

Nasser Khosro, the Muslim scholastic Marodsilton Muborakshoeva¹

Based on the analyses of Nasser Khosro's major works and empirical evidence from field work, this paper explores the extent to which the compositions of this great Muslim sage fall within the broader characteristics of scholasticism and how his scholasticism is understood, employed and practiced among the people of Badakhshan, Tajikistan. To achieve these aims, first of all this paper argues that the definition of scholasticism, as understood in its Latin or European context, is not very accommodating when reading Nasser Khosro's works. The definitions with limited applications and understandings have been challenged by scholars such as Cabezon (1994, 1998), Madegan (1998), Strauss (2013b), etc, which gives us confidence to examine Nasser Khosro's work in light of new developments in the field. Leo Strauss assertion with regard to Islamic and Jewish philosophy perhaps should be a starting point to explore Islamic scholasticism with its various versions in its own right. Strauss

argued that medieval Islamic and Jewish philosophy should not be seen as 'counterparts of Christian scholasticism' (in Parens, 2012). Since Christian scholasticism was extensively studied, it became tempting for modern scholars of Islamic and Jewish thought 'to draw paradigms and methods of interpretations from Christian scholarship on scholasticism' (Parens, 2012:204). The exploration of Buddhist scholasticism, for instance, led Jose Ignacio Cabezon (1998) to be critical of the narrow definition of scholasticism and propose that scholasticism needs to be seen as a comparative and analytical category. I argued elsewhere that the narrow definitions limit the conceptual applicability of scholasticism in different traditions as well as within one tradition, for instance in Islam, scholasticism should be explored in its various forms (Muborakshoeva, 2013b).

If one of very basic definitions of scholasticism is 'a medieval philosophy, or more accurately, a method of learning taught by academics of medieval universities'

(http://www.philosophybasics.com/movements_scholasticism.), then we have to agree that methods of teaching and learning in medieval cultures and civilisations shared some similarities and had differences. Methods of learning for some of these cultures may have taken some roots from the ancient Greeks and for some of them it may not have been the case. Makdisi claims that Muslim scholastics were predecessors to the Latin ones. In Islamic cultures, a Muslim layman would put a question (*mustafti*) to a jurist consult (*mufti*) asking for a response or legal opinion (*fatwa*) and then the jurist had to research the answer using *ijtihad* (using one's efforts to its limit). The Muslim scholars therefore perfected the art of teaching and learning and developed institutions such as *madrasahs* and other establishments for higher learning. Later on we see the equivalents of *faqih*, *mufti*, and *mudarris*, appearing in the Christian West as *magister*, *professor* and *doctor* for each title respectively (Makdisi, 1989). Thus the Christian West not only borrowed methodological and pedagogical tools from Muslims but also structures of higher educational institutions such as colleges (Makdisi, 1991), which they elaborated on further and developed these establishments into universities (Muborakshoeva, 2013a). Muslims, on the other hand did not develop colleges into universities and places for higher learning remained diverse and methods of teaching and learning continued to be largely flexible and adaptable to the needs of different groups and learners (Ibid). Therefore, it makes sense not only to explore the affinity between the Muslim and Christian scholastics, but also to examine how each tradition then developed scholarship in its own unique ways. Exploring the works of Nasser Khosro, these similarities and uniqueness could be demonstrated rather comfortably.

Works composed by Nasser Khosro not only fall with the definition of Islamic scholasticism proposed by Madegan (1998) and almost perfectly match the broader characteristics of scholasticism identified by Cabezon (1998), but also have breadth and depth that enrich the notion and understanding of scholasticism further. Analysing at least three major works such as the *Jame ul- hikmatain*, *Kushoish wa*

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Rahoish, and Rawshanainama of Nasser Khosro, this research will shed light on the methods Nasser Khosro employed, which put him at par with other scholastics, but also will highlight the uniqueness of his approach. What is more, Nasser Khosro's work and heritage is still alive among the people of Iran, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Northern Areas of Pakistan and Eastern China, especially among the Ismaili Muslims of these areas. The empirical part of this paper, therefore, draws on the analyses of data collected via qualitative interviews and proposes that Nasser Khosro's scholasticism is understood, employed and practiced among the Ismaili Muslims to this day. I will closely examine the case of Ismaili Muslims in Badakhshan, Tajikistan. It is hoped that this paper will bring to light the usefulness of scholasticism as an analytical category in academia and in popular culture. Indeed it is the various educational tools employed since the medieval ages (such as questioning, commenting on and writing responses to the questions, debates, disputations, poetry, literature, art and calligraphy, music and dance) that conveyed the elaborate scholarships and philosophies to the ordinary people (Muborakshoeva, 2013a).

Key words: *Nasser Khosro, Islamic Scholasticism, educational tools, traditional education, methods of teaching and learning, Badakhshan, Tajikistan.*

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