

# Madrassa's Education in Pakistan since 9/11

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## **Abstract**

The word 'Madrassa' has become confused and its negative image is propagated during recent years. In the West and US, a circle among the policy makers considers this institution as an instrument of spreading hatred and violence in the society. In the same manner the Madrassas in Pakistan are looked as nurseries of religious bigotry and extremism. On the other hand Madrassas have a significant role in imparting the religious education. The main objective of this research study is to throw light on the changing pattern of Madrassa's education and the efforts of Pakistan government to reform. Further, this study also investigates the Madrassas in their socio-political context. One of the major findings of the study is that there has seen a shift in the traditional study to multidimensional approach in Madrassas.

**Key words:** Madrasa, Pakistan, Reform Education, 9/11, Islam

## **Introduction**

Madrassa is Arabic word which means schooling place either religious or secular.<sup>1</sup> This has got popular recognition as a place of disseminating Islamic education. In the early days of Pakistan, there a very few well reputed Madrassas and its number increased with the passage of time. This institution became much more prominent when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, by supporting Afghan Jihad. About 1000 Madrassas are reported to have established during this period with the support of Arab countries. As such Afghan Jihad is one dominating factor of the mushroom growth of Madrassas in Pakistan in the year 1980s.

When Russia withdrew from Afghanistan the US, Middle Eastern countries and other International donors ceased their support to these Madrassas and lift the Afghan fighters in lurch. The security vacuums, created by these forces were filled-up by Taliban, the emerging phenomenon. Taliban, who were the students of these Madrassas controlled major parts of Afghanistan. In post 9/11 American led war on terror of 42 countries backed by UN, target these Madrassas once supported.

Pakistan decided to go with International community to support Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). In response Pakistan faced terrorist attacks from these forces which brought Madrassas under lamplight once again, but this

time with negative images. Several international newspapers, particularly Washington post severely criticize Pakistan's Madrassas in their article since 9/11. In 1947 there were two hundred Madrassas in Pakistan which is now about forty thousands, majority of which are working on the pattern of NGOs, providing lodging and feeding facilities to poor and orphans.

According to one school of thought some of these Madrassas are involved in promoting sectarianism while few of these are sending manpower to anti-state insurgent groups of Pakistan. Some Madrassas of Tribal areas are reported as involved in transportation of fighters to Afghan war.<sup>2</sup> According to P.W Singer 10 to 15 % of Madrassas are promoting militancy. Madrassa's education, their funding and influences in society is subject of consideration domestically and abroad. Different voices demand to bring them under governmental control and introduce reforms in the system which becomes more prominent after 9/11. The main objective of the study is to highlight the history and role of this perception, need of reforms, realities of its function, governmental efforts to reform and its impacts would also be discuss in the article.

### **Madrassa Education Historical Overview**

Masjid remains the center of learning and social gathering since the days of Holy Prophet (SAW). During the times of Abbasside dynasty (750-1258 AD) the pattern was changed as due to expansion of knowledge and need of administrative skills, to a more specialized one which give birth to Madrassa as an institution. It is generally believed that first Madrassa was built in Fas (Fez) city of Morocco in 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Teaching of Quran and Hadith was the syllabus of early Madrassa and with the passage of time emphasis on Fiqah was given to train judges for imperial courts. Subjects like astronomy, mathematics and other social sciences were brought under the syllabus as well. Thereafter, Madrassas were established in different places by Muslim rulers and wealthy persons. Turkish rulers brought this concept to sub-continent to bring socio-political and religious transformation.

### **Madrassa's Education in Pakistan after Independence**

At the time of independence there were 200 Madrassa in Pakistan. Whereas currently there are 17000 Madrassas reported by BBC though some other sources estimate this figure from 25 to 40 thousands. These institutions accommodate about 2 to 5 million students and give employment opportunities to thousands of religious scholars.<sup>4</sup> Madrassa system of Pakistan is operated by five schools of thoughts. They are Deobandi, Barelvi, Ahl-i-Hadith, Jamat-e-Islami, and Ahl-e-Tashieaa. Each school of thought organized Madrassas under different boards that are responsible for registration, examinations, and syllabus.<sup>5</sup>

- **Rabitatul-Madrisul-Islamiya**: This board was established by the Jamaat-e-Islamiat Lahore in 1983, and recognizes the Madrassas of all Islamic thought. They teach more modern subjects.
- **Tanzimul-Madaris**: Central board of Sunni Barelvi institutions; established at Lahore in 1960.
- **Wafaqul-Madaris Shi'a**: This board of Shia institutions was established in 1959 and has its center in Lahore. Shia Madrassas teach FiqhJafariya named after Imam JaferSadiq, while other madrassas in Pakistan teach FiqhHanafia.
- **Wafaqul-Madarisul-Arabiya**: Central board of Sunni Deobandiinstitutions; established at Multan in 1960.
- **Wafaqul-Madarisul-Salafiya**: This board was established by the Ahl-i Hadith at Faisalabad in 1955.

### **Traditional Madrassa**

During Mughal eraMadrassa attracted people from all walks of life, but currently the main enrollment is from lower and lower middle class only, with few exceptions.<sup>6</sup>This shift is because of job orientation. The rich Muslims admit their children in schools and arrange part time tutors to impart religious education to their children. Due of rigid division inthe education system, most of the middle class people send one of their children to Madrassa while the rest to modern school. Some families have religious background train one of their children in religious education.<sup>7</sup>

Followers of one Fiqah join the same Madrassa and their mutual differences become sharper as they oppose each other which inflame sectarian violence in society.<sup>8</sup>As these students belong to the weak economic background that's why they adopt rigid attitude and extreme ways for their ideological goals.<sup>9</sup> Lack of modern education and extra-curricular activities in Madrassas cause limited understanding of modern world in these students.<sup>10</sup>Most of the students in Madrassa belong to rural area. In Madrassa of Karachi students belongs to all districts of Pakistan.<sup>11</sup>Pushtoon student always dominates other communities.<sup>12</sup> The graduating students are normally 17 to 27 yearsold. The girl students are on an average younger than the boys. Onereason for this is that their course duration is shorter than that ofboys.<sup>13</sup> Larger Madrassas attract students from different parts of thecountry and from different communities.Some of these Madrassas have entrance exams while the rest have formal admission process. The reputed Madrassas advertise their admissions though newspaper usually after the month of Ramzan while the rest enroll students throughout the year. Most of the Madrassas offer free admissions, food, hostel facilities and books as well.<sup>14</sup>It Means Madrassas are like orphanage for those who have no relatives.

### **Reforms during Musharraf era**

Government intention to reform Madrassa's education can be traced back to August 2001, about a month before terrorist attacks in USA in the month of September.<sup>15</sup> The then president Parveez Musharraf wants to curtail the influences of religious institutes. He proposes wide range of changes to Madrassa's syllabus to drag them into mainstream education and forbid them to enroll foreign students. Major portion of national education policy of 1999-2010, was to deal with Madrassa's education. Basic objective was to bridge the gulf between the two systems and equate their degrees. Provide them new research basis and to bring it close to modern education.<sup>16</sup> To achieve the desired objective the government took serious steps in this context.

### **Pakistan Madrassa Education Board Ordinance of 2001**

On August 18, 2001 Establishment and Affiliation of Model Dini (Religious) Madaris (Madrassas) Board Ordinance was adopted to secure the registration, regulation, standardization and uniformity of curricula and standard of education of Madrassa imparting specialized Islamic education with the general education system.<sup>17</sup> The board was proposed to be consisting of different people from different school of thoughts. On 8<sup>th</sup> of September 2001 under the ordinance Pakistan Madrassa education board was started under Ministry of Religious Affairs. Due to non-cooperation of the religious circles the government failed to enforce the ordinance and revised its policy.

### **Madrassa after September, 11**

Due to its role, Madrassas in Pakistan was labeled as factories of violence and Islam as a violent religion by the international community. Pakistan was criticized because of Taliban and Al-Qaida's links with Madrassas. No doubt these Madrassas creates up to some extent religious, sectarian and anti-west biases but it can't be justify that such feeling are transformed into militancy or violence as projected by international community. In the eyes of western politicians, a certain type of education based on exclusive and rote learning of the Quran offered by Madrasas, seem to be the only logical explanation for the inculcation of hate and irrationality in Islamist terrorists.<sup>18</sup>

Linking of Madrassa education with militancy against west caused broadcast of simple Islamic notions as monolithic, ideological and violent faith.<sup>19</sup> But it's not only the students of Madrassas even the young student of modern educational institutes as well join militancy due to exploitative policies and neo-colonialism.<sup>20</sup> Both Madrassa graduate (belonging to poor families) and middle class (politically literate) global Jihadi are fundamentally different.<sup>21</sup> The latter section because of its modern exposure negate this modern life style and cause havoc in the form of launching militancy, neglected significant aspect in international political circles.

Pakistan after September 11, launched reforms in Madrassa education but remains just a political eyewash as the government failed to streamline and regulate Madrassa's education. The main reason is that government hasn't the actual number of Madrassas. Though government wants these Madrassas to be register but sense of curricular autonomy and superiority are the major impediments towards rational development of the institute. After 9/11 madrassa education came under the limelight of international scholars, to understand the reality we should study the policies introduced by the Parvez Musharraf's regime which emphasized modernization of these institutions instead of Islamization. It was June of 2000 that government launched movement of registration of each Madrassa but succeeded to register only 4350 approximately one tenth of the total. The rest of Madrassa ignored registration as there was no punishment or reward.<sup>22</sup>

In August 2001 "Pakistan Madrassa Education Board" was established under Pakistan Madrassa Education Board Ordinance 2001 to introduce model Madrassas.<sup>23</sup> Mandate of PMEAB is to regulate the existing Madrassa on the basis of its academic council and to grant approval to the new ones, further to affiliate madrassas of private sector as well. This affiliation wasn't under registration but just encourage the institution to impart modern education along with its basic religious education.<sup>24</sup> Establishment of three model Madrassas, two in Sindh (Karachi and Sukkar) and one in Islamabad is the major achievement of PMEAB. Parvez government introduced education sector reforms action plan. NCHD (National Commission for Human Development) was supported by the government as well for its educational responsibilities.<sup>25</sup> Special attention was given to education sector reforms in order to reform madrassa under ESR's (Education Sector Reforms) objectives to bring their curriculum into mainstream education with inclusion of modern subjects like science in their system.<sup>26</sup>

Some of the Madrassa show their resistance to registration. According to PMEAB's annual report of October 2002 "Misunderstandings about the objectives of the Board have resulted in non-cooperation of the heads of Madrasas".<sup>27</sup> Government promised in 2002 to reform Madrassa, to launch a creak down against those who promote violence, to promote moderation in Madrassas like public school system. Deeni Madaris ordinance of 2002 was initiated by Musharraf a voluntary registration and regulation.

Under the act government promise to finance those Madrassa which are formally registered their selves. A deadline of Dec 31, 2005 was given to expel all foreign students. Islamic groups reacted which force the authorities back down. They publically announce that they wouldn't use force to enforce the reforms. Ullam's negative attitude was not the limitation of these ordinances but the Poor administration structure.<sup>28</sup> Popular support isn't easy to achieve because of international events and the killing of hundreds of Muslims in

Afghanistan. Anti-American sentiments and lack of governmental credibility cause this failure.

Madrassa reform project was initiated and Rs. 225 million was allocated in PSPD (Public sector development program), to establish trust between the state and Madrassa. It would educate 1.5 million male and female students and will give them opportunity to continue their studies in college and university.<sup>29</sup>The major objective of these reforms was to introduce modern subjects at primary and secondary level. Under its proposed education policy of 2009 government decided to establish Madrassa regulatory authority to control Madrassas. The proposal was rejected by ITMP (ItehadTannzem-e-Madaris Pakistan) and suggested regulation under the ministry of religious affairs or education ministry. The government succeeded to conclude an agreement with ITMP regarding contemporary courses introduction at their Matric and Intermediate level.

After 18<sup>th</sup> amendment the issue of reforms becomes more complex with when Islamic education was handed over to provinces.<sup>30</sup>Due to mistrust between Madrassa's administration and government all efforts of reforms remain fruitless. For a better role in society, government offered these Madrassas technical and financial assistance.<sup>31</sup>No doubt Madrassa played essential role in importing education for centuries and there are distinctively good features in the system otherwise it would have collapsed long time ago. The initial motive of Madrassa changed and special attention is given to religious education. It's very important to highlight impacts of this education on polity and society.

Pakistani Madrassas don't have uniformed structure due to its sectarian division. Sunni sect's madrassas are further divided into Deobandi, Ahl-e-Hadith and Barelwi. Each of these madrassas follows its own point of view. These sects are located in different parts of the country like Shi'a sect is based in southern Punjab, Karachi and in northern part of Azad Kashmir, Ahl-e-Hadith are outnumbered in Punjab and interior Sindh, Deobandis are inhabited in urban Punjab, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Northern Balochistan and Sindh while Barelwis are located in Sindh and rural Punjab.<sup>32</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The majority of the stakeholders of Madrassas education are having below average income. Since the Afghan jihad the Madrassa have started to perform an important role in the power politics of Pakistan. Madrassa have been playing a very important role in the education of Pakistani society. Islam is a religion of peace and security therefore the curriculum of Madrassas is designed on the same pattern. Madrassas are one of the prime source of the spread and understanding of Islam throughout the ages and particularly in Indo-Pakistan. During the Afghan jihad there is an activism on the part of Madrassas and they have supported the jihad in Afghanistan.

The incident of 9/11 brought Madrassa's under the attention of world countries. They also started performing a visible political role under the auspices of Islamic political parties in Pakistan. As such political life is included in the overall aspects of the life of a Muslim. Therefore Madrassas have played a positive role in the re-construction of Pakistani society in peculiar type of Islamic modernization and development.

Students of Madrassas became a close circle and they considered western education as alien, morally delinquent and un-ethical in their thoughts. The reason is that they propagate the present day concepts of individualism, capitalism, liberty, socialism and democracy in western perspective. Most of these Madrassa don't teach modern subjects like science and technology etc. The designers of the curriculum are of the view that each and every concept and topic of the course must be from Qurran and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (SAW). Lack of modern education in the curriculum of Madrassas debar its students from employment.

The concept of reward for good deeds is propagated in a well-organized manner which diverted towards Madrassas. Wealthy people often help these institutions and even some of them are reported to sponsor even the entire expenditure of institute to get blessing of Allah almighty and for better eternal life.

While our great Muslim scholar Imam Ghazali divided Muslim education into two

1. Compulsory
2. Elective or optional education.

According to him compulsory courses must include holy Quran, sayings of the holy prophet (SAW), Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic history. Elective education or subjects may be included all types of social and natural sciences. Further, he says if in elective subjects the knowledge which students get is playing a role which can led Muslims towards honorable survival, just now a day we see the role of science and technology. Imam Ghazali recommends that such subjects may be taught as compulsory subjects along with the holy Qura'n and the sayings of the Holy prophet (SAW). This clearly indicates that there is a need to reform and re-construct the courses which are included in Madrassa's education.

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