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EDUCATION XXVII. IN AFGHANISTAN

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Traditional education in the regions lying within the present boundaries of Afghanistan followed the general pattern prevalent in pre-Islamic and Islamic Western Asia (see i-v, above). By the end of the 19th century, however, mosque schools (*maktab*s) and *madrasa*s had lost their vitality, rigor, and scope. As modern Afghanistan emerged, internecine struggles among the ruling Abdālī (q.v.; see also DORRĀNĪ; AFGHANISTAN x) and subsequently among the Moḥammadzai clan ensured that no trace of regular and systematic education remained in the country (Ẓahīr and ʿElmī, p. 23). Children continued to learn the rudiments of Islamic religion and some reading and writing in mosques and private homes. Clerics taught in the former, but in private houses girls and small boys were often taught by female teachers (*bībībātūn* < *bībīḵātūn*; Shorish, 1986b, p. 318; cf. Mullen, p. 121). The primarily religious education provided in these schools was only a pale reflection of the extensive Islamic learning of previous centuries, however.

Formal government schooling began in the time of Šēr (Šīr) ʿAlī Khan (1285-96/1868-79; Ẓahīr and ʿElmī, p. 23; Rahimi, p. 1; Mullen, p. 120; Cowen and McLean, p. 18) with the opening of the first primary school, Maktab-e

ḥarbīya in the cantonment of Šērpūr near Kabul, and the Molkī wa Ḵᵛānīn School, mainly for members of the royal family, in Bālāḥeṣār, the citadel of Kabul (Ẓahīr and ʿElmī, pp. 24-25). In these two schools traditional mosque education was combined with some curricular and structural aspects of Western education, including chemistry, mathematics, geography, and cartography. Both Afghan and foreign teachers worked under a government director of education; other government officials included a purchasing officer, a director of central supplies and payroll, and an inspector of schools.

Under Ḥabīb-Allāh Khan (1319-37/1901-19) the nationalist and modernist Maḥmūd Ṭarzī was the leading champion of government schools (Ṭarzī, pp. 459-75; Cowen and McLean, p. 18). Eleven traditional primary schools for the memorization of the Qurʾān (*dār al-ḥoffāẓ*) were opened by the government in Kabul, with 140 students and 14 teachers. Fascination with Western technology also led to adoption of aspects of Western education. The Ḥarbīya School seems to have been destroyed during the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-80; see ANGLO-AFGHAN WARS ii). A new Maktab-e ḥabībīya opened in central Kabul in 1321/1903, with elementary, middle, and secondary sections. In the four elementary grades children studied religion, Darī, mathematics, geography, and penmanship. The curriculum for the middle three years included religion, history, geography, language (Darī, Pashto, and English, Urdu, or Turkish), drawing, hygiene, and systems of numerical notation (*roqūm o sīāq*). In the secondary grades the curriculum consisted of religion, Darī, history, geography, algebra, trigonometry, geometry, physics, herbal medicine, chemistry, and English (Ḡobār, p. 702). Branches of the elementary school, including one specifically for Hindus, were established in six other districts of Kabul. In 1338/1919 Ḥabīb-Allāh Khan established a special class for aristocrats in the Ḥabībīya School. This school had a great impact on generations of Kabul intellectuals (Ḡobār, pp. 700-02). Eventually enrollment reached 1,000 students with 55 teachers; the school had a laboratory, a map and art room, a clinic, and a library.

In 1327/1909 another Ḥarbīya School was founded. In the same year fifty-seven students were sent to Bombay to learn automobile mechanics, apparently the first Afghans to study abroad (Ḡobār, p. 703). The Anjoman-e maʿāref-e Afḡānestān (Educational Council of Afghanistan), founded by Ḥabīb-Allāh's son ʿEnāyat-Allāh Khan in 1331/1913, comprised four Afghans, three Turks, and four Indians (Ẓahīr and ʿElmī, p. 30; Ḡobār, p. 702). Secondary-school teachers were mainly expatriates from India and Turkey; later some

Europeans also taught in Afghanistan. The first normal school, Dār al-moʿallemīn, was established in Kabul in 1330/1912 to train teachers for elementary schools (Ministry of Education, p. 6). The Department of Education was founded in 1331/1913, with a view to broadening the curriculum of mosque schools, to helping train elementary-school teachers, and to publishing standard textbooks (Cowen and McLean, p. 18).

The third of the Anglo-Afghan wars ended with Afghan independence from Great Britain in 1337/1919. Amān-Allāh Khan (1337-47/1919-29; see AMĀN-ALLĀH), like his son-in-law Ṭarzī, was committed to the social development of Afghanistan, including education for women. He established Maktab-e ʿeṣmat (later Malalai), the first primary school for girls, in 1339/1921 (Ministry of Education, p. 7). The Anjoman-e ḥemāyat-e neswān (Women's Welfare Society) was founded in 1928, and a first group of women was sent to study nursing in Turkey (Ḡobār, p. 799). Article 68 of the first Afghan constitution (1922; see CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN) provided for compulsory elementary education for both boys and girls (Ḡobār, pp. 789-94; Ṭarzī, pp. 494-512).

In addition to the Ḥabībīya School, during Amān-Allāh Khan's reign three other secondary schools for boys were established in Kabul: Amānīya (later Esteqlāl, on the French model) in 1922, Amānī (later Nejāt, on the German model) in 1923, and Ḡāzī (instruction in English) in 1927 (Gregorian, pp. 239-40). The teachers included Indians and Europeans. Vocational schools were also established in Kabul; the curricula included telegraphy, the arts, carpentry, construction, Arabic and European languages, agriculture, police training, music, carpet weaving, architecture, home economics, and women's health. Similar schools were established in Jalālābād, Qandahār, Herat, Mazār-e Šarīf, and Qaṭaḡan. There was an agricultural school in Qandahār and a teachers'-training school in Herat. In 1927 there were about 322 elementary schools in Afghanistan, with a total enrollment of nearly 51,000. At that time the educational atmosphere in the country was apparently relatively free. A few hundred students were sent to Germany, England, France, the Soviet Union, and Turkey for further training (Ḡobār, p. 792-94; Cowen and McLean, p. 18).

During Amān-Allāh Khan's reign most Afghan educational and other reforms were based on models in other countries. Subsequently Afghans and their foreign advisers expanded on these ideas and innovations. Judging by the reactions that forced Amān-Allāh Khan to flee the country, the reformers must

have misread public attitudes. As early as 1924 there was a major uprising in Paktīā (Ḡobār, pp. 806-07; Cowen and McLean, p. 18). Palace intrigues, bureaucratic corruption, and insistence by some religious leaders that Amān-Allāh Khan's reforms were anti-Islamic eroded his popular support (Ḡobār, pp. 794-50). Within a few months all educational institutions were shut down.

The impact of the civil war that brought about Amān-Allāh's abdication in 1929 cannot be overestimated. The pace at which changes in institutions and values were pursued under Amān-Allāh Khan (Dupree, pp. 452-57) may have intensified the opposition. Although the turmoil had subsided by the end of the year, a period of extreme anti-intellectualism ensued. A few elementary and secondary schools were reopened, but in 1930 there were no more than thirteen in Afghanistan, with fifty-three teachers and 1,590 students (Ministry of Education, p. 12). Two years later enrollment had fallen to about 1,350 (World Bank, p. 169).

World War II brought the government of Afghanistan back into contact with the rest of the world. The educational system did not, however, attain a vitality and rate of growth equal to those before 1929 (Ministry of Education, p. 13). By 1940 there were only 324 elementary and secondary schools with a total enrollment of about 60,000 (World Bank, p. 169). In that year the government decreed that Pashto was to be the language of instruction for the entire country; Darī was taught as a second language. Only after severe criticism of this policy by a mission from the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1952; Ẓahīr and ʿElmī, p. 131) was Darī adopted as the language of instruction in Darī-speaking regions (World Bank, pp. 169-70). Other major Afghan languages did not achieve this status until the fall of the Moḥammadzai clan during the Russian-inspired communist coup of 1978 (see COMMUNISM iv).

Kabul University (Pūhantūn-e Kābol) was opened in 1947, though some faculties had been established earlier (medicine, 1932; law, 1938; science, 1942; and letters, 1944). All Afghan institutions of higher education received foreign assistance from the beginning. The instructional materials of most faculties at Kabul University were in foreign languages: English, German, French, Arabic, or Russian. The language of instruction in a given faculty or department was often that of its donor. Subsequently faculties of theology (1951), agriculture (1956), economics (1957), pharmacy (1959), veterinary medicine (1961), home economics (1962), education (1962), and engineering (1963) were opened, as well as a polytechnic institute (1967) and the Institute

of Education (1961), oriented toward practical teachers' training (Mojaddidi, pp. 17-23; Kabul University, p. 1; Dupree, p. 598). A branch of the faculty of medicine was founded at Jalālābād in 1965 and later expanded into a university.

In 1956 there were 762 elementary and secondary schools in Afghanistan with an enrollment of about 121,000, about 111,000 (92 percent) in elementary schools (Ministry of Education, p. 23). This number constituted a very low proportion of the relevant age group, reflecting more the poverty of the country than a negative public attitude toward "modern" schooling. By then Afghans were convinced that government schools were indispensable to social mobility. In 1975 about 17,600 teachers of varying qualifications were teaching about 650,000 elementary-school pupils in facilities that included village schools with one to three teachers each. The level of enrollment was still low, considering the estimated total population of 15-16 million.

In 1973-74 about 11 percent of Afghans from age six years to over sixty-five years were literate. The literacy rate for males was 18.7 percent, for females 2.8 percent (United States Agency, pp. 73-92). At that time only 23 percent of males and 4 percent of females had some schooling. A total of only 4 percent of this group (6 percent of males and 1 percent of females) had finished sixth grade. Two percent of males and less than 1 percent of females had managed to complete twelfth grade, and about 1 percent of males had at least one year of education beyond secondary school (United States Agency, p. 85). At present it is impossible to compile relevant statistics and other data on the socioeconomic life of Afghanistan. Politics, poverty, and wars have precluded a complete national census. A UNESCO report in 1990 (1993, p. 121) put the total literacy rate at 30 percent, 44 percent for males and 14 percent for females, but the sources of these figures are not given. Certainly the educational indexes of Afghanistan are among the lowest in the world (Table 1). All figures should be considered in the context of an eroding educational system, owing partly to poverty and population growth.

One way to cope with the pressure for increasing educational opportunity was to expand schools through upgrading. By 1975 the government had converted village schools into six-grade schools and extended elementary education to eight years. The aim was to increase the number of children between seven and fourteen years of age who were enrolled in school from about 29 percent to almost 40 percent. Similarly, all middle schools were converted into secondary schools (United Nations, 1977, p. 3; idem, 1975, p. 13). In 1977,

however, many Afghan schools had no buildings, and most did not have desks, chairs, books, or other instructional materials. To reduce pressure on both the educational system and the labor market, the government instituted an examination, the *concours*, at the end of the eighth grade, in order to "select out" students. In 1975 10,000-12,000 secondary-school graduates were competing for about 3,000 places at Kabul University (personal communication from ʿAbd-al-ʿAzīz Feroḡ, former deputy minister of planning in Afghanistan, 20 December 1995). It was assumed that students would have had some vocational and technical training in seventh and eighth grades and that those who did not pass the examination would be prepared to enter the job market (United Nations, 1977, pp. 33-34; see ECONOMY xxv). By 1977, however, thousands of teenagers who had failed the *concours* were unemployed. The government of Persia, in response to Afghan efforts to obtain assistance from the Arab states, in order to reduce its dependence on the Soviet Union, offered President Moḥammad Dāwūd $800 million in loan funds at 6 percent interest. The money was intended for various projects that could absorb some of the unemployed graduates in Afghanistan. Of these projects only a woolen mill at Qandahār was actually funded (personal communication, Feroḡ). No financial aid came from Persia, however, and no vocational schools were built. The *concours* and the injustices it symbolized became a rallying point for Soviet-inspired Afghan communism (see COMMUNISM iv) after the coup in April 1978.

There was also controversy over textbooks. Several major themes emerge from an analysis of textbooks on Afghan history and the Darī and Pashto languages produced during the 1960s and 1970s (Shorish, 1986a). First, Pashtuns were to be emulated by all Afghan children; their mode of dress and theoretical code of conduct (*paštūnwālī*) were depicted as entirely positive, and deeds of Pashtun rulers were shown in a positive light, often exaggerated. Second, the implicit message was that the Moḥammadzai clan of the Barakzai tribe, which ruled Afghanistan, was above the law. Third, pre-Islamic events and personalities and the superiority of the West, even the former colonial masters, were implicitly glorified. Children were taught more about Europe than about Asia, the history of Islam, Afghanistan's neighbors, and minorities within the country (Shorish, 1986a). The structure of Afghan society depicted in the textbooks was pyramidal. Male Sunni Pashtuns were at the top, other male Sunnis immediately below, Shiʿites (e.g., Qezelbāš, Pārsīvāl, and others) below that, then the few Pashtun Shiʿites; the Shiʿite Hazāras were at the bottom of the pyramid (Shorish, 1986a; Dupree, p. 57). Women were rarely

mentioned and then only Pashtuns.

During the war with the Soviets (1978-92) more than one-third of the Afghan population became refugees in Pakistan and Persia, where relatively few received education (see DIASPORA ix and x). There was some “emergency education”: Children learned the fundamentals of their faith and basic literacy, and some older children were trained in elementary forms of warfare and weapons maintenance. The rationale was that Afghanistan was at war and needed committed fighters. Textbooks for Afghan refugee children in Pakistan emphasized Islam and presented Russians as the enemy not only of Afghans but also of all humanity (Šūrā, p. 61). Unlike the textbooks produced before the coup in 1978, those written for refugees did not emphasize Afghan national identity, and tribal cultures, traditions, and other localized materials were also omitted. Islam was emphasized as the force unifying war-torn and divided Afghanistan (Majrooh; Shorish, 1986a). Afghan refugees in Persia were not as successful as those in Pakistan in obtaining permission to open schools. A few schools were operated surreptitiously, but otherwise only a small number of children attended schools within the Persian system. Problems arose because in Persian schools the Shiʿite views of the government are propagated, whereas most Afghan Muslims are Sunnites (Shorish, 1988). As a result, most Afghan refugee children in Persia remain uneducated to this day.

During the war education in Afghanistan itself was possible only in some urban centers controlled by the government. In rural areas military operations made it impossible to keep schools open. Since Afghan resistance forces (*mojāhedīn*) entered Kabul in 1992 most schools there, in Qandahār, and in other eastern parts of the country have remained closed because of factional fighting. Even the few schools that remained open during the war suffered the fate of Kabul University: Most of the buildings were destroyed by constant bombardment and rocket attacks, and laboratories, furniture, and even electric wiring inside classroom walls were vandalized.

It is doubtful that the Afghan educational system will be able to recover even the low level of prewar activity for many years to come. Nevertheless, Afghans have used moments of peace to rebuild. In the province of Herat and the city of Mazār-e Šarīf schools have reopened, despite enormous economic constraints. Since 1992 institutions of higher education have opened or reopened; several faculties of Herat University were functioning in 1994. By the autumn of 1995 all women had been barred from schools and places of employment outside the home in areas controlled by the so-called Ṭālebān

militia, including Herat.

From their inception to the present this and other Afghan educational institutions have faced problems related to poverty, underdevelopment, turmoil, and dependence. All have been supported in some way by foreign countries and international organizations (Wilber, p. 368). Such foreign assistance began at the end of the 19th century, when Turkey and India were among the first supporters. Later the United States, France, Germany, England, Japan, and Egypt became major contributors, underwriting the expenses of some schools in Kabul (Ministry of Education, pp. 218-58, annex C). Afghanistan joined the United Nations in 1948. Thenceforth most educational institutions and faculties were directly affiliated with international educational organizations and various foreign universities (Ẓahīr and ʿElmī, p. 11). Educational expansion and development in Afghanistan have thus always been correlated with foreign assistance. The destruction of various aspects of Afghan social life by the Russians and their allies cannot be remedied to any degree without extensive help from the international community.

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