

Madrassah Reforms in Pakistan: A Dispute

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined Madrassah Reforms in Pakistan and analyzed the issues associated with it. The Madrassahs came under scrutiny particularly by western media, after the 9/11 era. This study is an effort to bring forth the real picture of Madrassah education in Pakistan. The present study was a descriptive using mixed method design. Data were drawn from various sources and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The results show that Madrassahs are the need of the Islamic society and providing religious and spiritual guidance since a long. Now Madrassahs are being alleged for real root cause of terrorism and extremism in the world. Government of Pakistan is in the process of Madrassah reforms. Various Madrassahs are not only willing rather providing modern subjects but, at the same time, vow to resist secularization and state-led reforms. It is considered by the religious lobby that west and USA is behind reforming Madrassahs in Pakistan. Mistrust and suspicion are the main causes of resistance by stakeholders for Madrassah reforms.

Keywords: Madrassah, Reforms, Issues, Wafaqs, Extremism

INTRODUCTION

Acquisition of knowledge has always been a fundamental and integral part of Islamic traditions. Since the beginning of Islam, mosques assumed the role as centers of learning where education was imparted free of cost. With the domination of Islam, Muslim jurists established schools of learning that separated themselves from mosques to provide specialized knowledge and were known as Madrassahs. A Madrassah was an exalted seat of learning and a stronghold of knowledge, source of inspiration and a beacon of light throughout the Muslim world.

According to Douglas (2006), the Madrassahs of the middle Ages were the mark of distinction of education and encouraged the creation of the Western university system. Madrassahs are present in across the continents: from Kenya to Bangladesh and from Senegal to Indonesia (Ali, 2009). The Madrassahs of South Asia are part of this historical tradition and their character was predominantly religious.

Madrassah received a major setback and suffered further reversal with the introduction of modern education. Madrassah teachers therefore, became uncomfortable and developed a rigid attitude towards religious education for Muslims. British started suspecting Madrassahs as possible centers of hostility after the historic participation of Madrassah leaders in 1857 revolt. After the failure of 1857 revolt, Muslim Ulemas feared that the Muslim mode of life may get diluted due to western education introduced by British. Their immediate need was to keep a check on the possibility of their community moving towards modern education which was possible only through Madrassah education. They launched Madrassah movement by establishing an Islamic seminary known as Darul Uloom at Deoband in 1865 with a view to educate Indian Muslims with Islamic system of education. By the close of nineteenth century Madrassahs like Farangi Mahal (Lucknow), Dar-al-Ulum (Deoband) and Nadwa-tul-Ulema

(Lucknow) emerged as exciting symbols for Muslim separatist movement in India (Robinson, 2001; Upadhyay, 2003).

After the establishment of Pakistan, Madrassahs could not regain their influence, so the opportunities of government jobs were still rare for Madrassah graduates. This was due to the domination of modern education. The environment was not conducive for Madrassahs in the newly established Islamic state which shared the British legacy of modernization. The state did not recognize Madrassah Education (Rehman, 2004). Consequently, the objectives of the Madrassah education system remained the same as they were during the British rule in India: imparting knowledge and development of the Muslim society, to train teachers for schools and preparing Imams, religious leaders, to carry out social responsibilities such as nikah (marriage contract), divorce, inheritance and funerals (Bano, 2007; Rehman, 2009).

These Madrassahs are now considered by some seculars and analysts as a threat to the west and western culture and have generated feelings of fear, especially after 9/11. So the Pakistani government offered funds to the Madrassahs on behalf of America and wanted to regulate their functioning like other educational institutions for their improvement and to mainstream them with the general education system (Mumtaz, 2003; Looney, 2003; Rashid & Rehman, 2006; Bano, 2007; Fair, 2008; Riaz, 2008).

However, it is not the first time in the history that the need for a change has been felt within the Madrassah. As a result of various educational movements in the last centuries, Madrassahs have been passing through a constant change in their internal system, improving their quality and standard with the support of the society. Candland (2004) states that effective educational reforms in Madrassahs in Pakistan are, admittedly, a complex and difficult phenomenon and it can only be possible with the help of religious scholars not on the basis of criticism by secular think tanks.

It is very important to know why the various governments aimed to reform Madrassahs. Pakistan was created in the name of Islam but, apart from General Zia, it has had secular minded leadership (Ali, 1970; 1983; Jalal 1990; 1995). Thus it was their natural desire, like post-colonial leaders, to reform the conventional religious outlook. Zaman (1999) asserts that secularism is strange to the majority of Muslims, and it is very difficult for secular-oriented reformers to understand the needs of Muslim society and the Madrassah phenomenon and correlate them with the education system. Therefore reform efforts faced the same dilemma in Pakistan as in any other Muslim country.

Every institution and every system needs reform and revision from time to time; Madrassahs are no exception. Rehman and Rashid (2006) argue that there is no objection to the efforts to “regulate” and “reform” the Madrassahs in Pakistan.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

More specifically the study is aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. What are the issues Madrassah Education in Pakistan is confronted with?
2. What is the nature of Madrassah curriculum? Has it been changed and improved over the time or remained static?
3. What is the nature of criticism levied against Madrassahs?
4. What reforms have been introduced by the government from time to time to improve Madrassah education?
5. What are the reasons of resistance for Madrassah reforms in Pakistan?
6. What are the views of the stakeholders about criticism against Madrassahs and the reforms initiated by the government?

METHODOLOGY

The present research was a mixed method research, involving qualitative and quantitative data. The research design for this study was an exploratory and descriptive.

The population for the survey was teachers from Madrassahs of the five major Wafaqs i.e. Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al-Arabia (W. M. Al-Arabia), Tanzem-ul-Madaris Pakistan, Rabita-tul-Madaris, Wafaq-ul-Madaris Ahle-Tashi (W. M. Al-Shia), and Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al- Salfia (W. M. Al-Salfia). To select a more representative sample, a stratified sample was selected from the five Wafaqs. Stratification of the Madrassahs was made on the basis of National Educational Census 2006-07 (NEC, 2006-07).

Table 1. Distribution of sample by madrassahs of five wafaqs

	<i>W. M. Al-Arabia</i>	<i>Tanzem-ul-Madaris</i>	<i>Rabita-tul-Madaris</i>	<i>W. M. Al-Shia</i>	<i>W. M. Al-Salfia</i>	<i>Total</i>
Madrassahs	148	133	37	23	38	379
Teachers of Madrassahs	740	665	185	115	190	1895
Questionnaires return	282	261	173	93	122	932

A total of 1895 teachers were selected to obtain their opinion for the study. The number of questionnaires returned from different Madrassahs was 932 (about 50 %).

Instrument of the Study

Two types of information were collected pertaining to the Madrassah Education in Pakistan and to explore the issues, challenges associated with it.

The questionnaire was composed of 26 statements. It contained both closed and open ended statements. The questionnaires were sent to the participants with the explanatory letter.

Data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Information gathered from reviews of research reports and documents were analyzed qualitatively and the results have been summarized.

In case of open ended questions, responses were analyzed in terms of frequencies. However, for the sake of developing a good understanding of respondents' views, these have been presented in the form of descriptions. While percentages of close ended statements were calculated and their results were analyzed.

Madrassah reforms in Pakistan

The present government initiatives for Madrassah reforms

The present Government established in 2008 continued with the Madrassah programme of its predecessor regime. However they were quite conscious and instead of imposing reforms package, they started a series of dialogues with the office bearers of ITMP (Islam, 2009).

Several initiatives to support change within Pakistan's Madrassahs are currently underway. The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) in Islamabad is working on capacity building and institutional development in the sector. The Washington-based organization, International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD), works with the ITMD to assist Madrassah leaders in expanding the curricula and diversifying teaching methods through capacity

building and exposure visits abroad. The aim of these visits is to encourage learning from the experiences of other Muslim education systems (ICRD, 2010).

It was revealed from the survey of the literature that, from time to time efforts have been made to reform Madrassahs. Reforms have usually required introducing modern subjects in Madrassah curriculum to provide better employment opportunities to the religious sector and thus produce a religious leadership inclined to promote a comparatively moderate interpretation of Islam (Hetland, 2008). In fact many of the policies are formed without involving the reasonable representation of Madrassahs and having reliable data for Madrassah reforms project (Andrabi, 2004).

Survey showed the opinion of Madrassah teachers about integration of Madrassahs and contemporary education institutes and is given in the table below:

Table 2. Opinions of the Madrassah teachers about, how Madrassahs and contemporary Education institutes can be integrated?

<i>How Madrassahs and other institutes come closer</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>% age</i>
Bring together both the systems	219	23.5
By removing the atmosphere of mistrust	136	14.6
By Islamization of Education system	102	10.9
By introducing religious subjects in mainstream institutes	86	9.22
By equalizing facilities and standard	76	8.2
By good planning	73	7.8
By introducing general subjects in Madrassahs	51	5.4
No need of this incorporation	37	3.4
By developing Inter-relations	16	1.7

About 23.1 % responded that these two type of institutes can be integrated by unifying both the systems while 14.6 % suggested by removing the atmosphere of mistrust, 10.9 % said that Islamization is the only way to bring them closer. only 9.2 % suggested to introduce religious subjects in general education institutes and 8.2 % gave their opinion that by equalizing facilities and standards it may be possible. Only 7.8 % suggested a good planning to bring them closer while 5.4 % gave the opinion of introducing general education subjects in Madrassahs and 3.4 % thought that there is no need to come closer the two. A very small percentage, 1.7 suggested by developing inter-relation between them.

About 50% respondents are agreeing with registration law and 55% are in favor of registration according to the PMEBO, as all Madrassahs are already registered with any of the five Wafaqs.

There is corruption in all the three parties that is the US, the government and the Madrassah leadership. If only they keep their grudges away, reforming can be supported and the quality of education can be improved by including the modern subjects along with religious education by improving teaching methods and training the teachers etc. (Eshya, 2005; Candland, 2005; Amneh, 2006; Islam, 2009).

Table 3. Opinion of the Madrassah Teachers about Reasons of Government Interest in Madrassah Reforms

<i>Govt. interest in Madrassah reforms</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%age</i>
Govt. wants to control Madrassahs	426	45.70
Govt. wants to please secular/ Christians/ Jews	260	27.89
Govt. intends to introduce its own brand of Islam	126	13.50
Govt. wants to promote secularism and immorality	111	11.90
Govt. wants to promote its supporter	82	8.70
Reforms are need of the time	46	4.90
Govt. reform efforts are just lip service/ unsatisfactory efforts	23	2.40

The majority of the Madrassah teachers responded i.e.45.7 % assumed that government wants control over the Madrassahs by introducing reforms there, and 27.90 % thought that the government intends to please secular/ Christians/ Jews lobby. However, this is a matter of perception that is held by most of the Madrassah officials. Government really intends to bring in reformation which can be seen in the history of Pakistan. Most of the governments made efforts for reforms but due to strong resistance these plans could never be completely implemented. Whereas, 13.50 % respondents revealed that the government intends to introduce its own Islam by reforming Madrassahs. On the other hand, 11.90 % showed that government wants to promote secularism in the Madrassah education system. Madrassah reforms is a need of the time was reported by 4.9% respondents while 2.40 % gave the idea that it is nothing but just a lip service and the government is not serious in its efforts. Some research papers also mentioned this fact (Amneh, 2006; Bano, 2007; Fair, 2008). Responses lead to one result that the government only wants reformation for its own sake as it wants to satisfy the other parties that are forcing to bring in the reforms in Pakistani Madrassahs.

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The impact of the model Madrassahs has been limited at best. Just three were started in the country (Iqbal, 2003). Model Madrassahs have additionally had a troubled start with continuous administrative, curriculum-related and infrastructural issues and have been especially slow to respond to critics. Teacher’s opinion about model Madrassahs is given in the table below.

Table 5. Opinion of the Madrassah teachers about model Madrassahs established by the government?

<i>Opinion about model Madrassahs</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>% age</i>
Don’t know about these Madrassahs	502	54.1
For developing model deen (Islam)	72	7.7
These Madrassahs are total failure	41	4.4
To get monetary funds from west	26	2.8
Its good decision	15	1.6

Majority of the teachers (54.1 %) did not know much about these Model Madrassahs. However, about 24.6 % gave no response as most of the respondents do not know about these model Madrassahs established by government. Some i.e.7.7 % thought that government intended to develop Model deen through these Model Madrassahs and 4.4 % considered these Model Madrassahs totally failure. Only 2.8 % thought it just to obtain monetary funds from west and a very small amount, 1.6 % considered it a good decision. Madrassah teachers (57%) resisted to implement this plan by force.

Hence the latest reforms, aided generously by the USA, have largely failed to see Madrassahs as educational, social and religious institutions that have specific problems that need to be looked at. Without considerable participation of religious leaders, these have been criticized by and large by everyone attached to the Madrassahs and have only heightened the secularization and traditionalism tension that are not just originated from the Madrassah anymore.

Indeed, no comprehensive study regarding for instance the standard of life, of nutrition or transportation problems, health issues or even academic acumen of students has surfaced. Instead, numerous contrasting reports based on Madrassah numbers, their links to terrorism and the sectarian texts they follow have been used for educational restructuring. Needless to say, the reform project has had to be closed down before it even became clear what exactly was expected to be achieved; funds have either been unused or wasted.

CONCLUSIONS

Broad definitions of Madrassah do not justify the unique role of Madrassahs in preserving Muslim culture. Such definitions portray a wrong picture and lead towards confusion.

Dars-e-Nizami is a comprehensive course of study, comprising religious and contemporary subjects. Historically, technical education has been an integral part of Madrassah curriculum. There exists a gulf between Madrassah graduates and the society due to their non-participation in the technical skills. Madrassahs are not considered in the wider perspective like other systems of education in the world. Only contemporary sciences are given a special importance.

Madrassahs are labeled as the incubators of hatred against the West as is usually assumed. Madrassahs presently are facing a number of challenges like, international and media propaganda, financial crisis, western pressure, charges of extremism and terrorism. It is just a propaganda and enmity.

Generally, the western media portrayal of the proliferation and enrollment of the Madrassahs is done by on speculation, misapprehension of curriculum, ignoring the history, and overlooking the political realities. Therefore limited understandings create confusion and exaggeration about Madrassahs and Madrassah reforms.

Voices of protest are being raised by Madrassahs against the biased perceptions at the global level but it is not justified to link these voices with violence, terrorism and extremism. The Muslim world simply opposes Western and American policies which are counter to interest of Islam and Muslims. If these policies and/or views are not revised, a change or revision of the Madrassah curricula will not really bring any major change in the thinking and behavior of the Madrassahs.

The trust of Ulemas and their active partnership is the only way to develop a reform programme and Madrassahs will accept. It is necessary to recognize and accept the primary role of Madrassahs in the Islamic society.

The majority of Madrassahs are convinced of the need for reforms and revision of the curricula. Some Madrassahs have already started teaching modern and social sciences. Where the modern subjects are concerned, it is crystal clear that Islam does not ignore the modern sciences. Madrassahs are also aware of this fact. Various Madrassahs are now teaching English along with Arabic and Urdu. Some Madrassahs have launched their own websites in Urdu, English and Arabic with information and question-answer series on Islam. It is therefore, an incorrect assertion that Madrassah students are an isolated class in the society. They support reforms and revision of curriculum but not dictated or framed only by the government.

The West is very anxious about Madrassah reforms in Pakistan. It has sponsored many studies about Madrassahs in Pakistan and has sponsored special teacher training programmes and workshops in Pakistan for Madrassah teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is worth noting that the entire educational system of Pakistan needs overhauling not only the Madrassah system.
2. It's a living reality that curriculum needs continuous revision and improvement. If some worldly subjects were part of Dars-e-Nizami in past, then why not such subjects can't be included in the Madrassah curriculum according to the present situation. Only the texts of Quran and Hadith cannot be changed.

3. When other educational institutes are free to adopt any of the curriculums then why only Madrassahs are criticized and monitored.
4. Madrassah reforms, based on self-developed logic or external pressure must be replaced with local thoughts and needs.
5. A policy should be devised for the reform of Madrassahs by mutual consent of Madrassah administration and the government. Madrassahs should be given adequate representation.
6. A secular minded approach cannot reform Madrassahs so there is a need to approach a cease-fire line where needs and demands of both the parties match.
7. Madrassahs, Public and Private Institutes may be provided the opportunity for mutual sharing of admission to be benefited with their special educational facilities. If this is executed, there will be no need to introduce modern subjects separately in the Madrassah curriculum.
8. Government should win trust of religious schools. This cannot be done by force or money. Government would have to take a holistic approach to address the issues related to achieving uniformity and without a uniform system of education it is difficult to streamline affairs of religious schools.

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