

The effect of thought streams on teaching philosophy in the madrasahs of Safavid era

Musa Alreza Bakhshi

Department of History, Farhangian University, Nasibe Branch, Tehran, Iran

Received for publication: 08 April 2013.

Accepted for publication: 16 July 2013.

Abstract

Madrasahs (colleges) did not pay equal attention to philosophy in the different eras of Safavid and they had different conditions based on the ideas existing in society. In this article, we will study teaching philosophy in the madrasahs of Safavid era citing historical references in the first and second half of this era. In the first half of this era, because of paying too much attention to rationalism and reasoning in madrasah, philosophy also received lots of attention beside religious sciences. But in the second half of this era, with the revival of Akhbārism or Ahl- Hadith and under its influence, teaching Akhbār and Shiite ahadith in madrasahs flourished and philosophy received less attention and even in some madrasahs such as Maryam Begum Madrasah in Isfahan, its teaching was prohibited and it was regarded as a harmful science.

Keywords: Safavid, madrasah, philosophy, akhbārism.

Introduction

The establishment of Safavid government in the early tenth century A.D was the most important event in the history of Iran. With the arrival of Safavid, the religion of twelve Shia was considered the formal religion in Iran—a job that any other government could do in the course of history in Iran. In such a condition, education and training was based on Shiite doctrines and it was an appropriate

condition for the flourishing of Shiite thinking in Iran. In this period, a lot of madrasahs were built with the support of Shaah, Royal family, officials and wealthy people. Construction of madrasahs received the greatest attention in the period of Safavid, i.e, Shah Abbas I (1038-996), even in the politically deteriorating period of Safavid era, i.e., the period of Shah Soleiman (1105-1077 A.D) and Shah Hossein (1105-1135A.D), the process of constructing madrasahs was still going ahead. From this angle of vision, the weak period of Safavid era is actually a flourished period of constructing madrasahs. As you see in the history, in the period of shah Soleiman in Isfahan, the capital of Safavid, according to Chardin, there were almost 50 madrasahs (Sharden, 1904, p.130) and in the madrasahs of this period, the prevailing religious thinking was *Ithna ashari*. And the co-sponsors of such madrasah, in spite of some disagreements on some issues, agreed on the idea that madrasah should be a place for teaching the doctrines of *Ithna ashari* Shiite. Therefore the teaching of Shiite textbooks in various fields extensively flourished in this period. Like in the past, many madrasahs and scientific centers paid great attention to philosophy as the most important branch of reasoning and rational science. But its teaching did not enjoy an equal trend in Safavid era. In this article, I tried to study the trend of paying attention of madrasahs to philosophy in Safavid period and the effect of prevailing thought streams of Safavid period on it. In the first half of Safavid period, i.e., the period of prevalence of Usūlīs thoughts and scholars in madrasahs

Corresponding author: Musa Alreza Bakhshi, Department of History, Farhangian University, Nasibe Branch, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: musa.bakhshi8@gmail.com.

and the second half of Safavid era coincided with the revival and flourishing of Akhbarism in many madrasahs and it flourished in the last few decades of Safavid period especially in the government of sultan Hossein Safavid (1105-1135, A.D)

Statement of the problem

Studying the history of science is one of the most important areas of research in history because without paying attention to the history of science and its evolutions, it will not be considered a science. Otherwise, it might suffer from recession. That is why research is vital and important in the history of science. Studying the history of science in Islamic civilization and Iran received an outstanding position and lots of studies have been done about it. This article is going to study the science of philosophy in the madrasahs of Safavid (907-1135 A.D.) and is going to study the effect of scientific and thought streams and also the effect of religious policies of Safavid government on the teaching of philosophy.

This research is going to claim that in the first half of Safavid era, philosophy used to be taught in many madrasahs, but in the second half of Safavid era, due to the genesis and flourishing of Akhbarism, which gave paramount importance to the science of hadith and disliked philosophy, in madrasahs, they paid less attention to philosophy, especially the Safavid government supported Akhbarism.

The position of philosophy in madrasahs in the first half of Safavid era

Reasoning and rationalism was the main scientific and intellectual orientation in the educational centers in this period in Iran. And in most madrasahs especially in Shiraz and Isfahan, the arbitration science especially philosophy used to be taught and paid great attention to. At the beginning of the establishment of the Safavid government, most of the Iranian scholars such as Ghiaseddin Mansour Dashtaki (948 A.D)-Mudarris (master) of madrasah in Shiraz, Musleh al-din laari (979 A.D) and Mirza Jaan Shiraazi (994 A.D) paid great attention to reasoning and rational science. And in fact most of them were hakim (scholars) rather than Faghih (religious experts). With an overview of the status of great scholars and mudarrises of Safavid era and their works in the book "Aalam Aaraaye Abbasi" we can see the domination of rationalists

in the educational tradition of Iranian scholars in the first half of Safavid era with regard to the books written or taught. Almost all the scholars whose status have been stated in Aalam Aaraaye Abbasi and who lived in the first half of Safavid era had enough expertise in the reasoning and rationalism science. But, it is not the case with the scholars and mudarrises of the second half of the Safavid era especially at the end of this period. For example in the status of shah Taghi- Al -din Mohammad, it was stated that he made great progress in reasoning and arbitration science and could get a position as a teacher in Dar-al- fazl in Shiraz (Eskandar Beig Turkaman, 2003, p.148). To save their neck, many Sunni mudarrises fled to other countries due to the pressures of Safavid government and started to teach in Ottoman madrasah or other Sunni countries. They had enough expertise in Philosophy and Theology and this shows the importance and flourishing of the rational science and the outstanding position of philosophy in the madrasah of the early period of the Safavid era (Bakhshi, 2011, p.206).

Shifa (The Book of Healing) and *Eshaaraat* written by Ave Sina has been the most important philosophy textbook in all the periods of Safavid era. And no other textbooks can be comparable to it from the importance viewpoint. Theology of *shifa* was the most important part of this book and it was used by lots of religious students. And these two books had lots of commentaries and margins and they were much referred to in the sources of Safavid era. (e.g. see Afandi, 1980, p.44). In addition, translation of these text into Persian in this period implies its extensive use as a textbook (Afandi, *ibid*, pp.186-187). In some cases, Mirdamad allowed Shafaa and Esharaat to his students (e.g. Horr Ameli, 1983, p.33), something that with the flourishing of Akhbarism or Ahl- hadith, is much less observed in the second half of Safavid era in the letters of permissions. Sheikh Bahaei has some poems implying the prosperity of these two books:

How late can you seek healing from Shafaa?

How late can you seek healing from poison?

Enlight your heart with the light of Gad

Someday Ave Sina may pass away

Hekmat Al-Ain was another important textbook in this period. The main text of this book was written by Athir al-Din Abhari Abhari—an Iranian philosopher in the 7th century. It is considered one of the most important textbooks of Mashsha' (Peripatetic) philosophy (Maleki, 1997, p.319). Many commen-

taries and margins have been written on this book. According to the report of the writer of *Jaame Ol Shoroooh Val Havaashi*, the greatest number belongs to Safavid period and it implies its prosperity as a textbook (Habashi, 2001, p.968). Mulla Abdulla Yazdi's description on the book is one of the most famous textbooks of this period. The book called *Hekmat Al-Ain* whose teaching was prohibited by the founder of Maryam Begum Madrasah. This indicates that the textbook was very famous so that the founder of the madrasah was forced to ban its teaching in madrasah (Honarfar, 1971, p. 667). Mir Hossein Meybodi wrote a commentary on the book that was highly regarded by Scholars in the Safavid period (Safa, 1983, p. 161). Some reports and commentaries of the copy of this book are available in madrasah of this period which approve the promotion of it as a textbook. For example, Mohammad Ebrahim Mousavi wrote a description of *Hekmat-Al- Ain* in 1118 in the madrasah of Mirza Jafar In Mashhad (Agha Bozorg Tehrani, p. 23). Shiraz madrasahs in this period was one of the most important training centers for teaching philosophy. Shiraz scientific Hozeh had polemical nature and rational science teaching and learning in pre-Safavid has received much attention. In the first half of Safavid era, philosophy continues to maintain its high standing and reputation in the Dar al elm (Shamlou, 1992, p. 164). One of the most active centers of Shiraz for teaching rational science was Mansourieh madrasah and many students around Iran and other countries went to this madrasah to study rational science - Many scholars, especially in the first half of the Safavid era were associated with this madrasah. Western writers also pointed to the importance of this madrasah in educating the great scholars and thinkers of Safavid era especially in the tenth century (For example, see Mitchell, 2009, p.173). One of the most popular instructors of Mansourieh madrasah was Ghiath al-din Dashtaki, who had a significant role in training rational science students. The peak boom years of philosophy in Safavid era is related to the middle of this period and the period of Shah Abbas I and coincide with the philosophical school of Isfahan and the political and economic boom of Safavid. Philosophical school of Isfahan under the influence of the philosophical Hozeh of shiraz with scientists like Mir Fendereski, Mir Dadmad and Mulla Sadra the author of *al-Asfar al-arba'a* (The Four Journeys) played an important part in the flourishing of philosophy (Motahari, 1989, p. 583). The philosophical

Hozeh of Isfahan during its flourishing period overshadowed the philosophical Hozeh of shiraz and in the light of the mentioned scientists, it attracted philosophy students from all around the world.

In the first half of Safavid era, we cannot observe the prohibition of teaching and learning of philosophical books in any madrasahs and even the most probably, in some of the madrasahs, learning the philosophical books has been one of the conditions of the founder of the madrasah (Sefatgol, 2002, p.377).

Akhbaris influence on the teaching of philosophy in madrasah in the second half of the Safavid era

The second half of the Safavid era coincided with the revival and flourishing of Akhbarism. The supporters of Akhbarism respect Akhbars (news) and in religious issues especially the provisions(Ahkam), they attach lots of importance to Akhbars (Hadith) and regard Ijtihad which is based on rationality and reasoning as incorrect (Radi, 1386,p.108) and in the Safavid era attribute the revival of this idea to Muhammad Amin Estarabadi (1033). In Akhbarism, the science of hadith is the main focus of religious sciences and Akhbarism scholars regard this science as highly important and do not like rational sciences esp. philosophy and speak against it. For example, Muhammad Zaman Tabrizi—one of the madrasah mudarrises in Isfahan—criticizing those who speak for philosophy interprets *Hekmat* in the verses and narrations as divine science, not in the common sense i.e., philosophy.

Mohammad Saleh Hosseini Khatoonabad, one of the renown mudarrises and scholars of the late Safavid era, defines the real scholar as a person who deals with the science of hadith and considers the group that seals with the books such as *shifa* and *Esharat* as ignorant and unwise (Khatoon Abadi, manuscript, leaf, 113.A). Samahiji, one of the outstanding Akhbaris scientists of the late Safavid era, is one of the scholars who expanded on the differences between Akhbaris and Usulis. In his book called *Moniat Al- Mamaaresin*, he rejects the viewpoint of Usulis, based on the idea that fir Ijtihad, knowing logic and theology is a necessity. He says that for Mujtahid and Mufti, knowing about the science of hadith is enough (Samahiji,manuscript, leaf, 189b). Although some scholars were against this view point, undoubtedly the flourishing of such ideas could affect the flourishing of Hadith science and Stagnation of rational science especially philosophy in the second half of Safavid era. And in many

madrasahs, it limited science to Fiqh and Hadith only. Therefore, philosophy lost its outstanding position at the end of this era. And even in some madrasah, its teaching was banned. We cannot observe such a case in the madrasahs of the first half of Safavid era. For example, in the devotion letter of Maryam Begum and Soltani madrasahs in Isfahan and Sheikh Ali Khan madrasah in Hamedan, it was clearly stated as an instruction that teaching philosophy should be banned. And it was considered as a banned science and the devotees of these madrasahs conditionalized that if a student deals with such a science, the mudarris or trustee should expel him out of the madrasah. In the devotion letter of Sheikh Ali Khan Zangeneh madrasah in Hamedan which was built by Etemad Al-Doleh in the Safavid government in 1100, dealing with Hekmat philosophy and Mysticism was banned or conditionalized unless they deal with them to reject them. If a student did not obey these regulations, his pension would have been cut and he would have been expelled out of the madrasah (Amani Yamini, Mahdi, 2009, pp. 983-984). A number of great Akhbaris scholars excommunicated some of the previous philosophers including Ave Sina whose books used to be taught. Muhammad Zaman Tabrizi referring to the excommunication of Ave Sina by some scholars such as Muhammad Bagher Majlesi criticizes it and considers it a kind of exaggeration (Tabrizi, 1994, pp.298-299). Some of the scholars used to be expelled out of their town because they were accused of indulgence in philosophy, to name a few, we can refer to Mulla Sadeq Ardestani (1134). He was expelled out of Isfahan for this reason and went to Karbalaa (Aqa Bozorg Tehrani, p.425). Hossei ibn Ebrahim Gilani—one of the students of mulla sadra—did not have the courage to go this town in order not to be excommunicated by mulla khalil Qazvini (1087)—a famous Akhbaris and Muddaris of Eltefatieh madrasah in Qazvin (Afandi,1974, v. 2,p.33).

Ali Gholi Jadyd Al Aslam believed that preaching philosophy was one of the actions of caliphs Abbasids so that the public will be unaware of the sciences and Ahadith of Imams A.S. (Jadyd Al- Aslam, manuscript, leaf 58,A). He expressed happiness that due to the multitude of scholars who follow hadith and religion i.e. Akhbaris scholars and supports of king Safavid, there was no room for the self-expression of philosophy supporters or as he used to call—atheists (ibid). He asks madrasah officials not to let philosophy supporters enter madrasah and expelled those who deal with these sciences (ibid). We can attribute the flourishing of this current to the period in

which we had three great Akhbaris as the top of the religious bureaucratic structure in important Iranian towns. They were Muhammad Taqi Majlesi in Isfahan, Mulla Muhammad Taher Qomi in Qom, and Muhammad Ibn Hassan Horr Ameli in Mashhad. They were Sheikh Al-Islam at the end of Safavid era and this is indicative of the power of Akhbaris at the end of Safavid era (Bakhshi, 2011, p.138).

In spite of these pressures, philosophy still used to be paid attention to by students and Mudarrises. (Afandi,1980, p.184-185). From the criticisms and speeches of Ali Gholi Gadyd Al aslam, we can infer that philosophy was much paid attention to (Jadyd al- aslam, manuscript, leaf 58.a) although the rational science could never be compared as it flourished in the period of Shah Abbas I, Aqa Hossein Qansari (1099) and his children, Aqa Jamal Khansari and Razi al-din Khansari—one of the greatest mudarrises and scholars at the end of Safavid government—taught philosophy in addition to religious sciences. Abdonnabi Qazvini reported that Esharat used to be taught by Razi al-din Khansari(1125) in Isfahan and the number of students in his class reached 200 to 300 (Qazvini, 1981,p156). It is worthy to say that among the various sections of philosophy, theology used to be paid more attention to.

With the evaluation of the texts that were written or copied in the madrasahs of Safavid era in its first and second half, we can observe a significant difference between them. In the first half of Safavid period, more philosophical books were written or copied than its second half. On the other hand, madrasah in the second half of Safavid period paid more attention to the science of hadith especially at the end of this era and it is not comparable to the past. And even in some madrasahs, teaching of hadith was one of the conditions of the devotee (vaqif) of the madrasah. For example, in the devotion letter of Soltani madrasah in Isfahan, the science of hadith was one of the most important courses that had to be taught by mudarris (Eshkevari, 1999, p.85). Among the manuscript catalogues of Ayatollah Marashi library, 320 manuscripts of hadith Arbaee books have been catalogued from Safavid era. And this shows the spreading of hadith science in this period (Bakhshi, 2011, pp.134-135)

Conclusions

The ruling of rationalism in the scientific centers of Iran in the first half of Safavid era caused many madrasahs to pay attention to philosophy and we know that its acme of success was the philosophy

school of Isfahan in the period of shah Abbas I including philosophers such as Mir Damad and Molla Sadra. *Shifa* and *Esharat* of Ave sina was considered the most important and the most common textbook all over the era of Safavid and we can see that they were much taught in the madrasahs of this period. In spite of Akhbarism which attaches lots of importance to the science of hadith and criticizes philosophy, and in spite of the fact that teaching philosophy was still continuing in some madrasahs, philosophy lost its outstanding position in many madrasah especially at the end of this period and even in some important madrasahs such as Maryam Begum and Soltani in Isfahan, its teaching was banned and it was considered a harmful science and some philosophers were also expelled out of their town.

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