

Madrassa Education and Fundamentalism in Pakistan

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Abstract

The western media has linked most of the madrassas in Pakistan with violence and terrorism. It is also considered by some people as a network of security for the people who are deprived. Social services are not provided to them by the state. The present paper seeks to find out whether Madrassa education in Pakistan has the ability in social, economic and political development of the state and what kinds of reforms are required in this direction. Additionally, the current madris in Pakistan are sometimes believed to be the nurseries, nurturing religious extremism. Nevertheless, the main aim behind the development of madrassas is to pursue basic Islamic awareness is not known. The teachers of madrassas are contented with the curriculum of madrassa as far as its main aims are concerned. The system of madrassa education is not preparing alumnae to contest in the current economic market. The paper shows that the system of education of madaris in Pakistan has always been peace loving. It is prejudicially accused of extremism. Therefore the main objective of this research is to comprehend the changing pattern of madris and the role of the Pakistani government to remodel them.

I. Introduction

“Madrassa” means traditional schools of Islamic teaching or places of religious knowledge in Arabic language whose main purpose is the preparation of Islamic scholars to lead the Ummah (American Heritage Dictionary of English language. 2005). All over the world, in these institutes of Islamic learning, generally, schooling is free along with accommodation and boarding facilities and religious education imparted is imparted according to a special curriculum without following the policies of the government. In modern usage “madrassa” has acquired negative meaning. Currently, these are considered by some people as centers of nurturing intolerance, divisiveness and violence. Unluckily, in Pakistan, the increase of Madrassas since 1977 has helped to divide the people into sectarian and militant groups.

The foundation of first madrassa was laid down in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SAW). The tradition is still prevalent since that time. Unluckily, this institution is to some extent in a miserable condition. True efforts are not been made to comprehend the true nature of madrassa, and the actual reason for its establishment and survival. By examining the status of madaris in the history of Islam it made it clear that its

successfulness was because of the strong sense of honor for knowledge in the Muslims as advised by the Holy Prophet of Allah.

It is an interesting fact that right from the time when it came into existence, madrassa has been innately linked with the policies, patronage, and activities of the state. Madrassa operated as allies of the Muslim state and delivered a vital role to assist the administrative activities in the early stage of Islam. Hence, the two units: state and madrassas have been sharing common history sine long. In history, madrassas were also established by Muslim rulers in the India. They even developed new curriculum, teaching methodologies and policies for education. Madaris delivered an effective role in the social organization in the subcontinent before the creation of Pakistan. It preserves, strengthens and communicates the tradition of religious teaching to new Muslim generation, to train them and provide firm religious and political leadership to them. This Islamic institution also played a significant part to revitalize the awareness of Islamic brotherhood, reproduce Muslim culture and transmit the real learning of Islam to the Muslims of subcontinent.

Status of Madrassa in Pakistan

Since the Pakistan's creation, the numbers of Madaris has been increasing gradually. Similarly, their role in politics has also increased. The total number of Madarassas in Pakistan at the time its creation was round about 245. It increased to 401 upto 1960. Furthermore, in 2001, the number of these institutions reached to 6,870. This number has gone across the limit of 50,000 till 2013. About 1.5 million students have taken admission in these Madrassas.

Madaris in Pakistan is regarded as non-government organizations providing free education to the people mostly along with boarding facilities according to specially designed curriculum. Education of religion is considered as the as important part of education along with the other educational system in Pakistan. Currently, three parallel educational systems are running in the country. These include the Government schools, private schools, and the Madaris. The madaris offers totally religious education to their students, while the public and private schools teach the subject of Islamyat as a part of their curriculum. Irrespective of the fact that madrassas are criticized by some people of the society, numerous among them keep on supporting them.

Curriculum of the Madaris in Pakistan

There are different schools of thoughts among the Muslims in Pakistan. They are Barelvi, Deobandi, Ahl-e Hadeeth, Jamat-i-Islami, and Shia school of thoughts. Each of them organized madris under different boards. These boards are in charge of their registration, syllabus and examinations. The detail is given below:

Wafaq-ul-Madaris-ul-Arabia: This Central board of Deobandi (Sunni) madaris was established in 1960 at Mulltan.

Tanzeem-ul-Madaris: This is Central board of Barelvi (Sunni) madaris. It was established in 1960 at Lahore.

Wafaq-ul-Madaris Shia: This is the board of Shia madaris. It was established at Lahore in 1959. Shia madrassas teach fiqah Jafariya while the other madris in Pakistan teaches fiqah Hanafi.

Rabita-ul-Madris-ul-Islamia: This board was established in 1983 at Lahore by Jamat-e-Islamia. Madrassas of all Islamic thoughts are recognized by it. Comparatively, more modern subjects are included in their curriculum.

Wafaq-ul-Madaris-ul-Salafia: This board was established at Faisalabad in 1955 by Ahl-i Hadith.

All the registered Madaris in Pakistan are supervised, controlled and monitored by their respective education boards. They have to decide scheme of study for all educational levels and frame rules for the registration of newly established madris. Each board also conducts examination and grant degrees and certificates.

The syllabus of almost all Islamic madaris follows the main standard and structure of Daras-e-Nizami. Except for that of the Shia, the courses of studies in almost all madaris are related to the philosophy of Hanafi fiqh. Subjects like grammar Quranic memorization, Arabic, Persian, theology, research in holy Quran, dar-ul-ifta, tableegh, syntax, etymology, munazrah, speechmaking, logic, philosophy, tib, fiqh, usul-I Fiqah, Hadeeth, Usool-e Hadeeth, Tafser and Usool-e Tafser are studied in these institutions and they are mostly based on Dars-i-Nizami. The detail of corresponding certificates and sanads issued by these madaris is given below:

*Hifz/Tajweel-wa-Quiraat/Ibtedayia, which is equal to the Primary level;
Mutawassita is equal to the Middle level of the government Schools;
Sanviya is equal to matric level of the government Schools; and
Sanaviya Khasa is equal to the HSSC.*

The students to get this degree/certificate have the option to continue their study in madaris for higher studies and they may join the formal sector for their education.

Madaris are generally run on the basis of charity. Mostly, the education is free in madaris. However, a nominal fee is charged in some madrassas. Currently, there are some small madaris in rural areas of Pakistan that provide free education and accommodation but the students have to collect foods as alms (wazifa) from the houses located in the neighboring area of that madrassa. In addition, there are some madaris in free boarding facilities are provided to the students without any cost.

The curriculum of the madaris is mostly distributed in two categories namely Ulum Aliya (sciences) and Ulum Aliyya (Arts). The primary group is composed of the Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, and Faqah. This group of courses is mandatory for the students to learn. The Secondary group of courses is somewhat flexible and is based on Arts. However, the methods adopted for teaching the subjects are quite boring and burdensome. The curriculum of Ulum Aliyya is based on traditional philosophical logic. Mostly the students of madrassas lack professional skills and modern knowledge. Resultantly, they are unable to properly participate in certain activities in the society. It requires teaching subjects like in madrassas to enable their students to adjust themselves in the modern society. The need for the integration of modern curriculum with the old one was felt by religious scholars like Allama Shibli Numani about a century ago. The effective learning of the whole curriculum of madrassa prepares the students only for the award of graduation degrees as a Molvi or Mulla at Mosque or Madrassa.

The teachers of every madrassa have a diverse qualification and knowledge. The staff members of some of the madaris do not meet the required standard while most of them appoint qualified teachers with exceptional teaching skills. The variation in curriculum along with differences in faculty may cause variation in quality. The working group on madrassas has proposed numerous reforms to bring into line education system of madaris in accordance with the requirements of the existing society. They also pointed out that administration of numerous madaris is unwilling to support the efforts to reform it. Any policy action that is taken by the government is conceived as risk to their freedom.

Reforms in Madrassa after 9/11

Madrassa education has been strongly criticized at international level since 9/11. General Pervez Musharraf took a step to bring reforms in madrassa education system. His policy proposed to modernize these institutions. The government of Pakistan tried to start the registration madrassas in June 2000. Only 4350 of the Madaris which is approximately one tenth of the total, agreed for registration. The remaining solely ignored the advice of the government. There was no incentive for registration and no penalty in case of refusal.

Indeed, in madrassas, reforms should be started. Nonetheless, each school of thought willing for these reforms has its own explanation and goals. US apprehended that Madaris promotes anti-American sentiments after the incident of 9/11 in 2001. Consequently, they embarked on a policy to bring reforms in Madaris. General Musharraf, who was the trusted supporter of America, took decision to handle this institution forcefully. His anti-Madrassa strategy, reportedly, was a blessing of America. Pakistan Madrassa Education (Establishment and Affiliation of Model Deeni Madaris) Board Ordinance (PMEBO) was promulgated during his reign and deliberations for development of strategies for the implementations of the rule were underway. Key attention was given to it during formulation of policies, specially the Education Sector Reforms (ESR) to reform madaris. To bring the curriculum of madaris in line with the general education system of Pakistan by including some modern subjects like science was among the stated ESR goals. Nevertheless, in 2007, Lal Masjid Operation and later on, in 2008, the resignation of Musharraf as President, proved to be severe setbacks to that effort. Though, the PPP Government led by Asif Ali Zardari retained the Madaris policy of Musharraf.

In September 2009, a new educational policy was proposed by the government. It was decided to establish, Under the Interior Ministry; a Madrassa Regulatory Authority for the regulation of the Madaris, a decision was taken to establish. Nonetheless, this offer to work under the Interior Ministry was overruled by the 'Ittehad Tanzemat-e-Madaris Pakistan' (ITMP). Instead, they suggested setting up the authority under education or Religious Affairs Ministry. The then government was successful in signing an agreement with the ITMP, in October 2010 to introduce modern subjects in madrassas in Ibtidayia and Sanayiya. Yet, after the endorsement of 18th Amendment, the matter of madrassa reforms has become more complicated. According to that amendment, the subject of Islamic education is now the issue of the provinces.

The role of Madrassas in Pakistan

Madrassas were established with the end to provide higher education, where Islamic law and Islamic philosophy were taught. Currently, in Pakistan, there are large numbers of madrassas. Most of the people send their children to madrassas because of immense poverty. Until 1970s, these madrassas have positive contribution towards the social and financial uplift of the people. When many madrassas involved themselves to produce Mujahids for war in Afghanistan; it resulted in the initiation of militarization in madrassas. Latterly, Madaris and Islamic militancy became similar words. These Madrassas developed on violent lines along with educating the masses due to the domestic policy of sectarian fragmentation of society started by President Zia-ul-Haq. In the Muslim world, Madaris offers traditional education. Whereas the states handled responsibility to fulfill the basic needs of the people. Hence there is two-fold education

system in Pakistan; the first one is that of madaris, and the second one providing modern education to the students to prepare them for modern societies and markets.

In the early stage, the basic cause of Islamic Fundamentalism was the provision of government funds to establish mosque schools (madrassas) in rural areas and small towns. Resultantly, militant religious organization grows rapidly. The Afghan war played the role of a catalyst in this social process during the reign of General Zia.

Large amount of funds were provided by the Arab world and America to Afghan Jihadi groups after the Afghan revolution. They also caught roots in Pakistan. As a result, lawlessness, sectarianism, fundamentalism, terrorism, and militancy started in the country. Highly trained and sophisticated militia committed all these acts in the name of Islam. The curriculum and textbooks of pre-Islamization era clearly distinguished the themes of Jihad and Shahadat. The post-1979 text-books and curricula openly praise Jihaad and Shahadat and encouraged scholars of madaris to become Mujahideen and embraced Shahadat.

The movement of Taliban was started with those mujahideens who were the students of the Madaris in Pakistan. Nevertheless, the allies of Madaris claim that most of them are benevolent Islamic institutions and have assisted in raising the ratio of education in the country. Refugees from Afghanistan and millions of poor Pakistanis would never have had to attain education if there would have no madrassas.

Social Role of Madaris

Madrassas are performing a key role to increase literacy rates in the country. They are developing religious awareness and educating the people through teaching and elucidation of Islamic laws by issuing Fatwas. They distribute their views on religious, political and social matters through their newsletters, and magazines. Large number of the scholars in Madrasas are children who memorize the Holy Quran. Dars-i-Nizami is taught in 8th class. From 1982 to 1987 about 371,905 children had read the Holy Quran without knowing its meaning (Nazerah). The award of Shahadat-I-Almiyah was got only by 45,691 students. Shahadat-I-Almiyah has been recognized as equivalent to master of Arabic or Islamic Studies by the University Grants Commission. Shahadat-I-Almiyah is the last degree and is equivalent to master of Islamic Studies or Arabic (Rahman 2000).

The role of Madaris in education of the society cannot be ignored. A deep-rooted educational framework is a necessary component of a socialized state. As it is playing a significant role in the progress of the people rather the whole society, so, it is of special importance for underdeveloped countries. As an alternative, Islamic education from madrasas has played a key role in the Islamic history in fulfilling the requirements of Muslim society as compared to the Western system of education. Though Madrasas are traditional Muslim educational schools in Pakistan, they are focal points in discussions on fundamentalism and extremism of society since Pakistan became American ally after 9/11.

Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism means to put stress on firm obedience to the fundamental principles of any set of beliefs. This term for the first time was used for a specific group of Christians who became eminent in USA in 19th Century. Between 1909 and 1915, they published a series of booklets known as "The Fundamentals: Testimony to the Truth". In the books, they made it clear what they thought to be the complete fundamental doctrines of Christianity.

Islamic fundamentalism is used for two different types of movements. The first one supports a coming back to the basic fundamentals of the religion. The second is similar to 'Ikhwan-ul Muslimoon' that came into existence for bringing a political revolution for the solidarity of the Muslims. Behind the Wahabiya and Salafia movements, the former is still the driving force. Moreover, its aim is the internal reform of Muslims. Thus, it has no possibility of conflict with non-believers of Islam. Islam prohibits violence. The Holy Quran stated that: "Allah does not love the transgressors" (2:205). Similarly, in chapter 16th, it has been stated that: "Allah orders justice, kindness and charity... and forbids indecency, wickedness and coercion." (Verse: 99).

The Holy Quran more specifically states that Allah loves the charitable (2:195).

It is the belief of the fundamentalists that departure from Islam, modernization, and liberalism has resulted in the decline of Muslim community. They are campaigning to adhere to the original principles of the religion as enunciated in the Holy Quran and traditions of the Allah's messenger (SAW). Their appeal for 'the return to Islam' has also involved some of the politicians of the Muslim world to re-Islamize the society. They want to establish an Islamic order according to the fundamental Islamic doctrine globally, prevalently famous as Nizaam Islami.

However, regarding the word 'fundamentalist', agreement is not there among the scholar in the Islamic perspective. Some of the scholars say that this term is less expressive than it is critical, others are of the view that Muslims believe in the fundamentals of the religion and so in the positive sense, are fundamentalists.

Most of the people are of the belief that fundamentalism means to focus on the basic principles of Islam. It has been clearly stated in the Holy Quran that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad (SAW) is the messenger of Allah. To believe in the oneness of Allah, all the Prophets, angels, all the books of Allah, on the Day of Judgment are the basic principles of Islam. Muslims would follow the orders of Allah like; the regular saying of prayers; zakat; performance of Hajj and to keep fast in the month of Ramzan. Indeed, these are the basic pillars of Islam. The Quran says to the believers: "Allah is powerful and mighty: He will surely help those who, once made masters in the land, will attend to their prayers and pay the alms, enjoin justice and forbid evil." (22:41).

Fundamentalism has become the most abused word. It is has been equated with the word extremism. The glancing the Islamic teachings, one would become clear that best Muslims are those who follow the fundamentals of Islam. The fundamental Islamic preaching is based on peace. Some of the individuals believed to be fundamentalists are far from Islamic teachings. On the other hand, they are partially deviated from the Islamic teachings.

Islam is not in favour of violence. The Prophet Mohammad (SAW) described human rights in his last sermon in sharp words that the inviolability of human life, honor, and property is sacred. The Holy Prophet, in the human history, elevated the foundation of a judicious, kind, just and moral society. According to the Holy Quran, "whosoever killed a person, it is as if he has killed all the humanity" (Al-Quran, 5:32). The assertion of a society to be an Islamic would be just only if it provides security to the life, honor and property of human beings.

It is very much important to analyze terrorism, fundamentalism, and sectarianism and to avoid the existing culture of victimization. Extra judicial killing of people in the name of Islam would be a great sin. On the occasion of Makkah's victory, the Holy Prophet forgave his opponents. In the early days of Islam, the image, humanitarianism

and message of the Caliphs facilitated them to spread the religion. The characteristics of Islam were based on financial and social equality, universal brotherhood and tolerance. It would be fruitful if true and real image of Islam is presented by discouraging violence and militancy.

Causes of Fundamentalism in Pakistan

In Pakistan, Punjab as well as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, students some of Madrassas are trying to get their political rights through militant means because their rights have not been given to them. The upper classes, liberals and the leftists have favoured English language. They should have favored Urdu and local languages of their people. Resultantly, ground was created for a future tussle for power between the leftists and the rightists. English language is required for jobs in the country. Madrassa student has little know how in English. On these grounds, they are deprived of jobs. It gives a chance them for jobs and their rights.

The western world has been repeatedly criticizing Islam for the last few years. It has been apprehended in the West that Islam stands for rigidity, fundamentalism and militancy and extremism. With the emergence of unipolar world after 1990, terrorism has become the common foe of the west. Unfortunately, it has been linked with Islam, particularly, after 9/11. Taliban were blamed for these attacks.

It is perceived that Taliban were students educated in the madaris of Pakistan and were also assisted by this country. Those students (Taliban) got training of jihad (religious war) against the non-Muslims. The Taliban were a Sunni expansionist skilled to create sectarian problems. They are blamed for involvement in sectarian uprisings in Pakistan.

There are numerous groups of Taliban. Some of their groups in Pakistan are involved in drug transferring in order to sponsor their militants since the Afghan war [26]. The spread of sectarian groups and their explanation of the notion of religious war strongly sponsored by the establishment damaged Pakistan's civil society. Nawaz Sharif and Benazir surrendered to their religious rights but this menace could not be curbed effectively during that democratic era (1988-1999). During the government of Nawaz Sharif, extremist Sunni parties became more powerful.

II. Conclusion

The saints and Sufis who are the followers of Islam launched movements and peacefully persuaded the people. Instead of the state, they focused the attention on the individuals. Their real objective was the spiritual reforms of minds of the people in order to convert them into new, transformed human beings. They adhere to the policy of persuasion and did not resort to violence. Nowadays Tablighi Jamaat provided another example of peaceful persuasion on a large scale for the reformation of the society. The emergence of pious group of people who regarded Islam to be a religion of justice, of peace and knowledge is the only hope to save Pakistan from fundamentalism and extremism. Hopelessness and deprivation will be produced in the minds of the people if there would be Political injustice, poverty, and illiteracy in the country. Madrassas are considered as a medium which promotes religious fundamentalism, extremism which resultantly creates terrorism. There is a need to change the curriculum of madaris. Some additional valuable and productive subjects must be added to the curriculum. It would enable the graduates of these madrassas to become pragmatic and valuable individuals of the society. The system of education in madaris is unable to provide easy and valuable

opportunities of jobs to its students as compared to that of modern education system. It is the main reason that after the completion of education, the graduates of these madaris got involved in unlawful activities. The students of madrassa are aware of the fact that getting modern knowledge of other Sciences, Economics and Mathematics is likewise essential in the modern era. Internet and computer is a vital source of education but the teachers of madrassas are not skilled in this modern technology. Traditional leaders of the Madaris resist any change in their system as they believe that they need teachers and molvis to prepare people for the life to come after death. According to them, the prevailing curriculum is sufficient to produce the required people. Nevertheless, it must be realized by them that they have the capability of producing stuff for other professions. The over-all system, curricula and different other aspects of Madaris are not free from mistakes. In order to accomplish demands of the modern era, the clergy of madaris should reconsider their approach and make alterations in the system and curriculum. The paused process of dialogue of Government with the Ulama of Madaris should be reinitiated. Madaris should not be enforced by the Government for reforms from above. Rather, religious group and religious political parties should be involved in order to bring reforms in these religious institutions.

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