

The Modern Glimpses of Madrassah Curriculum (A Contextual Analysis)

*Muhammad Rashid (Corresponding Author)**

*Sartaj***

*Muhammad Rafaqat Ali****

ABSTRACT

Madrasah education is generally blamed for fomenting extremism, fundamentalism, indoctrination and violence. Although it is true that Madrasah curriculum still has many shortcomings like any other curriculum of government or private schools, but this does not absolutely prove that such curriculum is the main source of breeding extremism. Instead, the Madrasah curriculum has been characterized as one of the means of promoting harmony, cultural values and Islamic ideologies, and shared values of peace, conflict resolution and human rights. The content of Madrasah syllabus has some challenges in application especially in the application of fiqh. And this difference has occurred due to the gap between the contexts of time. When these books were compiled, their context was politically in favor of Muslims. Therefore, many laws made about many phenomena, which might be of little relevance in this period of time, are present in the texts books of Madrasahs. Thus, missing links have left Madrasahs' students far behind to understand the current context and prevailing trends. Along with these shortcomings, there are some peace contents which favor modern rights in society. The combination of different concepts consequently makes the Madrasah's students confused and limits their roles in the society.

Keywords: *Madrasah Curriculum, Education System, Curriculum, Religious Education System.*

Introduction

Pakistan is facing severe security problems due to various factors. To deal with this issue, one needs to address the quality of education in the religious schools. The main rationale of education is to enlighten the people so that they can have a proper understanding about the various issues existing within the country and to educate the people in such a way that they can distinguish between the good and bad to live with harmony and peace. Although there are many reports claiming that Madrasah education or faith-based schools are spreading extremism and are constantly dividing the society. As the US

*PhD Scholar, Department of Politics & IR, International Islamic University Islamabad.

** Lecturer, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Riphah International University, Islamabad.

*** PhD Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies, University of Karachi, Karachi.

Commission on International Religious Freedom has researched Pakistani school textbooks to find out that there is religious biasness in almost every Madrasah, which leads to societal intolerance and smear the minority groups.¹ The Madrasah curriculum was actually formulated for producing Islamic scholars and was based on the teachings of Quran and Hadith to analyze this curriculum, the common parameters and standards are of not much help because they present only one side of the story. Madrasah curriculum is still relevant in the light of its foundational objectives. Even though there are some shortcomings, but those are not the tools to feed extremism which lead to terrorism.

Two types of allegations are leveled against Madrasah; (i) one, that these seminaries indoctrinate students, breed extremism and teach violence (ii) and another is the bias and prejudice which come to their minds while studying in a sect-based Madrasah. The first allegation is based on the teachings of Jihad, as mentioned in the Holy Quran and Hadith, but usually these are quoted without proper context.

Thus, we heard demands from civil societies and other pressure groups about revision of Madrasah curriculum. There is no doubt that it is the state that has the authority to make or suggest such changes but the issue is that if this is done due to external pressure then it can become counterproductive. It is also true that subject related to peace and tolerance should be included in the curriculum with reference to true Islamic teachings so that minds of young children can be molded along the lines of acceptability and tolerance. A universal curriculum should also be established, which would be acceptable to all sects in the country. This is not as simple as it may sound, but it is not possible for the government to do this without the consent of Madrasah leaders. On the other hand, Madrasah leaders are never satisfied with those allegations that are often quoted by researchers, and thus have no validation in their eyes.

Equality

Equality or masawat among people-whether Muslims or Non-Muslims is strictly emphasized in the Islamic scripture. We would focus on Madrasah curriculum to look for whether it sustains these values, negates them or is silent about these worthy values. As mentioned above, the significant and prominent part of Madrasah curriculum is the Holy Scriptures. Other books such as fiqh have also interpreted equality, but of course Madrasah curriculum does not take the interpretations done in other institutions as it explains the equality like

”المؤمنون متكافأ دماً وهم، فهم متساوون في الدية والقصاص، فليس أحد أفضل من أحد، لا في النسب، ولا في اللون، ولا في الجنس.”

Muslims are equal in blood and diyat and qisas, there is no one better than other, not in race, not in color, and not in gender.²

The Qur'an states that all humans are the descendants of one man, Adam and are therefore brothers to one another. The emphasis on equality and justice in the Qur'an appears throughout the text. The duty of Muslims to be just and truthful enjoys a high priority status in Islamic jurisprudence. The Qur'an clearly restricts Muslims from aiding someone in need of their help only where they intend to mislead or carry out an act of aggression by stating "help one another in goodness and piety, and do not help one another in sin and aggression." Besides, the Qur'an teaches its followers that treating the followers of other religions justly and kindly is an object of faith.

Right to Life

Islam promotes the right to peaceful living for everyone and declares it to be one of the basic rights. There are many verses that have different interpretations but the mainstream religious scholars, mainly in Madrasahs, consider the interpretations made by the fuqahaa in various books, as they consider it Ijtihad and Istinbat. The Qur'an says that life is a divine bestowal on humanity that should be secured and defended by all means. It is an individual and a universal duty of Muslims to protect the human merits and virtues of others. Life in the Qur'an is considered a prime and wonderful value, in fact the Qur'an says that "whoever kills a soul, it is as though he slew humankind and whoever saves one life, it is as though he has saved the whole humankind" (Al-Quran). Sometimes it is said that in Islam only Muslims have equal rights to life etc but looking at the fiqh literature it becomes evident that blood and honor of Non-Muslims is as much secured and sacred. According to the great scholar Imam Abu Hanifa, if someone kills a Non-Muslim in an Islamic state the qatil (murderer) would be killed in reward:

” قال: 'وكذا احتج أبو حنيفة بعموم هذه الآية على أنه يقتل المسلم بالكافر، وعلى قتل الحر بالعبد، فقال: الآية عامة، فإذا قتل مسلم ذمياً أو معاهداً فإن النفس بالنفس، فيقتل المسلم بالكافر، وإسلامه هذا ينفعه عند الله، أما في الدنيا فإنه يقتل هذا بهذا“

“Imam Abu Hanifa argues that the verse says that if someone kills other, he would bear the burden because it is a common hukam and that includes both Muslims and Non-Muslims, if Muslim killed Non-Muslims without any right he will be killed. Because the Islam and Kufr is something to deal with hereafter and Allah will do final justice among them.”³

Thus, it can be concluded that the right to life is conferred by the Qur'an and even during war Muslims are prohibited from using force except in self-defense. During the war it is ordained by God that if the enemy decides to a peace agreement then Muslims should also respond positively. Also protected by the Qur'an are the aged, women, and children of the opponent and to these there are no exceptions Al-Quran, Sura Albaqara. 208, Al-Anfaal, 61, Al-Mumtahinah, 6-9.⁴

Right to Ownership and Protection of Property

Hidaya, a prominent Hanafi fiqh book has clearly mentioned dealing with Non-Muslims and advised a full protection and security of their property allows them to continue trade and business of such things which are considered haram for Muslims such as pig, wine etc. The Qur'an bestows upon humans the right to property as well as the freedom to deal and trade as much as they are satisfied with fair dealings. Moreover, throughout the Qur'an, the feeding of orphans, the poor, and the needy are described as highly virtuous deeds. The principles of fair protection of rights and property of those in need of such protection, such as orphans, were brought together in the Qur'an when it says "And give to the orphans their property and do not substitute worthless (thing) for (their) good (ones) and do not consume their property like you own property; this is surely a great crime." The messenger of Allah said, O people "Do you know what day is today?" The people replied "Allah and His Apostle know better" He said "Today is 10th of Dhul-Hijja, the sacred day. Do you know what town is this town?" They replied "Allah and His Apostle know better." He said "This is the sacred town Mecca a sanctuary." And do you know which month is this month? They replied "Allah and His Apostle know better." He said "This is the Sacred (forbidden) month." in the last He added "Allah has made your blood, your properties and your honor Sacred to one another like the sanctity of this day of yours in this month of yours and in this town of yours."⁵

Rights of Minorities and Non-Muslims

Although the Qur'an is the religious scripture of Islam which is ought to be followed, it prohibits Muslims from using any method of pressure to influence the religious practices and beliefs and forbids it to compel any Non-Muslim to accept Islam except with his/her own choice and free will.⁶ The Qur'an goes even further in protecting the rights of the followers of other religions by obligating Muslims to protect all "cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which God's name is (recited) remembered."⁷ In relation to different ethnic, cultural, and religious groups, the Qur'an tells Muslims "Allah says for every one we put a way and he guides himself."⁸ The Qur'an promotes equality between all and says that only good deeds may raise the status of one human over another.

Women's Rights

On the issue of women rights, the followers of Madrasah are usually blamed that they have no regard for women rights. Hidaya, a fiqh book in Madrasah curriculum and many other books in Madrasah teach women rights in the light of the interpretations of fuqaha. Women have the right to get their miraas (inheritance right) as men do, but have the inheritance distributed among men and women in specific portion of miraas. With regards to women's rights, the Qur'an attributes one whole chapter to women which is evident from the very name of the chapter, (Al-Nisa) The Women. For instance, the

Qur'an states in that Surah that whoever does good deeds, whether they are male or female, shall enter Paradise and not the least bit of injustice shall be dealt to them. The same message is repeated in chapter sixteen "Whoever does good whether man or woman and he is a believer, we will most certainly make him live a happy life and We will most certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did."⁹

The ability of women to bear children is a significant quality used by the Qur'an in a number of verses to strengthen the status of women. One such chapter states "And We have enjoined man in respect of his parents--his mother bears him with fainting upon fainting and his weaning takes two years--saying: Be grateful to Me and to both your parents; to Me is the eventual coming." In terms of the economic rights of women, the Qur'an demands "And give women their dowries as a free gift but if they of themselves be pleased to give up to you a portion of it, then eat it with enjoyment and with wholesome result."¹⁰

Women have also been given the right to inherit as the Qur'an states. The Qur'an in one particular verse creates an additional obligation on men to provide, protect, and generally take care of women as their guardians and not as superiors. Perhaps the most valued status, with regards to women, is that of a mother in the Qur'an as it demonstrates this point by binding the reward of paradise to those who satisfy the needs of their parents.

Right to Knowledge

According to the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him), "It is duty of every Muslim man and woman to obtain knowledge."¹¹ It is an obligation to recite few verses from the Holy Qur'an during the performance of five times prayers in a day; therefore it is the duty of every Muslim to learn few chapters from the Holy Qur'an by heart. He is supposed to know about his rights and obligations towards parents, spouse, and children and near relatives. Knowing about such matters demands that student must acquire a minimum level of education. Islamic teachings can be made part of life only through a process of learning made by each and every member of the community. It is a fundamental right of every Muslim to have facilities and sufficient opportunities for learning and acquiring knowledge.

The Demand for acquiring knowledge is not limited to religious knowledge only, but covers almost every field of knowledge that is beneficial to humanity in any way.

No Punishment without Trial

According to the teachings of Islam, a person must not be punished without conducting a proper judicial proceeding that demands proofs against the accused person regarding the offence. It is the duty of a Muslim judge to hear from both sides and to give verdict with justice. Everyone is defined as innocent unless proven guilty by the proofs in the court of law. Even in the

time of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), He never punished anyone without proper trials. Principally, if some doubt persisted regarding commission of an offence, or is created whether the crime has happened or not, then the judge would drop the punishment and the accused person would remain safe.

Equality before the law

One of the principles of law is to treat every person on equal basis. There are many instances Islamic history where the rulers appeared in the court against laymen (Kaseer, 750 H). All citizens must be treated equal according to law whether rich or poor, or of high status or an ordinary person. The Holy Quran says “O mankind! God has created you from one man and one woman. You are divided into nationalities and communities only so that you may identify one another and in the sight of God the most pious among you is most respectable among you verily God is oft-knowing well acquainted.”¹²

International Obligations

Muslims are under obligations to play positive and constructive role among their communities. There are some fixed rules which deal with international ethics. Imam Muhammad, a prominent disciple of Imam Abu Hanifa wrote a book on international relations where he described the obligations which Muslims are subject to follow.¹³ It is their collective responsibility to contribute to the world’s peace and security. Muslims consider themselves as the upholders of values of justice and fairness. On an international level, they are bound to struggle for the promotion of peace and prosperity of nations. The Holy Qur’an provides a universal principle to maintain peaceful relations with the other communities of the world; an open invitation to all the peace-loving nations to come to terms and maintain world peace and harmony. As it states, “Come to a common word between us and you”.¹⁴ It is an invitation to the world communities to agree on those points which are common between the community of Muslims and other nations.

Conclusions

The content of Madrasah syllabus has many challenges in application especially in the application of fiqh. As mentioned before, this difference has occurred due to the gap between the context of time and the new era. When these books were compiled, their context was politically in favor of Muslims. Therefore, many laws made about many phenomena, which might be of little relevance in this period of time, are present in the text’s books of Madrasahs. Thus, missing links have left Madrasahs’ students far behind to understand the current context and prevailing trends. Along with these shortcomings, there are some peace contents which favor modern rights in society. The combination of different concepts consequently makes the Madrasah’s students confused and limits their roles in the society.

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