

Islam, Madrassah and Modern Challenges (Literature Analysis)

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ABSTRACT

Islam has always been viewed as a religion as well as a political system. Islam was practiced politically by the followers as well as it worked as a constitution for the Islamic state. It was due to these teachings that Islamic education was considered productive for running the Islamic state of Madina. In the 19th century, different Islamic organizations started efforts for the revival of Islamic Politics in different parts of the world. This 'revivalism' is called Islamism, which is positive in its essence and has no links with extremism as claimed by certain scholars. The opinions of various scholars demonstrate that the Madrasah educational system, based on the Quranic and Islamic teachings, alternatively indoctrinates students to act violently against others. But the literature being taught in Madrasahs proves otherwise. Madrasah's students are taught about Islam and its preaching of peace and harmony. However, just because students are provided with the teachings of Dars-e-Nizami in Madrasah, it does not absolutely suggest that they attempt to use violent means against their opponents, despite the fact that economical frustration haunts them. Another important factor to be considered is that thinking of Madrasah graduates is also affected and thus shaped by the international political circumstances. However, there is no clear evidence to show the involvement of Madrasah students in any kind of terrorism. It is believed that there are only a few Madrasahs that produce militants or support militancy, but it cannot be admitted that these few Madrasahs have any strong effect on the country-wide militancy. Madrasahs are not limited to only religious affairs, but they also play a significant role in politics. So, they should not be considered only a place of learning, but centers for political studies, values, and norms related to practical life.

KEYWORDS:

Madrassah, Dars-e-Nizami, Extremism, Islamism, Modernism, Islam

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Introduction

The debate on the expansion of extremism in Pakistan is perceived to begin with the advent of Madrasah education system and its religious affiliations. Scholars from all strands of Social, religious and recently from Security Studies have developed an overarching view about Madrasahs and other religious institutes in Pakistan, which reflects Madrasahs as an essential mean of engendering terrorism and extremism.¹ In saying so, many of them believe that the education being imparted in these seminaries is the ultimate base which induces violent and aggressive behaviors among Madrasah graduates. The preconceived notions of Madrasah students are likely to have stemmed from what they have been taught in these institutions.²

Madrasah graduates view the world as it was perceived by the people of the medieval periods generally because most of the courses and contents of Madrasahs stem out of what has been designed by the people of that era to cater the needs of that time specifically.

On the other hand, there is no denying in the fact that the menace of extremism has become exceedingly dangerous in recent years thus threatening the very social fabric of the Pakistani society. The last three decades since late 1970s are generally perceived as the lost decades for Pakistan due to the utmost wave of violent extremism. Internal and external as well international factors are generally considered to play vital role in shaping the public policies of Pakistan regarding the role of religion in public life. During the Cold War era, the adventure of super powers (USSR-US) and the changing political nature of the neighboring countries in the region caused to the State's public posturing to defend the Islamic ideology and the geographical borders of the country, paved the way for the spread of extremist tendencies in Pakistan in the 1980s. This policy did not cease with the end of the Cold War, rather it morphed into an internal patronage of the sects by the allied forces from within and abroad that led to a sectarian strife within Pakistani society. In the first decade of the 21st century, when Pakistan's incumbent regime chose to side with the US in the war on terror, the leviathan of extremists came out with unexpected extreme violent operations. Terrorist attacks and suicide bombings in all corners of Pakistan shook the entire socio-economic and political fabrics of the country. This violent backlash perpetrated by groups with aggressive inclinations was suddenly blamed on the Madrasah and other religious educational institutions. Therefore, a quick reform in the curriculum was then proposed and enforced through a system of check and balance prompted by the backing of the state.

Currently, multiple strands of education systems exist in Pakistan and the Madrasah-based education is one of them. The entire educational institutions can further be divided into two major categories; (i) the religious schools which offer a traditional religion-based education (ii) and the secular schools

that purportedly offer secular education dominating the socio-economic grounds. The time after 2000 has changed the previously held world view is currently being reshaped around the globe. However, the trends and trajectory of Madrasah education, even in the unfavorable circumstances, have remained consistently steadfast. The focus has given to the increasing numbers of institutions rather on the textual and contextual standards of them. The following table shows the statistical increase of Madrasahs in Pakistan during a short period from 1988 to 2002.³

Increase of Madrasahs during the Year 1988-2002 with Sectarian Differences			
Sect	# of Madrasahs in 1988	# of Madrasahs in 2002	Percentage growth
Deobandi	1779	7000	294%
Brelvi	717	1585	121%
Ahl-e-Hadees	161	376	134%
Shia	47	419	792%
Jamaat-e-Islami	97	500	415%
Total	2801	9880	253%

Source: Tariq Rehman thesis “Madrasahs: the potential for violence in Pakistan” (Rehman, 2009)

The following statistics show the current numbers of Madrasahs, Madrasah’s students and teachers.

Current numbers of Madrasahs, Madrasah Teachers and Students 2017⁴			
Sect	# of Madrasahs	# of teachers	# of students
Deobandi	13,700	108,700	2,770,000
Brelvi	8,300	66,000	1,680,000
Ahl-e-Hadees	1100	8,700	222,000
Shia	1,500	11,970	305,000
Jamaat-e-Islami	600	4,800	121,000
Total	25,200	200,170	5,098,000

These statistics show that a prominent portion of Pakistani society is regularly engaged in Madrasah education. For many people, there seldom exists any choice to get decent education except to admit their children in Madrasah educational systems due to various socio-economic factors. The poor exposure and the lack of the fully comprehension of the modern society and new trends consequently, caused to their isolation from the entire privileged society, which is a great loss for all, and hence, seeking job in the “Mimbar” pulpit in the mosques or other religious institutions becomes the

only option of a sustained career by most of the graduates. Ultimately, the graduates of Madrasahs are thus never considered influential in any of the socio-political decisions which the privileged part of the society has the edge to normally maintain. Moreover, any political activism that is held by this segment of the society is also viewed with some kind of suspicion and mistrust.

What is extremism? Whether Madrasah is involved in it or not? The whole crux of conflict is characterized by a lack of consensus in defining 'extremism' within the prevalent debates on Madrasahs and their role in violent extremism. The term 'extremism' in Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary has been defined as the "Political, religious etc. ideas or actions that are extreme and not normal, reasonable or acceptable to most people." These words still have the ambiguity, which give the space to many, to explain them in their own interest, like, what is the limit of extreme? Who are these (most) people? Of course, there is a big debate between the different groups on defining these terminologies.

The Roots of Islamism

Islam has always been viewed as a religion as well as a political system. Islam was practiced politically by the followers as well as it worked as a constitution for the Islamic state. It was due to these teachings that the Islamic education was considered productive for running the Islamic state of Madina. In the 19th century, different Islamic organizations started efforts for the revival of Islamic Politics in different parts of the world.⁵ This 'revivalism' is called Islamism, which is positive in its essence and has no links with extremism as claimed by certain scholars.

The opinions of various scholars quoted above demonstrate that the Madrasah educational system, based on the Quranic and Islamic teachings, alternatively indoctrinates students to act violently against their opponents. Although the literature being taught in Madrasahs proves otherwise. Madrasah's students are taught about Islam and its preaching of peace and harmony. However, just because students are provided with the teachings of Dars-e-Nizami in Madrasah, it does not absolutely suggest that they attempt to use violent means against their opponents, despite the fact that frustration haunts them. When Madrasah graduates face various socio-economic instabilities such as lack of jobs and other social insecurities, they have the nostalgic image of the Muslim past where they could fit in every sphere of life.

Another important factor to be considered is that thinking of Madrasah graduates is also affected and thus shaped by the international political circumstances. The Iranian revolution was the first and foremost event that brought a trend of revolution to Madrasahs. As a consequence, Madrasah's scholars started thinking to seek political power in order to revive religion-based revolutions. The policies of Western Powers, and their media, presented religious schools as perfect and complete centers for terrorist's

trainings.⁶ However, there is no clear evidence to show the involvement of Madrasah students in terrorism. The writers who have written much about Madrasahs have neither asked parents' views about Madrasahs, nor did they meet the students of Madrasahs. So, their investigations which target Madrasahs as responsible for engendering militants have no sound footings or empirical evidences. It is believed that there are only few Madrasahs which produce militants or support militancy, but it cannot be admitted that these few Madrasahs have any strong effect on the country wide militancy.

Moreover, Madrasahs and other religious educational institutions are not part of any high rank educational system, except the Iftaa course which is a kind of specialization in Fiqh. They thus teach their own syllabus and consider the syllabus selection an internal matter, besides being under patronage of the state.⁷

Madrasahs are not limited to only religious affairs, but they also play significant role in politics. So, they should not be considered only a place of learning, but centers for political studies, values and norms related to practical life.

The Genesis of the Extremist Tendencies

Madrasahs in Pakistan have been indicted of indoctrinating and feeding extremist ideology that produced terrorism and radicalism in society. Madrasah is considered a key educational institute which educates those children who have no resources or the children who want to get religious education. The Madrasah system of education has many pedagogical challenges, for example; not being compatible with the modern context as its graduates cannot achieve similar opportunities and positions in society in comparison to the graduates of modern contemporary educational institutes. The decline in economic opportunities increases the already existing frustration in Madrasah graduates due to a utopian worldview of the golden time of Islamic history while comparing it with the modern era. This frustration is evident from their extreme views expressed in their speeches and writings. This assertion is backed by the psychological theory of Frustration–aggression hypothesis, which is also known as the frustration–aggression–displacement theory. It is mainly a theory of aggression proposed by John Dollard, in 1939,⁸ and further developed by Miller, Roger Barker et al. in 1941⁹ and Leonard Berkowitz in 1969.¹⁰ The theory states that aggression is primarily the result of a blocking on a person's efforts to attain their goals.¹¹ The frustration–aggression hypothesis attempts to explain the factors which turn normal people to scapegoats for displaced aggression. It attempts to give an explanation as to the cause of violence and the root causes for aggressive behaviors. The theory, developed by John Dollard and colleagues, claims that frustration causes aggression, but when the source of the frustration cannot be challenged, the aggression gets displaced onto an innocent target.¹²

Many examples can be drawn to explicate the theory. For instance, if a man is disrespected and humiliated at his work, and cannot take revenge of his humiliation for the fear of losing his job, he may alternatively burst his anger and frustration out at any subordinate being such as his family. This theory is also used to explain the riots and revolutions which are instigated by the poorer and more deprived sections of the society who may express their bottled-up frustrations and anger through gross violence. Research indicates that frustration is more likely to lead to aggression if the aggressive behavior helps to instigate the causes of frustration. Accordingly, frustration defined as “the state that emerges when circumstances interfere with a goal response” often leads to aggression. This frustration can be caused by many factors; as in if someone tries to realize his ideal realm of fantasy which does not essentially exist, so ultimately, he will be frustrated which will be transformed into aggression and that will harm any human being whether or not, he is responsible for it. When the target group is displaced, then the innocent can become a soft target of such aggression.¹³ Similarly, when insurgents start fighting with the military and are unable to find any military target easily, they start slaughtering civilians and innocent local police officers.¹⁴

There is a strong perception that Madrasah graduates usually become frustrated after their graduation in many ways. Let's take an account of the scenario in which the existing text of the seminaries to derive the rationale of change or amendment has been developed and applied. The traditional Madrasah curriculum includes books, written and developed some five hundred years ago, when Muslims enjoyed a prestigious identity within the surrounding world. The codification of Islamic injunctions in comprehensive text reflects the glorified identity of the Muslims at that specific time. Consequently, the present Madrasah graduates are carrying the same thoughts as if they want to dive into that part of the society where they can find their own version of norms and beliefs. As a result of failure to find their utopian society, some of them get frustrated which morphs into aggression against all those institutions which do not permit them to be part of the privileged society such as the government, modern schools, culture, modern institutions and the public. In some situations, frustration does augment the likelihood of aggression. An experiment held on the issue revealed that one of the three types of frustrations responsible for aggression was: failure to earn money, failure to earn better grades, or failure in a given a task. All three groups showed more subsequent aggressions than a controlled group which did not reflect any form of frustration.¹⁵ If someone establishes an opinion, and considers it the utmost truth and the right goal of life to achieve at first hand, but finds certain hurdles to attain his/her goal then it will ultimately cause frustration that will instill an aggressive behavior against the prevailing system and everyone aligned with it. One study found that closeness to the goal makes a difference. The study examined people waiting

in a line and concluded that the second person standing in the row was more aggressive than the twelfth one when someone crossed the line.¹⁶ Frustration does not inevitably result in aggression. It is important to identify the circumstances under which frustration will end to transform into a massive aggression. The present work is therefore grounded in this theory and seeks to examine the extent to which Madrasah students adopt aggressive behaviors in order to reveal their frustration against the suppressive powerful structures of the society.

Recommendation for the Further Improvement

Below are some recommendations suggested for faith-based schools to reform and meet the needs of the new generation religious atmosphere. Despite the fact that Madrasah curriculum has a massive strength, to relate these notions that once have been idealistic views according to the ancient context, is now set to be defined as sheer conservatism in the current day affairs, and therefore, is suggested to generate a new framework followed by advanced methodologies which can enable it to enter into the powerful structures of society., Otherwise, it would be just a recurrent dream to keep something which could not be related to the current situation and cannot solve the existing problems of the present day. Hence, these institutions are advised to bring massive reforms and to offer advanced forms of knowledge to their respective students. Following are some of the suggestions in the light of the overall discussion and debates done in the earlier chapters which can be helpful for further consultation:

A Comprehensive Planning:

There should be a devised planning characterized by modernistic missions and strategies and their application along with standard operating procedures giving preference to implications with a constant reflections and calculations to make sure that program is in accordance with the set parameters. It has been examined that what gives Madrasahs a less edge in relation to other educational institutes, is the lack of a modernistic, highly organized planning of what should be taught and what should be discredited from the outline of the syllabus and the likely material to be taught in the institute.

A Balanced Curriculum:

Islamic teachings, being universal in nature, claim its importance to be followed by all mankind, regardless of any particular sect. In Pakistan, it is highly recommended to organize a curriculum keeping the contextual factors in terms of religious, historical, cultural and societal needs along with the parameters of syllabus making, thus creating a more balanced, flexible, attractive, comprehensive and pragmatic syllabus in terms of co-relating religious teachings with worldly affairs, to fully grasp the sense of true Islam.

Diversity and Comprehension of Curriculum:

Religious scholars need to take a keen observation to the various aspect of societal organization and select their primary subjects on these bases. Religious knowledge is fundamental for the Madrasahs which were built for this sole purpose but it is also essential to consider the modern parameters of education to instill an effective medium of communication. To resolve people's problems in the current sphere, religious scholars should have a deep knowledge of the dominant institutional structures of society such as the new emerging languages, Islamic banking, psychology, sociology, International Relations etc so that religious conflicts can be analyzed and managed in better way. A similar diversity in the curriculum should be established to reflect the diversity in society. Considering different schools of thought, sects and even religions, a scholar should be well versed to face conflicts peacefully and learn to live in a society with diversity. Along with healthy and functional activities such as research, leadership, counseling skills as well as embarking technological developments are significant for Madrasahs. Pakistani society mostly consists of youth, both male and female, so there should be equal proportions for all stakeholders to take part in such activities.

Curriculum-based on Sectarian Harmony:

One of the fundamental aspects is to explore the problems of sectarianism in the curriculum and to work on common values and Usool where the difference lies in the Juziyaat (secondary details), which will strengthen the moral values of the students. For this sole purpose, students can make visits to each other's Madrasahs and discuss their means of knowledge respectfully. Muslim scholars have paid great importance to this aspect by knitting the commonalities among different fiqh which are more than 90%. Muslim scholars did ijthihad on their principles which were beyond the capability of any other Mujtahid, but they never despised each other and were respectful to every scholar's opinion on the subject matter

Research Oriented Curriculum:

Curriculum should be research oriented that can engender research skills within students learning strategies. Most of the students are unaware of the term research and its connotations along with its importance. Instead, they only fall prey to Taqleed like any other layman. Madrasah students should work extensively on the new issues during their studies to become skillful on how to make ijthihad. This practice will enhance their skills and will serve as a great talent for establishing norms and values in the society regarding research.

Arrangement of Professionalism:

It is also of equal importance to gain a professional training along with spiritual one. There should be a special program that can train the students, teachers, Khateeb, preachers to make them relevant to the society. The

major problem with Madrasah institutions is that Madrasah students may receive graduation but they fail to understand the parameters of society and thus find themselves in a paradoxical situation where they have grasped an archaic knowledge that no more exists to serve or penetrate into the powerful structures of the society.

Diversity in Education:

Humans are different in nature from each other, and their individualistic abilities serve as mean to direct them to a specific way of life, especially those who lack interest in studies but exhibit greater talent in terms of other co-curricular activities. Having different learning attitudes must therefore be catered accordingly. Madrasah should provide the learners with advanced means of knowledge. This will foster the learners with abilities to make them expertise in their relative fields.

Flexibility and Development:

There can always be a room for reforms and advancement. Institutions are constantly engaged in progress and gradual development. Similarly, curriculum design should have much flexibility to adopt the reforms according to the societal changes so as to prepare the students to face the new upcoming challenges.

Challenges of Globalization:

Madrasahs have to be aware of the current globalization challenges. The world has become a global village, and access to every means of technology has become easily available across the world. It is through the effects of globalization that different cultures, colors, languages, religions along with their distinctive ideologies about education, politics and economics have become an amalgamation. Consequently, if a person lacks an effective knowledge about the dominant trends that have been engendered through globalism, he/she might find him/herself in a perplexing situation for providing proper solutions to any prevalent issues.

Some specific Recommendations

There is a political system in Pakistan which guaranteed with its all flaws the freedom to practice and preach the religion of Islam and the existing constitution of 1973 was prepared with the consultation of Ulema who belonged to all schools of thought. Madrasahs teach their students about the authenticity of basic resolutions when Pakistan came into being and the Islamic articles which forbid any un-Islamic amendment in its constitution

As understood, Madrasahs are educational institutions so therefore, they must follow the parameters of an educational institution. Despite the fact that Madrasahs are Waqf property which cannot be owned by anyone, there still exists a board which runs the whole system of Madrasahs. We may claim that small areas can create a Madrasah of their own so as to educate their people who lack any facility of gaining education, but the sole purpose of

education still cannot be met if there does not exist a whole organization that operates on its behalf.

Madrasahs are being criticized of their funding and not conducting any internal or external audit. To make a corruption free institution, audit is necessary. Though many governments have tried to bring Madrasah under audit system but it is recommended that before government tries to impose any such measure forcefully it is necessary that Madrasahs should take all measures into consideration and be in accordance with the government laws. All Madrasahs should therefore be registered and must be run according to the laws implemented in the country and that no Madrasah should try to deny any of the rules and regulations.

Madrasahs are not trust or welfare organizations, but are considered as proper educational institutions. Thus, being an educational institution, Madrasahs should change their method of awarding Asnaad thus making them valuable and equivalent to Metric, FA, BA and MA like any other status of educational institutions in the country. Madrasah students should have same facilities and opportunities as modern educational degree holders have. Moreover, the five Wifaqs of Madrasahs should have the status as any other educational board has in issuing the degrees acceptable anywhere. Madrasahs should also take a massive consideration towards the incorporation of other spheres of knowledge such as Social Sciences so as to create a harmony among the different religious sects prevalent around the country.

Madrasah authorities and leaders should make a committee to review the curriculum and make sure that no biased material is being taught in any Madrasah. As a matter of fact, the current atmosphere is characterized by a large number of conflicts among different sects. Pakistan, being a Muslim majority country should take these conflicts into account and provide Madrasah students with effective knowledge on how to behave or interact with groups of people who belong to other sects. Madrasahs should arrange training centers for their graduates to train them as an Imam, Khateeb, and teacher or in any other profession that they wish to adopt to perform their duties rightly. Inter and intra-faith trainings are required for perpetual peace among religious leaders, teachers, Imam and Khateeb as they set the trends for the community to follow. It is therefore their duty to guide the masses about the true teachings of Islam to live with dignity and respect with each other.

Conclusion

The main conclusion of the work pertains to certain areas and gaps which require to be filled at priority basis. As it is proved that Madrasah curriculum has become gradually outdated in certain aspects and cannot introduce students to current situation in some themes and to the prevailing trends in the society. Therefore, after graduation, graduates find themselves lurking in

a paradoxical situation in which they cannot easily understand the society and its need and problems which consequently makes them unsuited and disorganized in the sphere of the modern society.

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