cross-cultural social mobilisation. One of the classical examples of this cultural exchange can be seen in the *madrasa* of Madīna, *al-Şuffah*. It has set the ideals which should be followed by later institutions for religious education. The education in that *madrasa* was imparted to a group of highly dedicated students who lived very close to a religious teacher. They watched him day and night, listened to his words, practiced his instructions and imbibed the true spirit of his message. Later, they preached the religion and trained people in the skills they learned at their *madrasa*. The paper signifies that the role of a *madrasa* was not limited to only a few objectives during the Prophet’s lifetime. The achievements of the Companions who studied at *al-Şuffah* testify the diversity of skills they learned under the guidance of their teacher. They impacted almost every section of the society. They migrated to far off areas, exchanged knowledge and traditions, and mobilised the society to a great extent.

As long as the *madrasa* system was following the ideals of *al-Şuffah* it progressed. Some classical educational institutions like *al-Qarawīyīn*, *al-Azhar* and *Nizāmiyyah* made their appearance. Many great scholars were born who carried with them the glory of knowledge and wisdom. But when those traditions were lost, the standard of education dropped significantly. When the religious sector faced an encounter with the secular, it struggled to compete with the latter. And the balance between traditionalism and modernism could not be maintained.

Now, the need of the hour is to go back to the ideals of *al-Şuffah*. *Madrasas* of the present day should perform the kind of social mobilisation which was evident in the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessing be upon him) for the purpose of preaching. Students of different cultural and social backgrounds should join to conduct nationwide preaching-campaigns, lead effective political movements, and exchange cultures among different communities and races.

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