



Pedagogical Views of Shahabuddin Marjani: Educational Experience, Historical Knowledge and Upbringing

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the pedagogical views of the reformist scholar Shahabuddin Marjani on the basis of his experience as a student and teacher in Movarounnahr, his activity in Kazan, and his historical works. Drawing on sources related to teaching in the madrasas of Bukhara, Samarkand and Kazan, the study shows that Marjani observed the shortcomings of the traditional education system as a student, through its results, and as a teacher, through its internal mechanisms. The article substantiates that the habit of demanding evidence, the aim of adapting educational texts to the learner, and the recognition of independent learning as a factor in personal development became central ideas of Marjani's pedagogy. It also highlights the educational function of the biographical texts in his works *Mustafod ul-axbor* and *Vafiyat ul-aslof* and the possibility of using them as historical-pedagogical case material in contemporary education.

Keywords: Shahabuddin Marjani; pedagogical views; madrasa education; independent learning; historical-pedagogical case; upbringing; Tatar intellectuals; educational reform.

INTRODUCTION

Shahabuddin Marjani (1818–1889) was a major reformist scholar of the intellectual and spiritual life of the Volga-Ural and Movarounnahr regions in the 19th century, and his pedagogical views are closely tied to his educational experience. This article analyzes his studies and teaching in Bukhara, Samarkand and Kazan, as well as his historical works, and shows how his pedagogical ideas took shape and why they matter for contemporary education. Shahabuddin ibn Bahouddin ibn Subhon ibn Abdulkarim al-Marjani was born on 16 January 1818 in the village of Yapanchi, near the city of Kazan [1, B. 467]. He was first educated in an old-style maktab. His teacher there said of him: "In my life I have taught many students and disciples, but I have never seen a gifted and capable pupil like Shahabuddin." He then studied at the madrasa in the village of Toshkechuv, where his father, Bahouddin ibn Subhon Marjani, taught, and he mastered the grammar of Persian and Arabic. His teacher advised him to continue his studies in Bukhara [2, S. 9; 25, B. 26–27]. Sources give different ages at which his studies in Toshkechuv began (six or fifteen), but they agree that these studies continued until 1838.

Biographers report that as a youth Marjani already asked his teachers questions that were not easy to answer, and that he compared the works of different authors on the same issue. He himself recounts a memory in which he put to his grandfather the question "What evidence is there for this?", and, dissatisfied with the answer, asked his father the same question. From the age of seventeen he took part in teaching at his father's madrasa. Dissatisfied with a Persian-

language textbook of Arabic grammar, he composed his own manual so that it would be more accessible to students [3]. These two facts, the habit of demanding evidence and the attempt to adapt a teaching text to the learner, are the earliest signs of his later pedagogical position.

In 1838 Shahabuddin Marjani, with his father's permission, set out for Bukhara. At the age of twenty he took a private cell (hujra) in one of the city's madrasas and studied under Solih Nodir Abdulloh al-Khojandi, Muhammad Safar al-Khojandi, Domla Fozil al-Gijduvani, Abdulmo'min al-Afshoni, Khudoyberdi al-Boysuni, Bobo Rafi' al-Khojandi and Sharifota Haji al-Bukhari. He then continued his studies at the Kokaldosh madrasa, where he was taught by Mirzo Solih al-Khojandi, one of the most renowned teachers in the city. At the same time he pursued learning independently in the libraries of Bukhara [4, S. 114]. Among his teachers was Abdulmo'min al-Afshoni, who criticized the order of the Bukhara madrasas and supported the views of Qursavi. Marjani asked his teachers whether the educational programme needed reform, but when he received no support, he directed his main attention to self-education.

From 1843 to 1845 Shahabuddin Marjani studied and taught at the Sherdor madrasa in Samarkand. He maintained close ties with the city qadi, Abu Said ibn Abulhay as-Samarqandi, and used his private library. Later, in his works, Marjani valued that library highly and wrote: "The books in the library served me as a true teacher." About Abu Said he noted: "This scholar was the main reason for my interest in the science of history and for my turn to the study of historical works." This acknowledgment has particular value from a pedagogical point of view. It expresses the idea of the decisive role of independent learning and direct engagement with books in the formation of a person, an idea that occupies a central place in Marjani's views.

In general, Marjani spent more than eleven years in Movarounnahr: he studied and taught at the Kokaldosh and Mir Arab madrasas in Bukhara in 1838–1843 and 1845–1849, and at the Sherdor madrasa in Samarkand in 1843–1845. This period was decisive for the formation of his scientific outlook and pedagogical convictions. In 1849 he returned to Kazan, where he played an important role in spreading his ideas among the Tatar intellectuals. The reformist scholar Shahabuddin Marjani died in Kazan on 18 April 1889. He was the author of more than thirty major works, and his scholarly heritage remains an object of research for scholars of Russia, Tatarstan and Central Asia to this day.

Marjani's teaching in Movarounnahr was not limited to study: he was at the same time a student and a teacher. His experience of teaching at the Sherdor madrasa in Samarkand was a distinct stage in the formation of his pedagogical views, since it was in these years that he had the opportunity to see the shortcomings of traditional teaching methods through the eyes of a teacher. As a student he observed the result of the system, and as a teacher he observed its internal mechanism. This two-sided experience is one of the main factors that gave his criticism depth and precision. It should also be noted that each point of his reform programme was put forward not as an abstract theoretical reflection but as the solution to a concrete pedagogical problem.

The Kazan period is the longest stage of Marjani's pedagogical activity. Having returned from Bukhara on 21 May 1849, Marjani was appointed imam of the first mosque in Kazan and teacher (mudarris) of the madrasa attached to that mosque on 6 March 1850; in 1867 he became akhun and muhtasib [5, S. 32–35; 127]. After his relations with the madrasa's patron I. Yunusov broke down, he was twice removed from his post, in 1854 and 1874, and was later reinstated. In one of the community members' petitions to the religious board, it is recorded that during his time

as teacher the number of students increased “two or even more times compared with the previous period.” In 1871 the Marjani madrasa became independent, and he introduced internal rules for students; in 1881 the madrasa moved into a new stone building. He taught Islamic religious instruction at the Kazan Tatar teachers’ school, which opened in 1876, until 1884. In his speech at the school’s opening he stressed the importance of studying secular subjects for Muslims. Although part of the community sharply condemned his work in a state school, he continued this work for more than eight years.

As the main instrument of moral upbringing, Marjani presents the model of the teacher, scholarly integrity and loyalty to truth. His own life became the practical confirmation of this principle. Sources record that when he was subjected to harsh criticism for his views, he did not give way: “They showered him with abusive words, and some even called him an ‘infidel.’ Even though he remained among a blind people and fanatical mullahs, Marjani never compromised his service or his courage. He always wrote and took part in debate.” [6] This description tells us more about Marjani’s pedagogical personality than any theoretical statement of his.

One distinctive feature of Marjani’s pedagogical legacy is the transformation of historical knowledge into a means of upbringing. Through his work *Mustafod al-axbor fi ahvoli Qozon va Bulg’or*, he tried to write the history of his people on a scholarly basis [7]. Barudi put this idea into educational practice: in the *Muhammadiya* school, the mother tongue and national history began to be taught as separate subjects [8]. Supporters of the new method considered teaching pupils more in their native languages the main condition for making literacy easier [9; 25].

It is necessary to emphasize the pedagogical layer in Marjani’s historical works. *Mustafod ul-axbor* and *Vafiyat ul-aslof* are not pedagogical treatises in the direct sense, yet they clearly display an educational function. When describing the lives of the scholars of the past, Marjani highlights in each biography a particular moral and professional model: devotion to learning, respect for the teacher, steadfastness in defending the truth, and humility. This corresponds to the method of upbringing through example, which has long been used in Eastern pedagogy. When interpreted with modern pedagogical concepts, such a biographical text can serve as value-oriented educational material. It is precisely this quality that makes his heritage usable in contemporary pedagogical education as historical-pedagogical case material.

In Marjani’s views, the student is not someone who receives knowledge ready-made, but someone who understands and assimilates it. This conclusion follows from the principle opposing blind imitation (*taqlid*): if every person must form an opinion on religious questions with understanding, then in education too the learner’s independent judgment must play an important role. There is a substantive affinity between this view and the contemporary principle of the learner as an active subject; however, Marjani did not use this notion as a pedagogical term.

The pedagogical views of Shahabuddin Marjani were formed as an integrated system in which his experience as a student and teacher in *Movarounnahr*, his activity in the Kazan period, and his historical works are interconnected. His observations of learning and teaching allowed him to understand both the results of the education system and its internal mechanisms, which gave depth and precision to his criticism.

The analysis shows that the basic principles of Marjani’s pedagogy, namely evidence-based reasoning, the adaptation of teaching material to the learner’s understanding, and the view of

the learner as a subject who understands and assimilates knowledge rather than receiving it ready-made, are close in content to the contemporary idea of the learner as a subject. At the same time, the clear educational function of his historical and biographical works shows that the example of the teacher and moral-professional ideals serve as instruments of upbringing. Thus, Marjani's heritage is a valuable source not only for studying the history of education in the 19th-century Volga-Ural and Movarounnahr regions, but also for use as historical-pedagogical case material in contemporary education.

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