

MADARAS IN PAKISTAN: CHALLENGES AND REFORMATION IN 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The study focuses on presenting the true condition of the madaras in Pakistan. The study dismisses the claims of extremism and militancy attached with all the madaras. It traces back the history of madaras and under the light of previous literature brings to lime light the real factors behind instilling the militancy in very few madaras in Pakistan. Then it presents the actual conditions and the needed reformation in Pakistani madaras. For this, data is collected through interviews and observations. The participant of the study are 14 ulmas and 37 students taken from 8 different madaras. The study also gives some suggestion for the betterment of this rich legacy.

Introduction

Muslims possess a rich tradition of education which is spread over 13 centuries. Muslim scholars and their work can be found in almost every academic discipline. Yet, it is interesting that very little is known about the Islamic scholarship in the non-Islamic countries especially in the west. The reason being the amount of literature produced over the years concerning the Islamic tradition of Education. Kinany (1957) asserts that there were a wide range of Islamic school spread all over the Islamic territory along with the Islamic universities which predated western universities. The question is that having this much plethora of knowledge how Muslim world became unknown to the world and what are the reasons of not producing same kind of scholarship which can compete the modern world.

One of the plausible answer to these issues mention above is the negligence from their own educational system. Islamic system of education revolves around the institutes which are based on their own educational values. These values are taken from the divine sources and thus, are not based on any reaction to the society or injustice as in the case of problem posing method (Freire, 2018). There is certainly some foreign factors that are responsible for this down fall but the internal factors are also there. Therefore, this great heritage of Islamic traditions is thought to as fallen behind or outdated. The need is to find out the issues pertaining to Islamic institutions and also to suggest some solutions for the betterment. Although the problems are many and require much more space and time yet this study can be seen as a starting point to the work needed for these institutions.

Keeping an eye on the above mentioned problem, this study aims at defining the Islamic educational institutions generally known as madrasa or madaras (plural of madrasa). These institutions have been the part of Islamic education since the birth of Islam and has produced many great scholars over the period of time. Yet in modern era exclusively in post 9:11 scenario these institutions come under fire from the west which accused them for either breeding terrorism or funding for the terrorist groups. Thus, the focus of this work is to remove some misconception about role of these institutions in Islamic world in general and in Pakistan in particular. For the guidance 14 Ulmas and 37 students are interviewed. Apart from these interviews, 8 different madaras are observed for first-hand knowledge of the issue. The observations are done inside and outside the classrooms. Although the problems and issues are so many yet, in the light of observations and interviews only main issues were identified and discussed. The study suggest that there is found a misconception about the madrasas in the west as these institutions are far away from the modern world and are in real need for reformation. This study also throws light on the problems and challenges faced by these institutions. In the end this study gives some suggestions on possible improvements in the light of modern world.

The word madras is Arabic in origin meaning school or an institution which provide education or instructions in Islamic and other subjects. These subjects are mainly four categories: Quran (The word of Allah), Hadith (sayings of Holly prophet), Kalam (the knowledge of theology), Nahw (grammar), Falsafa (philosophy), Fiqah (jurisprudence) and Islamic Law. This list is by no mean exhaustive and include different other subjects like Al Kemia, mathematics, medicine and other social subjects etc. But overall the main purpose is to teach Islamic Curriculum (Campo, 2009). In west, the word madrasa is used for the any kind of school which is dedicated for Islamic teachings. In Arabic speaking countries the word madrasa is used for any educational institution. In south Asian countries like Pakistan, India and Bangladesh madrasa refers to religious institutions. Thus, the word madrasa may have different connotations pertaining to different cultural, social and political contexts. For this study the word Madrasa is used as an Islamic religious institute.

Madaras are mainly responsible for the production and preservation of religious knowledge and religious elite. These madaras possess central positions of in forming ecclesiastical authority in the society. The religious authorities, in order to keep their hold, have maintained their form and they have stayed in their shape for many centuries thus, madaras have been marginalized in the society (Berkey, 2014). In the past and even in the modern era, question on the functions and positions of madaras have been raised not only in non-Islamic world but in the Islamic world as well. The debate on the reformation of madaras have urged the world to look into the matter and bring the Ulmas (religious scholars) to deliberate the matter.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are:

- To find the challenges faced by the Madaras
- To remove the misconception about the madaras and madras education

Historical Background

The term madrasa found its origin from the word *dars* which is alternative term for the word *fiqh*. *Fiqh* is the term used for law and thus teaching of *fiqh* was termed as *dars*. The teacher of *fiqh* was termed as mudarris. Thus, the term madrasa is used for the teaching of law (*fiqh*) (Makdisi, 1961). Tibawi (1962) seems to disagree from this interpretation of the term and is of the view that no direct evidence is found for this interpretation as we do not have knowledge for what was taught in these early institutions.

The history of madaras dated back to the Islamic history when the mosques were used for the educational purposes. Even in the life of Holly prophet (peace be upon Him) and afterwards these small scale institutes were made and educated people among them were providing education to the people. Yet, these institutes were not the well-established institutes formed by the people themselves on smaller scales. The first formal established Islamic madras was established by the Saljuqid minister Nizam-al-Mulk in the latter half of eleventh century, called Madrasa Nizamiyah (Blanchard, 2007; Makdisi, 1961). It offered free education along with food and other lodging facilities. The madrasa flourished and soon its chains were spread in different parts of Islamic world (Makdisi, 1961; Pedersen, 1929).

As mentioned by Makdisi (1961) there seems to be no obvious parallel to this institution in west at this time. It proved to be a great success not only in the teaching of Sharia and other subjects but also in the field of Muslim theology. Its success is related to Niza-al-Mulk and the great Muslim scholar Al-Ghazali whose genius in Sufi mysticism and mastery in religious theology is still appreciated. The institute is dedicated to the teaching of religion where main focus was on the classical Arabic linguistics along with other aspects of religious subjects. In madras Nizamiyah the curriculum taught is often referred to as Dars – e- Nizami. These madaras spread in different places so, the curriculum offered in these madaras are marginally different depending upon the social and cultural set up of that particular place (Blanchard, 2007; Makdisi, 1961).

This Islamic system of education enabled Muslim to excel in different fields and remain one of the fundamental part of education not only for Muslims but for non-Muslims as well. This heritage was followed in almost all the Islamic world. It was in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when the western colonialism shook the world. They dominated the colonized world and introduced more secular institutions overpowering the religious institutions and discouraging them (Blanchard, 2007). It was a deliberate effort to reduce the effects of these madaras so that they can penetrate the in the core cultural values and can alter the social set up according to their needs.

Dars-e- Nizami in Subcontinent

As mentioned above, these madaras spread almost all parts of the Muslim world and Subcontinent is no different. Similarly, this system was farmed by the Muslims after they come to subcontinent. It was in the colonial period, when the British government on the name of reformation introduced the schooling system. There were certain purposes behind this so called reformation: the famous among them was ‘British thinking in white skin’. These colonizers realized that the source of knowledge for Muslims were these madaras and hence, out of fear they discarded these madaras (Zaman, 2010). Mid nineteenth century in this regard mark a crucial period in the history of subcontinent. It was the time when two policies were implemented: first in 1835 and second in 1854. Short after that the war of independence (1857)

was fought which remained a failure by the Indian people. Yet it was the end of East India Company and starting point of British rule. British government realized the importance of changing the mindset of the people hence, they went on to launch institutes for higher education in India modelling them on the form of University of London (Qadir, 2013). As a reaction, the Muslims realized the whole situation and started their efforts to launch higher education institute to resist this invasion. There were two famous school of thoughts and followers of that tradition namely Deoband and Bralvi who resisted the British invasion and retained their identity against all the odds. In addition to it, Muslim Anglo-Oriental College was formed by Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan in Aligarh in 1957 and Dar-ul-uloom Nadwa was founded in 1893 by Allam Shibli Numani (Qadir, 2013). The policy which British government adopted for tackling this situations demands a separate work and thus, it is not included in this work.

After the partition of India and with the emergence of Pakistan a great number of Islamic scholars 'Ulmas' came to Pakistan and formed their madrasa here. The study made by Rana (2009) suggests that there are five types of religious madrasas in Pakistan which include 46% of Deobandi, 27% of Braelvi, 12% of Ahl-e-Hadith, 9% of Shia and 6% of Jamaat-e-Islami. All these madaras have been working independently and their source of funding is their own raising of charity. It was until the Zia-ul-Haq's rule in 1980s, when these madaras turned radical. US government and its agencies were responsible for this radicalization. Consequently, it was the starting of the culture of violence which later embedded in madaras. El-Edroos (2008) contends that extensive militancy in madaras was introduced in 1980. He further mention a study by Patrick Belton at the university of Nebraska-Omaha and published by USAID about the literature on the validation and reassurance of holy war against the Soviet Union. In the light of this outside influence, students were programed for the jihad against Soviet Union in Afghanistan. This increase in militancy in the madaras was unchecked as it was serving the purpose of outside forces and thus, it became a threat for all eventually. According to Mary Ann Weaver (1995) "Madrasas in Afghanistan and Pakistan were allegedly boosted by an increase in financial support from the United States". Yet it is important to mention that these were few and far between as majority among them remained away from this whole campaign. Blanchard (2007) in this regard states in the 2003 USAID strategy paper which pronounced associations between madrasas and extremist Islamic groups as "rare but worrisome," but also added that "access to quality education alone cannot dissuade all vulnerable youth from joining terrorist groups"(Benoliel, 2003).

This was a very serious situation as students of all these institution were provided with the literature which was useful for some in that era but could cause a serious damage in times to come. These Jihad i's institution which were very few in number, as mentioned by Dalrymple (2005, pp. 6-7)

"By and large, however, madrasa students simply do not have the technical expertise necessary to carry out the kind of sophisticated attacks we have recently seen led by al-Qaeda. Instead the concerns of most madrasa graduates remain more traditional: the correct fulfillment of rituals, how to wash correctly before prayers, and the proper length to grow a beard. All these matters are part of the curriculum of Koranic studies in the madrasas."

The madaras involved were funded by USA against the Soviet Union and the person who was entrusted this job was General Zia-ul-Haq. They all together forgot the radical ideology they infused in those madaras was like a bomb which could explode any time and could cause damage to any one including themselves. This resulted in the foundation of Taliban and other extremist organizations which promoted sectarianism and violence in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The coming civilian Governments failed to curtail this violence either purposefully or due to lack of resources. This failure, however, promoted religious militants to excel in size and power,

Pakistani Madaras after 9:11

In the recent time especially after 9:11 incidence, madaras in Pakistan were alleged to have connection with militancy. It is obvious that even in Soviet war only few madaras were involved with militancy as mentioned by USAID report 2003. The research in this connection on madaras is only limited to “anecdotal accounts and investigative journalism(Ahmed, 2009, p. 4)”. But it has done two thing at least for the betterment of these institutions which are long forgotten by not only governments but other organizations. First, it attracted the attention of different International and national NGO’s as they think that this radicalization extremist psychology is against their interest now which infect was bred by them once. On the other hand it also brought the focus of the governments.

It became inevitable for the government and other agencies to make madrasa reforms so that this radicalism could be stopped. It was a uphill task although only about 10 percent madaras were involved in militancy directly or indirectly (Ahmed, 2009). The government deliberately avoided this situation as they thought that this confrontation may result in cut down in their popularity. Most typical example came into scene with Lal Masjid incidence where only few people declared the enforcement of Sharia in their premises and some girl hijacked Children library and cautioned suicide attacks if any operation was carried out. The purpose was to avoid madrasa reformation as reported in *Daily Times* (April 7, 2007).

It was in the General Pervaiz Musharraf’s government when the madrasa reforms were initiated. The slogan of ‘Enlightened Moderation’ along with ‘Muslims must raise themselves up through individual achievement and socioeconomic emancipation’ clearly indicates the aim of Musharraf (Musharraf, 2004). It was a revers of what had happened in 1980s when similar forces who were encouraging jihad were now calling for the reforms. These reforms in madaras are probably the most difficult task took up by Musharraf government. Before looking into reforms and it draw backs, let us first take a look at the situation of Pakistani Madaras.

Pakistani Madaras in Recent Time: Condition and Challenges

Madaras in Pakistan show a miserable condition and do not provide even a shadow of its glorious past. These madaras although follow the foot step of Niazamia Madrasa but in reality there is no system at all. The interviews and observations done in this study since, only consider the condition of madaras and the challenges they face. In the light of these, the main findings of this data analysis is given below

When asked about the situation and funding sources of madaras the Ulmas who provided researcher valuable feedback and first-hand knowledge about the recent state of madrasa system in Pakistan, were of the view that situation in madaras is quite pathetic. In majority of madaras

due to lack of interest from the governments these madaras remained the places for rote learning curtailing them to the cramming of Arabic text without the understanding if the real content. With the passage of time, these madaras became a place for the children of poor people who cannot afford their educational expenses and have no choice but to send them to madaras. Individual madaras selected their pedagogical content which propagated sectarianism rather than the knowledge of Islam in its right spirit.

These institutes generate fund at their own. Their funding sources are mainly charity driven. Almost all the madaras get their funding by virtue of endowments, Zakat, trust, donations and other contribution from the individuals. Although in Zia-ul-Haq reign the collection of Zakat from the public was done by the Government yet these madaras were provide financial assistance by the publicly administered zakat funds. Madaras are mostly free for all the students. In some institutes there is a very low fee for the students. Apart from this students are given free text books, boarding and lodging facility and in some cases stipend for the needy students.

The participants of the study showed a great concern over the syllabus taught in Madaras but they were unable to present any solution for this issue. Syllabus taught in these madaras is outdated. There is no culture of research and thus majority of the books taught are more than 5 centuries old. Ahmad (2004) asserts that the book they use as text are dated back to eleventh century and the latest among them are from seventeenth century. That is a concern for the students and the teachers yet, no one is interested in upgrading the syllabus. Another important issue concerning the books and the subjects is that not all the facilities are available in one madrasa so students have to go to another to finish their course work. These issues regarding syllabus is one of the reason that madaras cannot regularize their curriculum.

Almost all the Ulmas and students showed their concerns over the availability of faculty in madaras. The teacher in the madaras are generally the graduates from these madaras. Although these madaras are sensitized religiously and politically yet these teacher are marginalized in the society. They face certain restrictions and their mingling with other persons in social gatherings are thought as a taboo. Their interaction is confined to the religious gatherings like death, marriage and religious events. They are thought as Ulmas who have to maintain their distance with the common people (Habib, Bhatti, Ishfaq, & Mahmood, 2017). The salary they receive is so modest that they have to rely on other sources for their households which in turn sways their focus from working in the field and bringing rigor to their work.

Third main challenge raised by the participants of the study is about student induction in the madaras. Students are inducted without any admission policy. The fact of the matter is that people generally send their least capable son or daughter to madrasa. They send talented ones to schools because they think that their son or in some cases daughter would have a bright future there. The poor people in the country who cannot afford the education of their children are left with no option but to send them to these madaras where not only they get education free but also able to earn after the completion of their education. Interestingly, majority of madrasa graduates get jobs even before graduation. However in the recent past few madaras established their admission procedure grading system and promotion system for the students.

Reforms in Madaras

After brief discussion on the challenges and the recent conditions of madaras it is very important to debate on the reforms. All the percipients for the study are in favor of reforms needed for the madaras but their nature of reforms are different. As mentioned by Rahman (2007) madaras are formed by keeping in view the need for the society. He further argues about the legitimacy of the claim that the institutes related to conservatism before the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan suddenly became the part of militancy and extremism. There is an ample room for reformation in madrasa education. In the light of the interviews and observation the main reformation needed for Madaras are summarized below.

Funding

A very important issue in madrasa reforms is the provision of ample funds. It is obvious that these madaras are inevitable for the education of unprivileged people who otherwise cannot afford the education of their children. Thus, there is a need for the development of the already working institutions. According to the constitution of Pakistan 1973 it is the duty of state to provide free and compulsory secondary education to all the people of Pakistan. On the contrary, majority of madaras are getting funding from different sources of their own. Some are being run by the known scholars in the fail who utilizes their linkages and make available necessary arrangements including acquiring of land, availability of faculty, lodging and books. It is therefore, important to provide funds to these already existing resources.

In this regard, Pakistan government's national action plan for the education was made for the period of 2001-2015 and estimated for 7.2 billion US Dollar. Apart from this Educator Section Reform bill was passed by the government in 2001 which aims at providing quality education and increasing the literacy rate. It include the reformation in curriculum and assessment, training for the faculty and infrastructure. Another important part of Educator Section Reform is Education for All in 2003 which cost 20 million US Dollar. One of the main objectives of Educator Section Reform program is to bring the Pakistani madaras into the mainstream educational system by adding those subjects to the curriculum which are related to modern day needs. For the reformation in madaras Pakistan 'Madrassa Education Board' was formed in 2001. The aim of establishing this board is to bring changes in madaras and providing them regular funds. The estimated cost for this project was 113 US Dollars. Unfortunately, it was not materialized.

Curriculum

Second important Issue mentioned by the participants is Curriculum. It includes the subject taught in the madaras, uniformity in curriculum and availability of the faculty etc. As mentioned above all the participant agreed that the curriculum taught in madaras is out dated but some among them disagreed on changing it. The reason they presented is staying close to the actual source: if we sway from the stuff, there is every likely hood of dissuading from the path. On the contrary most of the participants are of the view that modern day things should be included so that both teacher and students may not feel secluded and away from the main stream

modern day world. They also agreed that research is needed for even the religious rituals to be imparted on modern day world.

In the light of “Enlightened moderation” Musharraf initiated the reformation in curriculum. This reformation included the teaching of subjects like Mathematics, science and English etc. Computer education is also made a part of the regular curriculum. It was good step as learning these especially English language students and even teachers can be get benefit from the modern technology which in this era is almost must. In addition to it. they can also study material which is written in English. It is also heartening that most of the participants viewed this step from the government as a good move towards reformation.

Infrastructure

Third important issue mentioned by the participants is the lack of infra structure. This includes all that is required for the learning and teaching process along with facilities like free food, lodging, acquiring land, and other miscellaneous things. The situation is further accentuated by the fact that the fee structure of these madaras is almost nonexistent. This puts immense pressure on the charitable sources. Thus, it is almost impossible to properly plan and execute those plan. It is therefore, important for the government to step up and provide financial resource to madaras so that the infra structure can be built and in turn the whole process of reformation can take place.

It was also discussed during the interviews that the funds received by the madaras by the charity, zakat or other sources are on one hand providing assistance to the educational procedure but on the other hand some time causing the external factors to interfere in the academic process and can introduce their ideologies in the students. Ahmad (2004) opines that the madaras which are supported by the religious endowments get the financial autonomy which is “a major source of independent religio-political power base of ulama in Bangladesh and Pakistan” (p. 7). He further states that the government should make a process of funding to the madaras and there should be make regulatory body for this purpose.

Social acceptance

The next important point made by the participants is about the social acceptance of the madaras, the teacher teaching in these institutes and the students. According to them these institutes are thought to be taken as something out of the social set up. Only ten percent of the student join madaras and rest take other formal education. among these 10% students only 1% are capable of grasping the religious instructions (Ahmed, 2009). Along with that, general public do not accept it as an educational institute rather they consider it a place where they can deposit their charities and zakat.

By and large people associate people attached with madaras are thought to be backward and people with no knowledge of latest technology. As far the status of students are concerned, both are taken as aliens in the society. They are not considered for any kind of formal jobs. General public consider students as additional part of society as parents prefer the weakest child in terms of mental capacity to join madras. The teachers in the madaras are taken as belonging to different world. They are differentiated in public gathering and are not considered as living

normal life. The participants of this study also mentioned numerous other issue on which few agreed but other rejected those. That is why researcher does not mentioned them in this study.

Conclusion

This study is focused on presenting the actual conditions and challenges in madrasa education. The study also discusses the history of the madaras in order to make the readers understand the importance and working of madrasa education system. Then the study discusses the Afghan-Soviet war where the actual extremism was born. Then the inculcation of jihadi literature is also discussed in the light of Pakistani madaras. The last part of the study is concerned with condition and challenges faced by the madaras.

The overall picture of the Pakistani madaras is quiet pathetic. The participants have shown grievance concerned over a number of issues concerning the conditions of the madaras but four main issues are highlighted by them which include funding from external sources, curriculum, infra structure and social acceptance. All of them agreed that these four things needed reforms. It can be concluded that the Pakistani government needs to take up these issues seriously and make sudden changes in the madrasa education. The reformation process should include the people from the madaras as well as education sector. There is a need of consensus among the scholars to upgrade the curriculum so that it should not offend any of the two groups. Apart from these changes in the madaras curriculum, there is a need of closely observing the funding process. The best solution is to bring all the madaras under government supervision and government should provide all the funds but if they don't have capacity still they should monitor the whole process. The faculty should get good salaries so that they can secure time from other money making activities and should only focus on the upgradation and research in the Islamic education.

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