

Madāris Educational System: Identifying Loopholes and the Way Out

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Abstract

Lately, the very role of Islamic institutions of higher learning known as *Madrasās* particularly in Pakistan has been in the debate at national as well as international levels. Some consider these seminaries as the citadels of Islam; and some view them as sources of hatred, extremism, activism, fanaticism, and terrorism. The argument advanced in favour of the role of Islamic centers of learning is that their end-products serve the society as *muftis*, *sharī'ah* court judges, religious teachers, *Qadīs* for the marriage ceremony, preachers, *imāms* of mosques, and *mu'azzins* for prayers. It is claimed that Pakistan without these *Madrasās* will lose its face as an Islamic nation, on the one hand, and Muslims will stand deprived of the services of the most needed personnel in the socio-religious arena, on the other. The motivation to work in *Madāris* is the thought pattern of the modern studies which enable us to have an insight into how critical and vulnerable is the education given at *Madāris* of Pakistan. Blame game against Islamic institutions is for sure to pour petrol on the fire, so the problem needs to be tackled wisely. This study is aimed at

delving into the system of education involving both curricula and the methodology of teaching and learning in *Madāris* and suggesting ways to overcome the underlying problems. The findings of the study may prove a catalyst in making *Madāris* education boon and not bane for the beloved country.

Keywords: Madrasa, Education, Curricula, Methodology

Introduction

Educations system of Pakistan has faced challenges since decades primarily due to the use of education as a religious and political tool and only spending a fraction of national GDP on education development. Review of school curriculum and textbooks reveals a scary picture of gross injustice to national history, harmony and identity. Doubtlessly, this matter is highly sensitive and serious due to the association of sentiments and rigid beliefs of people but this can't be left unchecked. We need to reform the whole Education System making the curriculum of modern and traditional streamlines more tolerant and peace-oriented. Therefore, this is the time for the reforms to be made in *Madāris* system and keeping in view matter's sensitivity and high risk of violent conflicts we'll show that the resolution of the matter lies in properly planned policy-making, table talk and through dialogue because the use of power is not an appropriate way to deal this situation when the target is associated with the superior and powerful sphere of the country. The process will surely be slow and the situation will get better gradually depending upon the efforts and strategies adopted. In light of the above discussion, the study devotes its efforts to find out the rational answers about following raised questions.

Research Questions

1. Why is there need of a modern education system in Madāris?
2. What type of amendments recommended in the curriculum of Madāris education to cope with the modern world?

Madāris: A Brief Historical Background & Focusing on Loopholes

Madrassa is an Arabic word meaning a school or Islamic educational institution. In Islamic history, Madāris were the major source of religious and scientific learning, especially between the 7th and 11th centuries, producing luminaries such as Alberunī, Ibn-Sīna, Al-Khawarizmī, Al-Razī and Jābir Ibn Hayān. Schools in Damascus and Baghdad are comparable to greatest contemporary educational intuitions. During the Abbasid period (750-1258 AD), a need for designing an effective educational system is considered to fulfill the administrative requirements of the Muslim empire. Because of these reasons Madāris are developed as a separate educational institution. The first Madrasa was established in Morocco. The curriculum taught in Madāris incorporated the teaching of Ḥadīth and Quran with expanding accentuation on *Fiqh*. The knowledge of *Fiqh* is considered compulsory to trained people for the justice courts. The subjects of science, medical and astronomy were also taught in these Madāris initially.

Madāris in Pakistan are divided into five categories depending on the types of sects. Each Madrasa has its board or Wafaq. Each board has its educational system and different administrative policies. All of these Madāris are a member of Ittihad Tanzeemāt Madāris Deeniyya (ITMD), which is an administrative organization for all Madāris, established in 2003. The five types of Madāris are the following:

1. Tanzeem-ul-Madāris (Bareilvi)
2. Wafaq-ul-Madāris al-Arabia (Deobandī)

3. Wafaq-ul-Madāris al-Shia (Shia)
4. Wafaq ul-Madāris al-Salafia. (Ahl-e-Ḥadīth)
5. Rabita-ul-Madāris al-Islamia (Jama‘at-e-Islamī).

These Madāris have their separate curriculum which is one of the unique parts of Pakistani education systems.

Unfortunately, Pakistan being in the process of extreme political and financial stability, very less focus has been paid to this issue. We are still fighting poor education system, lack of basic infrastructure facilities in government schools, torture and physical punishment is given to students and insufficient budget and funds for quality education has been specifically seen in the sub-continent that the Madāris system and dependence on religious institutes is very prominent and the lives of the people living there are connected to it, which means they start their day with them, and schedule everything under the direction of Madāris /Religious Institutes/Mosque Head, even they consult them in case of medical emergency for spiritual treatment of chronic renowned medical diseases. This shows the influence and association of people of sub-continent with these religious institutes. But the situation was not the same from the beginning as these institutes were just considered as a source and system available for Muslim students. These were also considered as welfare institutes because of free lodging and boarding facilities of students studying there from distant areas. Apart from all the positive facts, the rigidity in the Madāris education system is the main problem as the students after graduating from there develop a very rigid and inflexible mindset and they consider prosaic wisdom rather than argumentation and rationalism. In short, they oppose every single thing

which they feel inappropriate in their sense of getting things, and they immediately give a verdict by simply saying it's against Islam. It is because of their limited knowledge or fixated and inflexible mindset that has been developed in the minds of the students due to the orthodox curriculum that is being offered in the educational and religious institutes.

Pakistani government tried to address the issue of religion and education. In the 1960s, during the regime of Ayūb Khān made efforts for this purpose and 'Ulama academy was founded to expose Madāris educators to modern ideas and social issues. Parallel to this, the Islamic university in Bahawalpur and Islamic Research Institute were formed to study and interpret religion for modern times. The Institute was built with the twin mission of bridging the gap between traditional madrasas and modern scientific scholarship and reorienting the Westernized mind-set of modern educated Muslims towards their religious tradition.¹ However, it could not work well and viewed by some forces that it has inspired by a Western liberal agenda.

Former US Secretary of Defense stated, "that Pakistan should reform Madāris education, engage the Madāris students in a 'battle of ideas', encouraging young Muslims to learn science, math, language so that they can earn a respectable living."² About such Madāris, Singer states: "These schools teach a distorted view of Islam. Hatred is permissible, jihad allows the murder of innocents, and the new heroes are terrorists. Martyrdom

¹ Fazl- ur-Rahman, *Islam & Modernity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 50-56, 78-79, 110-112, 114.

²Fatima Sajjad, "Reforming madrasa education in Pakistan: Post 9/11 perspectives." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)* 3, no. 1 (2013): 103-121.

through suicide attacks are also extolled, and anti-western speeches are committed to memory. The students are uneducated, young, dependent on the schools, and cut off from contact with their parents for years at a time, and thus highly susceptible to being programmed toward violence.”³ A prominent Pakistani journalist Hussain Haqqanī termed Pakistani Madāris as ‘Islam’s Medieval Outposts’ and he stated that “Western fears by narrating the stories of Madāris students and teachers emphasizing their conservative mindset. It describes visits to different Pakistani Madāris by the author including Dārul ‘Uloom Haqqania, Akora Khatak, which has been described as a ‘University of Jihad’, a place which gives birth to the likes of Mullah Umar.”⁴ According to FATF the Madāris system in Pakistan is the nursery of terrorists which not true but we can’t deny its association with the terrorist wings. “ The critics tend to see the Madāris in stereotypical terms, often branding all Madāris as backward and reactionary....They are seen as a major burden on Muslim society...Much of what they teach is considered ‘useless’ in the contemporary context.”⁵ Such criticism of Madāris has been termed as exaggerated. Claims that all Madāris are static are grossly misleading. Madāris see themselves as guardian of the Islamic traditions. This is the role that they are playing effectively and it’s also the main focus of their teachings. Pakistan is an Islamic country and its basis includes Islamic

³ P. W. Singer, *Pakistani Madrasas; Ensuring a System of Education Not Jihad*. Analysis (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 2001),14.

⁴ Hussain Haqqanī, “Islam’s Medieval Outposts,” *Foreign Policy*, 2002, Nov 1(133):58.

⁵Yoginder Sikand, "The Indian Madāris and the agenda of reform." *Islamic education, diversity, and national identity: Dīnī Madāris in India Post* 9, no. 11 (2006): 269-80.

Education as a mandatory course and source for the Quran and the Sunnah education which is only being provided by Madāris and its alternative can't even be imagined. The establishment of institutions like Dārul 'Uloom Deoband, Nadwatul 'Ulama and Aligarh University demonstrated a strong recognition among Muslims of the key role education could play in the restoration of their faith in changing times. At its birth, Pakistan inherited this debate; thus, the role of religion in education has remained a central question in the country. All Pakistan needs to do is to reform the Madāris system and this is the right time for the reformation of the Madāris system as the wave of terrorist activities has now diminished by the military action and negotiations are being done in this respect.

According to Candland, unlike the common perception, many Madāris do have a desire to reform and update their curriculum. Many Madāris agreed to get registered and affiliated with the Government Madāris board. An association of Madāris with the name Ittihad Tanzimāt-i-Madāris Dīniyya (Religious Madāris Organizations Alliance) was formed to protect the interests of the Madāris and curtail government interference. This alliance represents at least 15000 Madāris.⁶

The current law and order situation of Pakistan in which both the government and Madāris being considered as a suspect, this study has great significance. International agencies, monitoring authorities, and the International community also pressurizing Pakistan over the reformation of the Madāris and Madāris educational system. But the process is being delayed by all the stakeholders due to their reservations on certain points in

⁶ Christopher Candland, "Religious Education and Violence in Pakistan," (*Pakistan*, 2005),19.

the process of reformation. The military action or confrontation is not the solution because doing so will only ignite the fire of revenge among the tribes of terrorists against the law enforcement agencies which may have a later but severe reaction and their response will be ferocious than the previous one.

Adopted Methodology

For data accumulation, the strategy/method was to visit the renowned religious institute's rather than believing the myths about Madāris and Madāris administration. The responsible persons from the religious institutes were interviewed and they were asked to answer the questionnaire in writing too so that we may have the first-hand information. The religious education institutes chosen for the task are as under:

(i) Jāmia Manzoor-ul-Islamia Lahore

(ii) Madāris /Jamia Salafia Islamabad (Salafia University Islamabad)

Central Board of Madāris In Pakistan

In the 14th century, Ibn Khaldun mentioned that only in Persia and Spain there were subjects like Grammar, Arithmetic, and Poetry that were part of the syllabus that was taught in the equivalent study of Islamic learning.⁷ Dars-e-Nizāmī has been revolutionized by time but still, it has the core marrow. Madāris in Islamic traditions is considered as the guardian of Islamic culture, Shariah, and standards. The students of Madāris shared their experiences during the interviews and emphasized that they are suffering from various problems including lack of necessities, (water and gas issues) unemployment, infrastructure and basic health facilities. Due to these suffering, they have to initiate fundraising activities to fulfil their needs. But unfortunately, they are often tagged as

⁷ S. M. Ikram, Rud-i-Kawthar (Karachi, 1958), 424-6.

terrorists and it hurts the egos of already suffering students. According to the data collected it has been identified that the students themselves are not satisfied with their educational institutes and the whole Madāris system. Moreover, it can be concluded that the system is comparatively less adaptable than other public and private educational institutes. They have a sense of insecurity about their livelihood as they think they don't have much job opportunities in the field of arts and sciences after graduating from Madāris. It can be concluded that the students also think that scientific knowledge is also compulsory to face the upcoming challenges. Although a few years back, the Madāris education system, had some rigidity to learn through the modern source of information or we can say that teachers didn't feel comfortable with the modern system of education to cope with the latest challenges of education but know the situation has changed and students and teachers of Madaris are eager to learn about the rapidly developing world and are interested in scientific and modern education. Moreover, it has been observed by the interviews that their minds are being moulded in a way that they are totally against the co-education system with zero flexibility and mostly did criticize the present co-education culture in college and universities. They claim that Islam doesn't provoke terrorism and it's a peaceful religion for which it cannot be blamed for the ongoing war in the world. It is somehow true because we have also seen that only a few of the total registered Madāris were involved in such type of activities and to blame all of them would be an injustice.

Educational Techniques:

The table underlying explains education techniques embraced by Madāris in Pakistan:

Comparison- Teaching Techniques	
Modern	Traditional
Seeing	Books
Listening	Lectures
Study under supervision	
Study from original source	
Survey	
Laboratory	
Problem solving	
Projects	
Lecture	
Discussion	

Personality Development:

In Madāris, there isn't any importance on personality grooming and development. The Madāris education system only focuses on religious education without caring whether the students benefit its personality with the literature being taught or they are just cramming the content. It has been observed that we can't produce a healthy mind with balance character by just forcing them to offer prayers and recite or learn religious content (Holy Quran, Hadith, Sunnah).⁸

Discussion of Madāris education is incomplete without touching the language education factor as it constitutes almost ninety percent of the basis of Madāris education. This system forces the student to get basic know-how of the Arabic language is present. We have examples from the past where the education system was abode by the language as per King's orders just like in Mughal's era the education system was bound to opt the

⁸Saleem Mansoor Khalid, *Dīnī Madāris Main Ta'ālīm* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 2002), 287.

Persian language for teaching.⁹ The Persian education system lasted so long but time changed a thing as in Pakistan this is replaced gradually by Urdu and Arabic languages.

Modern Teaching Techniques:

Surveys and interviews revealed that Madāris are following outdated teaching methodologies and techniques. This Madarass just focuses on equipping the students with memorizing abilities, acting upon tutor lectures, and following the context/content of the specified syllabus.¹⁰ Use of technology and internet is need of the hour. With the spread of COVID'19, as almost everything has turned out online now, it is empirical that the young generation is equipped with latest technology and means of communication to succeed in the professional lives.

In lieu on the current scenario, Madāris need to equip their faculty with the modern teaching strategies. The teachers are mostly using orthodox teaching styles and methodologies which results in the production of even poorer quality students relying only on books and literature. Wafaq-ul-Madāris organize posting of teachers but the issue is still the same i-e., the choice is usually made amongst the graduates of the same Madāris System.¹¹

Government Assistance

One of the most alarming facts revealed during the study was the hesitance of Madāris in receiving financial assistance. The Madāris refused

⁹ Kees van den Bosch stal, "Islamic Education in Pakistan; Introducing government approved subjects", Report 2008, 10.

¹⁰ N. T. Dogar, "Madrassa reforms: Problems and prospects." *National Defense University's Journal* 9 (2010): 1-25.

¹¹ Umar Farooq, "Falling Flat", *The Herald*, July 2008, 57.

to have any financial or monetary support thinking that it would lead their independent Madāris under One Unit Governance and they might be questioned regarding these funds and even each penny they spend.

Social & Welfare Issues

The Madāris system also deals with welfare and social issues creating goodwill gestures in society. Following are a few of these:

1. Free education of poor children.
2. Free of cost boarding and lodging facility lessening the burden of poor families along with free education.
3. Providing free food to the students, travelers, and also to the poor of the surrounding area of respective Madāris .

Madāris Reforms

In the year 2002, Pakistan's government launched a program named Madāris Reforms Program under the Education Ministry of Pakistan. It was a 5-year project and approx Rs/- 5.79 Billion was allocated for mainstreaming of about eight thousand Madāris . The following are the objectives that were to be fulfilled by the Education Ministry under that program.¹² The teaching of Maths, English, Social and Pakistan Studies in four thousand Madāris at primary level and teaching Business, Economics, and Computer science in three thousand Madāris at the secondary level and Pakistan Studies in remaining thousand Madāris at the intermediate level. The purpose was to integrate the religious and formal education system to have a bridge between these two completely parallel systems of education.³³ Opening contact lines for 'Ulama who run

¹² Govt of Pakistan, Ministry of Education, *PC -1 Madrasa Reforms (Teaching of Formal Subjects in Dīnī Madāris)*, 2004.

Madāris and imparting formal and religious education which results in the promotion of religious values.³⁴ Mainstreaming the Madāris by including formal studies in the syllabus of Madāris. Providing funds for at least five computer systems and two printers in a thousand Madāris with an intermediate level of studies.

The outcomes were not so satisfying as the Project Director Dr. Ḥanīf revealed that only five hundred and seven Madāris were approached during the five years. According to a responsible official of the Madāris Reforms Project, it was concluded that the authorities failed in utilizing the funds allocated under the program as only 3% of the total allocated 5.7 billion rupees. In addition to this, the regular bureaucratic approach also created doubts on the effectiveness and seriousness of the reform program as it took approximately two years in releasing funds for Madāris under the Madāris Reforms Program.¹³ The cause for the delay was the process of selection and identification of Madāris and also categorizing those in three groups i-e., primary, secondary and Intermediate level of education, as disclosed by a responsible official associated with the program.¹⁴ At present, there are approx fifteen thousand (15100) registered Madāris under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the number is not encouraging and efforts must be done to mainstream all Madāris of the country.

Conclusion

The study has its conclusions quite contrary to the general perception of considering that Madāris education system is 'at par' with the general public/private education system of Pakistan. Whereas in public education

¹³ Umar Farooq, "Falling Flat", *The Herald*, July 2008, 58.

¹⁴ Umar Farooq, "Falling Flat", 60.

system, lower educational standards, inequality between schools and different classes, inadequate instructional practices and outdated curricula are common features. So, Madāris or Madāris education system can't be tagged as the only problem when we have the same standards in our public education sector. The behaviour of just blaming the Madāris is totally injustice and should be changed. This usually being done because no meaningful progress could be made on the ground even though hard resources, intense advertisement and media promotion were invested. In Pakistan it is quite impossible to reform the Madāris education system without providing sufficient training for teacher and other staff along with the allotment of adequate funds. The government must bring the 'Ulamā of all school of thoughts on boards, their problems must be addressed and they must be made allies in the efforts for the eradication of religious extremism and militancy in order to get succeed in reforming Madāris system. The reform campaign, in fact, underpins the belief that religious education must be excluded from the national curriculum which is certainly impractical. These force-imposed measures will not improve tolerance rather it will be counterproductive in the society. Religious tolerance values should be encouraged with better funding and adequate services. It is worth highlighting the Islamic Peace message. In Pakistan, public education suffers from inadequate financial investment, low productivity in functional reforms, weak management consistency as well as supervision, evaluation and poor teaching techniques.