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## Theology Education and Its Application in Afghanistan's Educational Policies (1973–2021): A Narrative Review\*

Rohollah Eslami<sup>1</sup>, Basir Ahamd Hasin<sup>2</sup>

1. Assistant Professor of Political Sciences, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran (Corresponding Author) (eslami.r@um.ac.ir)  0000-0001-7429-6105
2. Associate Professor of Political Sciences, Jami University, Herat, Afghanistan (b.hasin@jami.edu.af)  0009-0002-5389-8363

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### Abstract

In Afghanistan, theology forms a crucial component of the nation's cultural and societal identity, having been influenced by various political and social changes. This review article investigates the historical progression and present-day status of theology in Afghanistan, emphasizing pivotal historical periods such as the communist era, the Mujahideen governance, the Taliban governance, and the era of the Republic. It scrutinizes attempts to reconcile religious traditions with educational modernization, employing a qualitative-historical methodology. The research seeks to comprehend the shifts in theology and suggests recommendations to harmonize it with modern societal requirements. Despite the scarcity of literature, this study establishes a foundation for understanding the ways in which theology impacts Afghanistan's educational policies. By examining the evolution from 1973 to 2021, it underscores how political, social, and ideological factors have molded the substance and approaches of theology, thereby shaping Afghanistan's national identity and cultural growth. Significant fluctuations can be observed in the position, content, and teaching methods, as well as the application of theology during this period, which have directly influenced the national identity, as well as the social, and cultural development of Afghanistan. Religion and theology have been perceived as tools for gaining and maintaining power or as obstacles to the influence of power for the governments of Afghanistan over the past fifty years.

**Keywords:** Educational Policies, Modernization, Political Factors, Religious Schools, Theology

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## 1. Introduction

In Afghanistan, theology is one of the mainstays of the country's cultural and social identity, always holding special significance. Throughout Afghan history, theology has been marked by a variety of political, social, and cultural events (Arefi, 1393 [2014 A.D.], p. 12). Measures have been taken to safeguard religious traditions and to enhance Islamic identity through the educational system, but one can also notice initiatives to modernize education and make it relevant to modern society.

Theology, viewed from the standpoint of a belief or study of religious basic tenets and foundations that guide human behavior, has definitely formed social values and priorities both in schools and universities in Afghanistan. Different classes in Quranic instruction and theology are used as part of the existing Islamic teachings (all concepts related to Islam), thereby playing an important role in developing the teaching-learning policies of the country. This has introduced the need to balance the dictates of religious beliefs with the demands of the modern society, especially in Afghanistan, where education is one of the means for the development of society in view of wars, political instabilities, and cultural diversities (Hosseini, 1401 [2023 A.D.]).

The political history, wars, and social crises of Afghanistan have influenced its educational policy. Despite some attempts at building a general system of education since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, periods like the one under the Taliban regime—which banned girls' education—show how theology and political factors are reflected in educational structures. Moreover, religious schools, although instilling Islamic values among their students, are not without their drawbacks: they stress memorization of Islamic texts, rather than practical applications of Islamic orders or critical

thinking, which have become important skills for workforce development (Easar et al., 2023).

This study attempts to trace the general trends and challenges of theology in Afghanistan by discussing various historical periods. First, it examines the role of theology during various royal regimes. The article then will assess significant historical events within an analysis of the rise of communist governments, the rise of the Mujahideen, and the rise of the Taliban in light of the educational system. Finally, it considers the developments that took place during the era of the Islamic Republic, which have all witnessed attempts to combine tradition and modernity in theology.

This study presents a close view of theological developments in Afghanistan and offers a comprehensive analysis of the factors that have influenced these changes. It also makes recommendations for improving theology and bringing it in line with the needs of contemporary society. This qualitative historical review examines and analyzes the impact of theology education on Afghanistan's educational policies during the specified period of 1973-2021.

## **2. Historical and Contextual Overview**

Literature in the realm of theology education and its implications on Afghanistan's policy of education is scant and fragmented. Although a number of key studies do exist, there has never been an overall comprehensive analysis in respect of this topic. Interest in reviewing the impact of Islamic education on the educational system, challenges, and opportunities that exist in integrating theological views within educational policies has recently grown. While the number of publications in this area is more limited

compared to other areas, the importance of this issue is increasingly being recognized. The need for comprehensive and interdisciplinary research exists in order to delve deeper into this topic. Some key themes within this literature include the challenges and opportunities of integrating theology education into the national system of education (Salim, 2024).

Sarwar (2015), in the article "Theology Education in Afghanistan", presents a broad historical overview of theological education in Afghanistan, starting from ancient times and up to the present day. The author discusses the influence of political and social changes on the country's theology. He insists that the better this history is understood, the more effective the current educational policy can be. This study primarily focuses on documenting events over an extended period, without an in-depth analysis of the past fifty years.

Rahimi (1396b [2018 A.D.]), in the article "Challenges and Opportunities in Integrating Theology Education into Afghanistan's Educational System", explores the challenges and opportunities associated with incorporating theology education within Afghanistan's broader educational framework. While acknowledging significant obstacles, the author highlights potential opportunities to promote religious tolerance and understanding. The article primarily focuses on contemporary challenges in applying theology to the educational system, without delving into a historical analysis of the past century's educational developments.

Khan (2017), in the perspective of "The Role of theology in Shaping Educational Policy in Afghanistan", discusses a number of ways in which religious influence shapes the formulation and distribution of educational policy in Afghani education and hence, in his conclusions, reiterates that the education of theology plays an

important educative role toward the direction of policy, while on the other hand, understanding of such influence offers a key to elaborating productive and inclusive educational policies. This article focuses less on theological issues and does not examine educational systems from the past fifty years.

Ahmadi (2019), in his work "The Influence of Theology on Educational Policy in Afghanistan", presented a case study on the impact of theology education, especially in schools, on educational policy in Afghanistan. He posits that schools are critical to influencing educational policy and, as such, their impact needs to be understood for the development of inclusive, effective educational policies that address the needs of all students in the country. This study differs from the current research as it does not systematically analyze educational periods in relation to theology.

In the article "Theology Education in Afghanistan", Azimi (2016) discusses the way in which theology education could be integrated into the general educational policy of Afghanistan through an integrative approach in curriculum building, teacher training, and community involvement. This article differs from the present study in that it focuses solely on challenges and opportunities without analyzing educational systems.

Rahimi's paper (1396a [2018 A.D.]), "The Role of Islamic Theology in Shaping Educational Policy in Afghanistan", investigates the role of Islamic theology on the development of educational policy in Afghanistan. The main conclusion emphasizes understanding Islamic theology's role in educational policy formulation and implementation, although the study covers a rather short time frame.

In the article "Theology and National Identity in Afghanistan",

Wardak (2019) gives a policy analysis of the role of theology in shaping Afghanistan's national identity, focusing on how theology and national identity interact in complicated ways within educational policy; it mainly discusses current policy in the field of theology; temporal and analytical differences are presented in comparison with this study.

Overall, these reviewed articles discuss implications of theology education on educational policies in Islamic countries, especially Afghanistan, and allow drawing the following conclusions:

**2. 1. The Pivotal Position of Theology Education:** The education in theology has been identified as a crucial ingredient in the formulation of educational policies. Theology and beliefs have a direct impact on curriculum design, teaching methods, and educational objectives.

**2. 2. Balanced Approach:** The inclusion of theological principles in new educational methods, with an emphasis on the improvement of the quality of education and answering the felt needs of society. With this approach, a good balance will be achieved between religious values and contemporary educational requirements.

**2. 3. The Contribution to National Identity and Social Cohesion:** Education of theology contributes to strengthening the feeling of national identity and cultural preservation. Religious literacy, in enhancing tolerance, peaceful existence, and social cohesion within Afghanistan, is pursued within nations.

**2. 4. Comparing and Contrasting:** The articles also undertake a comparative analysis of theology in Islamic countries to show how the same religious teachings have an impact on policies and actual practices across these countries.

These works illustrate that theology education not only forms educational policy, but also may act as a significant factor in social and cultural development of Islamic countries, especially Afghanistan. A basic difference in this paper is that no systematic review of the last fifty years of government systems has been done together in their educational systems. Furthermore, this research explores the teaching of theology as a tool used by governments to gain and remain in power (Shams, 2023).

### **3. Theology and Educational System in Afghanistan**

Theology is a collection of texts related to Islam, which includes curriculum, books related to Islamic concepts, teachers who teach religion, and teachings of Islamic religions. The word "theology" in this article refers to the concepts and texts related to the Sunni faiths, especially the Hanafi faith, which has been taught in schools and religious schools of the Afghan educational system during the last 50 years. Whenever we refer to the theology of texts and concepts related to other belief and faiths, especially the Shia faith, we use the word Shia.

The political development of Afghanistan is divided into two distinct periods in terms of political orientations and its approach to new issues. The first one is before 1921, when the governments were completely religious and the theology-based educational system constituted the basis for all educational and professional activities. The second era refers to the after 1921 time period, when the governments sometimes distanced themselves from religion and introduced modern concepts into the country's educational system (Arefi, 1393 [2014 A.D.], pp. 2-4). However, during the different periods of the monarchy in Afghanistan, the teaching of theology

has played an important role in the educational system of this country. During the Shahi period, considering the social and political situation of Afghanistan, theology was recognized as one of the main pillars of education (ibid., 8). Regarding the teaching of theology in the schools of the Sultanate period, we can distinguish four periods, namely the period of Amanullah Khan: Modernization of the educational system (1928-1921) (Ahmadinejad, 1373 [1994 A.D.], p. 172; Azizi, 2017, p. 345); the period of Habibullah Kalkani: Islamizing the educational system (1928-1929) (Fayaz, 1387[2009 A.D.], p. 45); the period of Nader Shah: traditional educational system (1929-1933) (Fayaz, 1387 [2009 A.D.], p. 45); And the period of Zahir Shah: attention to contemporary sciences (1933-1973). In these periods, although efforts were made to develop modern education, significant traces of theology could still be seen in the educational system. Religious schools continued to operate and many people wanted to study theology. This shows the importance of religious culture in Afghan society (Farhang, 1374 [1996 A.D.], p. 78). According to the above-mentioned words, the educational system in Afghanistan consists of schools that are established under the supervision of the government and at the expense of the government, which have a regular curriculum consisting of theology along with modern sciences (Mathematics, physics, chemistry, ...) Students aged 7 and older enter into a the 12-year educational system (1-6 years of primary, 7- 9 years of secondary school and 10-12 years of high school). Therefore, when we use the word schools, we refer to these 12 years of school. However, when we use the word “religious schools”, we refer to schools that are dedicated to theological education. Since theology has played an important role in the life and education policy of Afghan people, it has sometimes received the attention and support of the people and the



government, while at other times, it has been completely removed from the educational system.

### **3. 1. Elimination of Theology from the Educational System during the Communist Era (1973-1992)**

The removal of theology from Afghanistan's educational system has a long history. It can be traced back to the rise of communist government after the decline of capitalism following World War I (1914–1918) and the emergence of bourgeois revolutions in many countries. During this period, Afghanistan's kings, who ruled under British support, were gradually influenced by revolutions in other countries and the weakening of global imperialism (Kakar & Hasan, 2024).

After World War II (1945–1948), imperialism further weakened, and communism expanded. Its ideologies, advocating justice and equality, gained acceptance among the Afghan people, who had long been exploited. Consequently, socialism received popular support, and communist ideas spread throughout Afghanistan via parties affiliated with the former Soviet Union (Afaq, 2018, pp. 1–5).

In this context, with the emergence of communism in Afghanistan, those advocating modernization and reform embraced communist ideologies. However, the only group and ideology that could not adapt to communism were the clergy and Islamic scholars. This was because communist ideology had its own framework, within which there was no place for Islam.

The Democratic Party, in the same context, introduced ideals and slogans in the field of education, stating: “One of our most

important duties is to train workers with a spirit of love for the homeland, national unity, patriotism, loyalty to the progressive ideas of our time, and international solidarity, while being uncompromising against the remnants of feudalism and bourgeois and nationalist ideologies. Our revolutionary party and state place great importance on the activities of individuals in the fields of education, literature, and art and will continuously strive to improve the conditions for their work, which holds fundamental importance for the present and future generations of the country” (Kamgar, 2008, pp. 99–101). In this statement by the People’s Democratic Party, theology education is not mentioned anywhere.

During the Communist era, teachers and students were forced to serve the Party, and anyone who disobeyed was imprisoned. Teachers and students from the theology departments protested against the Soviet occupation and anti-religious policies on multiple occasions. These protests were met with severe repression, resulting in many clerics being killed and a significant number imprisoned. During this period, the prisons were filled with clerics and opponents of communization (Kamgar, 2008, pp. 99–101).

In 1940, the new Communist constitution addressed education in Articles 24, 26, and Clause 5 of Article 29. Subsequently, on December 18, 1981, the Council of Ministers of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan approved the secondary and general education charter, following the constitutional declaration of the state’s education policy. Notably, Articles 2 and 3 of this charter explicitly aligned Afghan educational objectives with ideological goals:

**Article 2, Clause 2:** Educate the youth with a revolutionary and patriotic spirit, ensuring active and informed participation in social transformations and defense of these changes, loyalty to the

principles of the Democratic Party of Afghanistan, and readiness to defend the homeland and revolution's achievements.

**Article 2, Clause 3:** Prepare individuals to build the new democratic society and train students for professional and social roles, nurturing democratic awareness and active social-political engagement.

**Article 3:** Link the education process to building a democratic society, instilling students with respect for ethical norms, national unity, patriotism, loyalty to ideals of social progress, and international solidarity (Amini, (1391 [2012 A.D.]), p. 131).

The governing party's ideology shaped these objectives, which were designed to promote its philosophical agenda. Authorities instructed administrators, bureaucrats, and educators to follow this mandate. For example, the school charter's Article 40, Clause 1, specified that educators should "provide students with a robust scientific foundation, cultivate a scientific perspective, and improve students' societal abilities" (Andishmand, 2011, p. 87).

During his speech at the inaugural educators' assembly in June 1359 AH, Democratic Party leader Babrak Karmal underscored the teacher's responsibility to enlighten students about the aims of Afghanistan's national and democratic revolution (referring to the 1978 communist takeover). He urged educators to cultivate in their students a sense of patriotism, affection for the people and country, humanitarianism, and global solidarity. Simultaneously, Karmal emphasized the importance of fostering an unwavering opposition to reactionary ideologies, the philosophies of Afghanistan's adversaries, and the mindset of exploitative and oppressive social classes (Amini, (1391 [2012 A.D.]), p. 141). Compared to practical education models, this approach to teaching was highly ideological,

servicing the Party rather than students' educational needs or theological studies.

At every educational level, including universities, the main objective was to propagate the governing party's ideology. The administration aimed to educate a generation well-versed in Marxist principles and committed to its beliefs, with the intention of positioning them in leadership roles across the nation. To accomplish this, alongside extensive domestic ideological training, numerous students were annually dispatched to the Soviet Union and Eastern European socialist countries for advanced studies (Kamgar, 2008, p. 100).

In 1979, Hafizullah Amin addressed Afghan students studying in the Soviet Union, encouraging them to absorb all knowledge from their "Soviet brothers". Likewise, in 1980, Babrak Karmal told Afghan students in the USSR that "the pulsating hearts of your family members eagerly anticipate your triumphant return, having acquired Soviet expertise, education, and transformed into new Soviet individuals devoted to Afghanistan"(Amini, 2012, p. 141).

Communism, rooted in the principles of Marxist ideology, left no place for theology, focusing instead on achieving Marxist goals. Article 28 of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan's constitution stated: "All Afghan citizens are equal before the law. All Afghanistan, regardless of race, nationality, tribe, language, gender, residence, religion, education, ancestry, wealth, and social status, have equal rights and duties" (Ministry of Justice, 2017, p. 250). All goals, laws, and educational programs of the Communist era excluded theology, which was confined to a few small, limited religious schools under strict supervision.

### 3. 2. Theology Education and Textbooks in the Communist Era

During the initial phase of communist governance, a progressive transformation sought to supplant the Afghan educational framework with that of the Soviet Union, resulting in curricular modifications. For example, English and German were eliminated from secondary school programs and substituted with Russian. Dedicated Afghan-Soviet friendship spaces were established in numerous educational institutions. Educators were officially instructed by the Democratic Party to foster Afghan-Soviet relations.

This new educational approach replaced the French-inspired subjects and academic structure with a Soviet system emphasizing Marxist-Leninist ideology in sociopolitical contexts. Soviet history became part of the school curriculum, including a course titled "The New History of Afghanistan", which portrayed Afghanistan's 1919 independence as a consequence of Russia's 1917 October Revolution. Pupils were informed that Afghanistan's liberation from British control would have been unattainable without the Russian revolution's success.

The curriculum also incorporated a course called "The Revolutionary Movement of the Working Class". University students were required to study Marxist-Leninist theory, scientific sociology, and dialectical materialism. Instruction was conducted in various languages, including Uzbek, Turkmen, and Baluchi, with textbooks published in these languages alongside Persian and Pashto. The primary objective of the "Khalq" (People) and "Parcham" (Flag) political factions was to extend their ideological influence throughout the Afghan society, with minimal recognition of ethnic or linguistic diversity due to their adherence to Marxist principles.

During this time period, religious schools (madrassas) were condensed to a four-year program. Eighth-grade students from secular schools could enroll in these state-run religious institutions, where they studied a limited range of religious subjects such as the Qur'an, jurisprudence, grammar, phonetics, Arabic, and logic. Female students also had access to education, with efforts to expand literacy initiatives across provinces, districts, and rural areas (Ministry of Education of Afghanistan, 1988). The communist government placed less emphasis on ethnic affiliations, instead prioritizing ideological alignment with Marxist values in its hiring policies.

Certainly, the religious schools active during this period were very limited, and those that remained operational were located in remote areas, largely due to the government's tolerance. When reviewing the government-issued textbooks of this era, it can be definitively stated that theology was removed from the educational system of this period (Kamgar, 2008, p. 124).

The subjects taught from grades seven to twelve in public and government schools during this time included:

1. General definition of political science;
2. Social and economic structure of society;
3. Socialism and its victories worldwide;
4. Class and class struggle;
5. Imperialism and the exploitative system;
6. Transitional movements of the working class;
7. Socialist revolution;
8. History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union;
9. How public ownership can become a source of collective production;
10. Communism as the highest stage of socialism;

11. State and revolution;
12. The just war of the socialist bloc and the unjust war of the Western bloc;
13. Maoism and its deviations from the perspective of scientific socialism;
14. History of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan;
15. History of Afghan-Soviet friendship (Niazi, 1989, pp. 137–138).

Among the listed subjects, not a single one is religious; instead, all are purely rooted in the socialist ideology.

### **3. 3. Theology Education in the Communist Era**

The communist government (1978-1992) brought significant changes to Afghanistan's social, political, and cultural fabric. One of the key transformations involved the adoption of a materialist ideology that limited theology education, especially for girls. Through secularization policies, the communist government sought to marginalize religion's influence on the society by banning theology education in state schools and placing strict oversight on private religious schools.

These directly affected girls' access to theology education for several reasons:

1. Combating religion as a rival ideology.
2. Emphasizing modern scientific education.
3. Gender discrimination: Although the communist government advocated for gender equality, gender-based discrimination against women persisted. Theology

education for girls, which was already limited, received even less attention.

The limitations on faith-based education intensified students' religious consciousness and undermined their ties to spiritual principles. As religious topics were eliminated from curricula, numerous female students experienced a decline in their spiritual identity, resulting in identity-related issues and decreased engagement in faith-based practices.

Additionally, due to a lack of sufficient awareness about religious matters, the participation of girls in religious activities decreased. It is worth noting that communists were not opposed to women's participation in education; in fact, they strongly supported gender equality. However, their disregard for the prevailing culture and traditions in Afghanistan at the time, combined with their pursuit of communist policies, marginalized women and girls.

Girls and women, who in the traditional culture were only allowed to receive theology education, were now deprived of that. This deprivation, however, was imposed by parents and the community, as they believed that women and girls, who were considered as the honor of their families, should not study in communist schools (Andishmand, 2011, p. 87).

Although there were no barriers to female education, the religious influence that had traditionally constrained girls' schooling was considerably reduced. In rural primary schools, students wore traditional attires: boys donned shirts and pants, while girls wore shirts, pants, and scarves. Urban school girls sported shirt-pants combinations or long socks without scarves. At the university level, female students were dressed in white shirts with red collars, black skirts, and long white socks.



After the collapse of the communist regime, opportunities for reviving theology education improved, but these changes brought new obstacles along with them. The disregard of Afghanistan's communist governments for the religious and cultural values of the people led to the emergence of a form of extremism and anti-communist sentiment among the general population. This resulted in intense competition between the clergy and the communists, ultimately leading to uprisings by opposing groups under the banners of Mujahideen and Taliban against the communists. These groups seized power and drove Afghanistan into civil war.

#### **4. Islamization of the Education System under the Mujahideen and Taliban (1992-2001)**

The political groups and parties, funded by various countries such as the United States, managed to overthrow the communist government after years of war and living in the mountains. As a result, in a political gathering, the parties and Mujahideen elected Burhanuddin Rabbani, the leader of the Jamiat-e-Islami Party of Afghanistan, as the president of Afghanistan (Ghafari, 1398 [2020 A.D.], pp. 1–3).

During his tenure, President Rabbani stressed the Islamic government's dedication to offering complimentary education to all young people in the nation. He underscored the significance of educational progress in safeguarding the Islamic Revolution's accomplishments and suggested revamping the curriculum to align with Islamic tenets and contemporary societal needs. This initiative involved establishing literacy centers in urban and rural areas, often utilizing religious institutions and mosques, to tackle illiteracy and promote Islamic learning. As a result, subjects such as Hadith,

Quranic interpretation (Tafsir), Islamic beliefs, Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), Islamic perspective, and Arabic grammar became essential components of the educational program in elementary, middle, and high schools.

Nevertheless, the Islamic administration soon encountered substantial obstacles, particularly with the eruption of internal strife. The civil conflict, previously confined to provinces, expanded to Kabul following the communist regime's collapse. Numerous educational facilities were transformed into military strongholds, and access to education was severely restricted due to the instability. According to a 1995 report from the Ministry of Education, roughly 60% of educational institutions in Kabul and approximately 70% in other provinces were demolished as a consequence of the warfare.

#### **4. 1. Taliban's Rise and the Educational System in Afghanistan**

The Taliban, a political movement that gained prominence in 1994, can be categorized into three distinct generations spanning from 1979 to the present. The initial generation (1979-1992) emerged during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, with many future Taliban members participating in the armed resistance, driven by their theology education. After the Soviet withdrawal, numerous individuals resumed their theological studies, including Taliban founder Mullah Omar, who set aside his weapons to focus on religious pursuits with his associates.

The second generation (1994-2001) arose in response to the power struggles among Mujahideen factions, which resulted in internal conflicts and widespread destruction of Afghanistan's infrastructure. Amid the chaos and lawlessness, the Taliban

emerged, promising to restore order. They successfully established the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" in 1996, opting for an "Emirate" rather than a republic. In line with their interpretation of Islamic governance, they designated their leader as "Amir al-Mu'minin" (Commander of the Faithful People) instead of president.

The third phase (2001-present) began when U.S. and allied forces ousted the Taliban from power. Despite this setback, the group regrouped in remote areas and eventually reclaimed control in 2021, as Afghanistan grappled with governance issues.

#### **4. 2. Religious Textbooks and Education during the Radical Islamist Period (Mujahideen and Taliban)**

During the Mujahideen and early Taliban periods, the educational curriculum was predominantly religious and difficult for young learners to comprehend. Textbooks often contained complex Islamic jurisprudence and theology with minimal simplification, making them challenging for both students and educators. This conservative educational approach persisted into the initial years of the post-Taliban Republic under President Karzai's leadership.

The internal conflicts' destructive impact led to an educational system that was heavily reliant on religious content, lacking a structured or modernized curriculum. While the Mujahideen did not establish formal schools in Afghanistan, the Islamic Alliance for the Mujahideen operated approximately 400 schools in exile, serving around 50,000 students.

The Taliban-era curriculum closely resembled that of Pakistani religious schools, with an almost exclusive focus on subjects such

as Hadith, Tafsir, Islamic beliefs, Fiqh, and Islamic perspective, all grounded in the Deobandi tradition. Contemporary subjects and modern sciences were virtually nonexistent in this educational framework (Monsif, 1946, pp. 67–68).

One of the reasons for which both Mujahideen and Taliban rejected modern sciences and prohibited their teaching in schools was that they needed soldiers with an Islamic ideology. In other words, to sustain their rule, they needed to promote religious and theological books. Furthermore, they viewed modern sciences as belonging to the West, and therefore, they considered teaching modern sciences to be a form of Westernization.

#### **4. 3. Theology during the Mujahideen and Taliban Eras**

During the rule of the Mujahideen and Taliban, educational opportunities for Afghan girls, particularly in the field of theology, were severely restricted. Factors such as internal conflicts, rigid religious interpretations, and discriminatory government policies contributed to the denial of education rights for girls (Rashid, 1362 [1983 A.D.], p. 74). These restrictions peaked during the Taliban era, where education for girls at all levels was completely banned. This situation led to a sharp decline in literacy rates, weakened women's social status, and ultimately delayed Afghanistan's development (Kabul, 1978, p. 49). Additional factors such as patriarchy, war and insecurity, and financial resource shortages also exacerbated this educational crisis. Overall, these two historical periods demonstrate how ideological and political interpretations of religion and culture can drastically impact the rights and opportunities of half of the population in a country (Noori, 1360 [1981 A.D.], p. 9). Under both the Mujahideen and Taliban

regimes, religious schools were given more value than modern schools, with most students being boys. According to dominant interpretations, Islam prohibits the joint education of boys and girls, advocating separate educational institutions for them. Female students were required to wear burqas and long black garments (Asghari, 1390 [2011 A.D.], p. 179). However, the Islamic perspective does not necessarily approve of this belief. This viewpoint comes from the Deobandi school in Pakistan, where most of the Taliban received theology education during the communist era. It is a narrow-minded perspective regarding the education of women, girls, and modern sciences (Simbar & Khavari, 2023, pp. 301–302).

Under Taliban rule, Afghanistan became the center of global extremism. As a result, in 2001, two planes crashed into the Twin Towers in the United States, causing the deaths of thousands of Americans. This act, carried out by al-Qaeda and the Taliban, led the United States to take action against the Taliban. As a result in 2001, the Taliban were overthrown, and a transitional government led by Hamid Karzai, with the support of the United States and Europe, came to power.

#### **4. 4. Liberalization of Theology during the Republic Era**

From 2001 to 2020, during Afghanistan's Republic era, the teaching of theology underwent significant changes, influenced by political and social shifts. This period, which began after the Taliban's downfall, saw international efforts to reconstruct the country, bringing both opportunities and obstacles in theology education.

A notable achievement was the creation of a new constitution that addressed both contemporary and theology education for all Afghan citizens without bias (Danish, 2010, p. 87). The Republic's constitution granted all citizens human and national rights and duties, with education being a key right. Article 45 required the government to create and implement a standardized educational curriculum rooted in theology, national culture, and scientific principles, incorporating religious subjects that aligned with Afghanistan's various Islamic denominations.

Furthermore, Article 17 highlighted the government's responsibility to advance education across all levels, enhance religious instruction, and improve the state of mosques, schools, and religious institutions (Ministry of Justice, 2017).

During the Republic era, theology education had the following features:

#### **4. 5. Post-Taliban Changes**

After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, the new Afghan government and the international community sought to improve the educational system. Traditional religious schools (madrassas) were recognized and some began incorporating modern subjects alongside theology (UNESCO, 2015).

#### **4. 6. Educational Programs**

Some religious schools started integrating modern educational programs, offering general subjects in addition to Islamic studies. This approach helped students gain both religious principles and

modern life skills (World Bank Group, 2018). Considering Afghanistan's diverse religious landscape and the need for inclusive and culturally sensitive educational methods, a nuanced approach to incorporating theological perspectives into educational policies was essential (Kakar, 2017, p. 45).

#### **4. 7. Role of International Organizations**

International organizations, including NGOs and development programs, provided financial and educational resources to religious schools. These organizations also aimed to enhance the quality of education and train teachers (USAID, 2019).

Despite progress, theology education faced challenges. Many religious schools remained influenced by traditionalist views, with some continuing extremist teachings. Security crises and political instability also negatively affected the educational process (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Efforts were made to improve women's access to theology education, with some schools exclusively for girls being established, allowing them to continue Islamic studies (UN Women, 2020).

Overall, theology education in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2020 experienced many challenges and opportunities, profoundly impacting society.

#### **5. Religious Textbooks during the Republic Era**

The curriculum and textbooks of the Republic era were designed to address new social issues and values, such as participation in elections, human rights, women's and children's rights, peace, non-

violence, and involvement in government and social activities (Hakimi, 1398 [2020 A.D.], p. 89).

The Republic era in Afghanistan, from 2001 to 2020, marked significant political, social, economic, and cultural transformations following the fall of the Taliban and support from the global community. Efforts to rebuild and improve Afghanistan's educational system included re-establishing schools and universities, which began offering both religious and secular subjects. This granted the younger generation access to academic and religious resources (Ahmadi, 2019, p. 15). Scholars and academics authored various books on Islamic jurisprudence, Quranic interpretation, Hadith, and Islamic ethics (Hosseini, 1398 [2020 A.D.], p. 23). These works aimed to address contemporary societal needs while, bridging Islamic principles with modern challenges.

Books published during this era focused on presenting theology education in a comprehensible and practical way for the younger generation (Noori, 1360 [1981 A.D.], p. 45). Topics such as human rights, women's rights, and social issues were explored within the framework of theology education. Religious scholars played a critical role in shaping public opinion and guiding the society by organizing conferences and discussions on various topics, striving to align theology educations with societal needs. Despite significant progress, challenges persisted, as extremist groups attempted to maintain their influence by promoting specific interpretations of Islam, hindering the modernization of theology (Sohrab, 2021, p. 10). Additionally, security and political instability adversely affected education and book publishing.

International support for education in Afghanistan, particularly in theology, increased access to credible academic resources and



books (Kazemi, 1394 [2016 A.D.], p. 57). Universities and educational institutions, backed by international organizations, produced scientific content and strengthened global cooperation. Under the supervision of the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan, religious schools were expanded within the country to prevent extremism. Additionally, theology subjects were introduced as replacements for other subjects in government schools (Popal, 2017, p. 2).

The Republic era provided numerous opportunities for the revival of theology. Despite challenges, the efforts in authoring and publishing religious books demonstrated the society's determination to advance in knowledge and learning (Mahmoodi, 2019, p. 21). These developments contributed to reinforcing the Islamic and cultural identity of society, steering the younger generation towards awareness and knowledge.

In the Republic period, education was considered a universal entitlement. The administration sought to incorporate liberal democratic principles into the curriculum. It is important to recognize, however, that Afghanistan was a fusion of republicanism and Islam, as explicitly stated in the constitution's Article 4. The educational material, as defined by the governing system, was designed to mold individuals' political perspectives, preparing them to embrace the current political framework. While people might have varying opinions on its application, they generally concurred on the regime's core values and legitimacy. For example, those raised under a particular ideological framework would never question the fundamental tenets of that ideology, even if they held differing views on its implementation.

### 5. 1. Theology Education during the Republic Era

During Afghanistan's Republic era (2001-2020), the religious instruction of female students was a nuanced and intricate matter, shaped by various cultural, societal, and governmental influences. In the wake of the Taliban's ousting in 2001, considerable initiatives were undertaken to enhance the educational landscape, with a particular focus on girls' schooling. Nevertheless, the realm of theology education for female students continued to encounter numerous obstacles (Easar et al., 2023).

Despite the initiatives undertaken, many girls in rural and remote areas lacked access to schools. This issue was particularly relevant to religious schools, which were mostly concentrated in urban areas (Ahmadi, 2019). Families, especially in traditional regions, often held conservative views regarding girls' education. In some cases, they preferred their daughters to engage in household chores rather than pursuing formal education (Zare, 2017).

Some religious schools attempted to design their curricula to include both theology and general subjects. This approach enabled girls to acquire religious knowledge while simultaneously gaining essential skills for everyday life (Hosseini, 1398 [2020 A.D.]). Educating girls in theology could have positive social impacts, as those who received such education often served as role models for other girls in the community and contributed to the promotion of positive values (Mahmoodi, 2019).

On March 14, 2017, the Afghan Ministry of Education announced new dress code specifications for female students. Previously, girls in public schools wore black clothing with a white scarf. The Ministry's new directive stated that the uniform for girls up to the sixth grade would be blue and knee-length. For girls in

grades six to twelve, the uniform would be steel-colored and ankle-length (Khavari, 2024). The scarf (rusari) for female students would remain white. The shorter uniform for elementary school girls and the longer attire for secondary and high school students were designed in accordance with Islamic values, ensuring comfort for their commute (Mahmoodi, 2019).

This policy shift aimed to accommodate the cultural and religious norms of the Afghan society, while promoting a more inclusive approach to girls' education. Despite these efforts, challenges in providing access to quality education, especially in theology for girls, persisted throughout the Republic era (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Policies on Theological Education Over the Last 100 Years

No.	Era	Policies on Theological Education
1	Communist Era	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan aligned its educational goals with Marxist-Leninist ideology, focusing on training a skilled workforce loyal to the party with an internationalist spirit. During this time, theology education was marginalized, with an emphasis on modern sciences and party ideology.</li><li>• The new constitution and school charters defined educational objectives based on party principles. Theology were minimized to a few subjects, while Russian was introduced as a second language, and Marxist courses became central in schools.</li><li>• The government aimed to train specialists loyal to party ideology by sending students to the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries. The primary goal was to spread the party's ideology and foster a new generation with Marxist thinking.</li><li>• During this era, girls' education also expanded, but with a secular focus to prepare them for the new society's workforce.</li><li>• Theology education for girls was minimal, prioritizing modern sciences and party ideology. As a result, girls and women were unable to benefit from it either; this was because the people of Afghanistan held traditional and religious views and were unwilling to send their daughters to</li></ul>

No.	Era	Policies on Theological Education
		<p>government or religious schools. This issue led to the spread of illiteracy among women in Afghanistan, preventing them from educating their own children. Consequently, they sent their young children to religious schools for upbringing. This situation led to many children being exploited by religious schools in Pakistan, contributing to the spread of extremism in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.</p>
2	<b>Mujahideen &amp; Taliban</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After the fall of the communist regime, President Rabbani emphasized providing free education for all and Islamizing the educational system. However, internal conflicts and insecurity, especially in Kabul, led to widespread destruction of schools and educational infrastructure.</li> <li>• Taliban, during their first rule (1994-2001), came to power with promises of security and stability, shaping the educational system based on their interpretations of Islam. Theology education took precedence over other subjects, and girls' schools were shut down.</li> <li>• During this period, theology education was conducted under the supervision of schools in Pakistan, and it was generally based on the viewpoints and teachings of Sunni Islam (Hanafi sect).</li> </ul>
3	<b>Republic Era</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After the fall of the Taliban, efforts were made to rebuild Afghanistan's education system, including theological education within the framework of the new constitution, which emphasized equal rights for all citizens. The constitution guaranteed the right to education for everyone and emphasized curriculum development based on Islamic principles and national culture.</li> <li>• Religious schools were officially recognized, with some modernizing their curricula by integrating general subjects. International organizations also supported these schools. However, challenges such as traditional mindsets in some schools, insecurity, and political instability negatively impacted educational progress.</li> <li>• Efforts were made to adapt textbooks to meet the needs of modern society, addressing topics such as human rights and women's rights within theology education.</li> <li>• During this period, efforts were made to conduct religious teachings within Afghanistan in order to prevent extremism and the exploitation of the Deobandi school in Pakistan.</li> <li>• Despite challenges, there was also a focus on providing theology education for girls, with some schools being established specifically for this purpose.</li> </ul>

Source: Author's Conclusion Based on Data from Literature Review

This table provides an overview of how theological education policies in Afghanistan have evolved over the past century, reflecting the nation's shifting political and ideological landscapes.

## 6. Conclusion

Examining The analysis of the developments in the education of theology in Afghanistan from 1973 to 2021 reveals that this field has always been influenced by a complex mix of political, social, cultural, and ideological factors. The decline of global imperialism and the rise of global socialism during World War I and II, along with the dependency of Afghanistan's governments before 1994 AD on global imperialism, led to the introduction of socialism in Afghanistan, making socialist ideology a major competitor to religious and theological concepts. The people of Afghanistan, suffering from social, economic, and cultural injustices, embraced the justice-oriented and universally equal slogans of socialism, promoting anti-religious sentiments within the government and ruling party. This anti-religious sentiment and the removal of theology from the educational system continued until 1992, leading to widespread dissatisfaction among many people in Afghanistan, especially the clergy. As a result, Islamic parties and groups emerged across Afghanistan with different interpretations of religion, but with the sole goal of overthrowing the communists. This led to intense internal and external conflicts.

During the Mujahideen and Taliban eras, no attention was given to modern sciences or the education of women and girls. Most students received theology education in Pakistan, far from their parents. This practice led to Afghanistan being regarded as the global center of terrorism and a safe haven for terrorists by the year 2000. The extremist interpretations of religion by the Taliban and

Mujahideen prompted the world to seek their elimination, resulting in the downfall of the Taliban in 2001 and the establishment of a republican government in Afghanistan.

Significant fluctuations in the position, content, and methods of teaching and applying theology have been observed over the last fifty years, directly impacting Afghanistan's national identity as well as social and cultural development. Key findings of this research illustrate the development and transformation of the educational system, which evolved from traditional religious schools to the establishment of modern schools and universities, experiencing remarkable changes. Additionally, the ongoing conflict between tradition and modernity in efforts to integrate theology education with modernization has consistently faced challenges. The policies of various governments have directly influenced the position and content of theology education, with ideologies such as nationalism, communism, and Islamism shaping the teaching, content, and application of theology. Furthermore, the role of women in theology education has always been a subject of discussion, with gender-based limitations and discrimination affecting this field. Internal wars and political instability have severely impacted the educational infrastructure as well as the quality of theology education. Overall, it can be said that the education of theology in Afghanistan, as an essential tool for shaping national and social identity, the formation of governments, and uprisings, has consistently been subject to various transformations and challenges.

## **7. Recommendations**

A comprehensive strategy is advised to improve theological education in Afghanistan. This approach suggests blending

theological studies with contemporary scientific understanding and crafting a well-rounded curriculum that addresses societal requirements. Incorporating cutting-edge technology can enhance the educational experience, while establishing a secure and nurturing learning environment is vital, especially for female students. As emphasized by Islamic Scholars, fostering gender equality is essential for encouraging women's involvement in the society (Larijany, 2023; Tabei & Zarean, 2021). Teacher training should focus on professional development; at the same time, fostering interfaith dialogue can promote tolerance and understanding among diverse religious communities. These measures aim to create a more inclusive, progressive, and relevant theological education system.

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