

Nizamiyyah University Of Baghdad

The spirit of Islam spread from Mecca and changed darkness into light; ignorance into knowledge and civilizations like that of the Romans, Greeks, Indians and Persians which were becoming extinct were revived and valuable books which had been gathering dust were put into use again. In this universal scientific movement, universities were once again established in Islamic lands and scientific works were also revived.

Palaces and Mosques Become Schools

Although in the early days of Islam there were no special places for propagating science and culture and since there were no schools or universities as was explained in the previous chapter, study groups were formed in mosques and gradually even in the Caliph's palace, the minister's house. Work areas and farms were converted into scientific, cultural or literary centres. Many people became scientists and writers and young and old, masters and slaves, were all busy learning. Some slave-owners even taught their slaves poems, narrations, history and literature and after learning these subjects, they were wonderful gifts.

Zubaidah, the wife of Harun Al-Rashid, had hundreds of female slaves and all of them knew the Qur'an by heart. In the early mornings they recited the Qur'an and filled the air with its pleasant sound¹.

Is Nizamiyyah The First School In Islam?

In the next stage of history, Islamic schools, universities and research centres were established.

Some writers, such as Ibn Khalkan, believed that Nizamiyyah University in Baghdad was the first college for Muslims, which was established by Nizamal-Mulk, Shah Malik's Prime Minister. These writers added that the "House of Wisdom" in Baghdad, which had been opened during the lifetime of Harun Al-Rashid, was merely an important library.

Nevertheless, many experts and historians believed that prior to Nizamiyyah, there were many colleges

and universities in Islamic lands. A quotation from a British Encyclopedia states:

"When Ma'mun was a crown prince, he established a university in Khorasan and for lecturing he invited experienced and educated professors from different countries."

Chambers Encyclopedia writes that in Ma'mun's time, important universities were established in Baghdad, Basrah and Kufa.

In the year 400A.H., Hakem, the Fatimi Caliph, established a large college in Egypt, dedicating many books and he also appointed a group of jurists and professors for lecturing.

King Mahmud of Ghaznavi dedicated a substantial portion of his wealth to the establishment of a magnificent university and built a great library filled with valuable books. He paid for its daily expenses and endowed many acres of land and villages.

In history it can also be found that while Baghdad was waiting for the great honour of the inauguration of its university by Nizam al-Mulk in the city of Naysabur, great colleges and universities were established, including Saiedieh College and Bayhaghieh, which Imam Ghazali graduated from.

From what has been said so far, it can be concluded that before Nizamiyyah, there were several colleges and universities in existence, yet the fame of Nizamiyyah was so great that it overshadowed all the other scientific and educational centres.

How Nizamiyyah Was Established

Nizam al-Mulk at-Tusi, the Minister of Alb Arsalan and Shah Malik, was determined to spread knowledge among the people. He did a lot towards fulfilling his aim and built several schools in villages in which he spent six thousand gold dinars and also endowed a tenth of his wealth for establishing libraries and colleges and most important of all, was the establishment of Nizamiyyah in Baghdad.

The foundation of Nizamiyyah was laid in 487 A.H., at a cost of two hundred thousand golden dinars, and it was completed in the year 489 A.H. It was inaugurated with a magnificent ceremony and if what has been written in history is true, all the people in Baghdad and the royal family hastened to attend the ceremony, which illustrated the Muslims' enthusiasm towards the development of knowledge.

Abu Ishaq, head lecturer, was nominated for rectorship in the university. He finally accepted after twenty days of insistence. As long as the Baghdad caliphate was in power, the Nizamiyyah was glorious and many famous scholars graduated from this university. Sa'adi, the famous poet, was one of them.

For the scholars and scientists of that time, there was no greater honour than being a lecturer at Nizamiyyah. For 200 years, no one was appointed to that position unless he was the most knowledgeable in related subjects.

Abu Zakaria Tabrizi, a well-known writer of that era, was the director of the central library of Nizamiyyah.

In 589 A.H., Nasiruddin issued an order to establish another great library to which he dedicated many rare and valuable books, which were transferred from the caliph's library. Students were allotted a certain amount of money as a monthly allowance, which was one of the advantages of this university. Another advantage was that both poor and rich people could send their children to study at this university and six thousand students graduated from it with high qualifications.

1. History of Islamic Civilization, Vol. 3 Georgi Zeydn.

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