



REFORMATION OF DEENI MADRASAHS IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Islam has always considered the acquisition of knowledge and learning both scientific and religious disciplines as an act of religious merit. Muslims gave the concept of Jamia or University to be a place of education and learning in all fields integrated to one another. Set up first under Seljuk rule in the 11th century by Nizamul Mulk Tusi, the grand vizir, Madrasahs were designed to produce trained bureaucrats for the Seljuk Empire. In their own time they had a modern curriculum that included logic, grammar, mathematics, history, law and administration. As a consequence, they produced renowned scholars like Al-Bairuni, Ibne-Sina, Ibn-al-Hoitham and Ibn-e-Khaldun etc. After the Fall of Baghdad (13th century), although things had begun to weaken and the elements of distortion had started appearing in the system, the real disintegration of the Islamic system took place in the post-18th century period. It was during the colonial rule that Madrasah education lost many of its dimensions and shrank into the shell of limited religious learning. In the Indo-Pak society, Madrasahs have played an important role by preserving the traditions of Islam and reawakening the consciousness of Islamic solidarity and Islamic way of life. Over a period of time, the same Madrasahs, which produced moderate scholars, started fanning sectarianism and extremism due to which Pakistan's internal security was threatened. From 1981 onwards, unchecked proliferation of Deeni Madrasahs also took place as a by-product of the Afghan Jihad particularly in those areas which lacked modern and basic educational facilities. Inside Afghanistan, first the former monarch and later his successors like Mohammad Daud Khan were against the religious institutions, therefore, the Afghans were compelled to approach the religious institutions of Pakistan and now it is believed that 90 % of Taliban leaders were educated from Pakistani religious institutions and 50 per cent of them got educated from Darul Uloom Haqania alone. The aim of this article is to examine the role of Madrasahs in promotion of literacy in Pakistan. To find out the extent to which (if any) the present set up is responsible for violence and sectarian disharmony in the society and whether their curriculum requires modifications and if so, what changes need to be incorporated?

INTRODUCTION

Deeni Madrasahs, today stand accused of religious extremism and promotion of terrorism in the name of religious extremism. Moreover, their syllabi are not in accordance with the dictates of modern education system. As a result, a sense of misunderstanding prevails between mainstream educationists and religious segments of the society. The Government of Pakistan too feels that sectarian disharmony and violence in the society is a fall out of the Madrasah system of education where the training syllabus being imparted to the pupils is very narrow based. To meet the challenges of present and future, a need was felt to bring these Madrasahs into mainstream education system so that their students are provided technical expertise to earn a respectable living and be a productive part of the society. The present government has adopted a strategy to reform Madrasahs in Pakistan to galvanize their positive aspects and remove drawbacks thus utilizing the existing infrastructure for optimum output.

However, the Government of Pakistan, since the start of Madrasahs reforms, is often accused by the western think tanks of taking only cosmetic measures. They point out that a majority of Madrasahs remain unregistered, and a modern curriculum is restricted to only a few. The Government, however, feels that an ill planned crack down will actually strengthen the resolve of dissident elements that had already shown lot of resentment against the Madrasah reforms. The problem thus can only be solved by taking concrete steps with far sighted policy decisions to remove the very causes resulting in decay of this vital Institution of learning.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The word Madrasah comes from '*Dars*' meaning lecture or lesson. The Madrasah is thus any place where lectures are given and lessons are received. Historically Madrasahs have been established in different parts of the world to either act as a counter force against outside influences or for imparting education within specified perimeter.

ORIGINS OF CONCEPT

Islam gives a revolutionary concept of knowledge, and education: the one that blends the spiritual with the mundane, the religious with the secular. This revolutionary and all-embracing concept of knowledge was institutionalized in the form of Madrasahs and Jamia (university). This tradition flourished throughout the first twelve centuries of the Islamic era. The light of knowledge in these Madrasahs started flickering in 13th century and finally got extinguished in the 16th century when the Muslim rulers drove out the scientists, philosophers and thinkers and handed the education to the theologians.

DEVELOPMENT OF MADRASAHS IN SUB-CONTINENT

As a consequence of the disintegration of the Mughal Empire and rule, Muslims in India felt threatened, disillusioned and some, like Sayed Ahmed of Rae Bareilly (1786-1831) responded militantly but were defeated. Others, like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1808-98) learnt English, entered the British bureaucracy and became junior partners of the British in the exercise of power. Still others, blaming Muslims themselves for their loss of power, tried to purify Islam in various ways. As a consequence, the first institution was established by Maulana Mohammad Qasim Nanatawi (1833-1877) and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1829-1905) at locality called Deoband in district Saharanpur.

Later on the Wahhabis (also called Ahl-i-Hadith), Deobandis, and the Barelvis among the Sunnis and the Shias created Madrasahs to preserve and propagate what, in their view was the correct interpretation of Islam. The syllabus was meant to produce clergymen so it had to focus on Arabic and Islam. But it was deliberately kept conservative.

DEVELOPMENT OF MADRASAHS IN PAKISTAN

At independence, there were about 137 Madrasahs. The number of Madrasahs has increased since General Zia ul Haq's rule and at present their numbers have grown to more than 10,000 with 1.7 million students. These institutions belong to the two major sects of Islam, the Sunnis and the Shias. However, Pakistan being a predominantly Sunni country, the Madrasahs run by Shia Community are relatively less in number. During the war by Islamic Afghan groups in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union the United States provided money, arms and ammunition through Pakistan which is said to have been sent to support the Madrasahs. Later, presumably these very religiously inspired Madrasah students infiltrated across the line of control to fight the Indian army in Kashmir, according to western sources they were supported by the Pakistan army specifically the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), however, both the ISI and the Madrasahs deny these links and therefore, it cannot be ascertained as to how many Madrasahs came into being due to the increased financial aid provided by foreign donors and the Pakistan army. The Saudi Arabian organization Harmain Islamic Foundation is believed to have helped the Ahl-i-Hadith and made them powerful.

There were very few Shia run Madrasahs after the Independence in 1947. They have increased rapidly after the President Zia-ul-Haq's period. Significant improvements have been made within the Madrasah education during the last 60 years of Pakistan's existence and more changes, as discussed in the ensuing chapters, are in the pipeline. There is very little credible information available on the unregistered Madrasahs. However, the registered ones are controlled by their own central organizations or boards.

ENROLEMENT POLICY

The prerequisite qualification for admission in Dars-i-Nizami course is class middle (i.e., class 8) while no such qualification is deemed necessary for the Nazra -e- Quran. Generally, the foreign students know a little bit of English, but some of the Madrasahs expect them to have some knowledge of Urdu language as well. Student's background is never considered a limiting factor during enrolment because it is presumed that mostly the poor will enroll as they are unable to afford even a respectable living; modern education being a distant dream. Officially students are never questioned about the school(s) of thought that they belong to because it is considered that they would mostly like to get themselves enrolled in a particular institution, approved by their elders based on the similarity of views. The textbooks have been authored to provide only one dimensional world view restricting the independent thought process of budding students.

STUDENTS BACKGROUND

About 80 percent of the Madrasah students are found to be the sons of small or landless peasants, rural artisans, or imams of the village mosque. The remaining 20 percent come from the families of small shopkeepers and laborers. There are very few who belong to well to do families. Apart from earning God's blessing, another reason for joining Madrasah is the fact that education as well as lodging is free at Islamic schools or 'Madrasah'.

FUNDING

Land grants and wealthy patrons in medieval India supported Madrasahs. The average expense at Deoband on each graduate between 1867 to 1967 was Rs. 1, 314, which is modest by any standard. The Ahl-i-Hadith Madrasahs, which were patronized by wealthy people in British India, nevertheless lived in the same frugal manner. Madrasahs in Pakistan are also financed through voluntary charity provided by the bazaar businessmen, expatriate Muslims living in western countries and others who believe that they are earning great religious merit contributing to them. Some of them also receive financial assistance by foreign governments—the Saudi government is said to help Ahl-i-Hadith seminaries and the Iranian government provided monetary help to the Shia Institutions.

The foreign assistance reaches only a few Madrasahs whereas the vast majority of them runs on charity (*zakat*= alms, *khairat* = charity, *atiat* = gifts etc.). The government of Pakistan gives financial assistance to Madrasahs for their textbooks, and introducing computers. The government, however, provides assistance to a Madrasah only if it houses more than 500 students. According to careful estimates, about 906 Madrasahs across Pakistan receive Rs. 60 million annually as financial assistances from Zakat fund therefore; in the overall context only a few Madrasahs receive these grants and the remaining ones generate their own resources through donations. Jamia Ghosia, a

Lahore based Madrasah housing about 150 students, spends about Rs. 200,000 every month including the salaries of teachers and housing facilities for Mufti.

CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

In 18th century Mullah Nizam Uddin standardized the curriculum known as Dars-i-Nizami. This curriculum did not focus on violent Jihad. In fact, the whole purpose of Dars-i-Nizami was to combine Islamic teachings with rational sciences to train the Madrasah pupils to become lawyers, judges and administrators. After the partition, the Indian seminaries remained within the confines of their original mission of preaching Islamic scholarship while the Pakistani ones increasingly became more and more digressed in defining Pakistan's "Islamic nature".

CURRICULUM

The Madrasahs, including those of the Shia, teach Dars-i-Nizami though they do not use the same texts. They also teach their particular point of view (*madhab or maslak*) which clarifies and rationalizes the beliefs of the sect (Sunni or Shia) and sub-sect Deobandi, Barelvis and Ahl-i-Hadith). Moreover, they train their students to refute what they consider heretical beliefs and some Western ideas. The Dars-i-Nizami emphasized studies based on human reasoning (*maqalat*) but at Deoband the traditional sciences, were imparted in their original form. Thus Deoband laid great emphasis on Hadith than the Dars-i-nizami had originally prescribed. In the Jamaat's Madrasahs the traditional texts are taught but subjects of politics, economics and history are also emphasized with a view to preparing the young ulema for confronting the ideas of the West. Let us examine the teaching of Madrasah in some detail.

The earliest Madrasah refuted Greek philosophy, which was considered as an intellectual invasion of the Muslim ideological space. Since the rise of the West, Madrasahs, and more so the revivalist movements outside the Madrasahs, refute Western philosophies. The Jamaat-i-Islami probably goes to greater lengths judging from its syllabus to make the students aware of Western dominations, the exploitative potential of Western political and economic ideas, and the disruptive influence of Western concept of liberty and individualism on Muslim societies.

In addition to this the important aim of the Madrasahs, ever since its inception when Nizam-ul-Mulk established the famous Madrasah in 1057 at Baghdad, was to counter heresies within the Islamic world and external influences, which could change or dilute Islam. Other religions are refuted in 'comparative religions' but there are specific books to counter heresies within the Islamic world. As such, without formally being given the centrality which the Dars-i-Nizami has, the opinions these texts disseminate opinions against other sects, sub-sects, views seen as, heretical by the ulema, Western ideas may be the major formative influence on the immature minds of Madrasah students.

DEFICIENCIES

The Dars-i-Nizami has come to symbolize the stagnation and ossification of knowledge. Indeed, the assumption on which the Dars (Madrasah education) functions is that the past was a golden age in which all that was best has already been written. What remains to the modern age is merely to preserve it? It was this backward looking nature of core Madrasah texts that made Taha Hussain (1889-1973), the famous blind modernist scholar of Egypt, disillusioned with the Jamia Azhar in Cairo. In Pakistan, although, the Dars-i-Nizami has been modified to some extent; the canonical texts are still there. These texts are used as a symbol of continuity and identity. Thus the Madrasahs, despite the desire to reform their courses, do not give up the canonical texts. The greatest critic of the Madrasah texts was Maulana Maududi who argued in his 1960 book, First Principles of the Islamic State, "those who choose the theological branch of learning generally keep themselves utterly ignorant of secular subjects, thereby remaining incapable of giving any lead to the people regarding modern political problems". The larger Madrasahs have made arrangements for teaching the secular subjects texts however only ulema approved teachers are eligible to teach.

The Madrasahs in Pakistan teach Dars-i-Nizami in eight years whereas the original course duration was 15 years till late fifties. This has adverse effects in many ways; the teachers use the guess work like being done in normal schools hence taking away the true spirit of learning. The course itself has become very difficult on account of being very lengthy. Most of the present day Muftis are average scholars who in turn produce just average scholars every year. Thus this system of education has fallen prey to a kind of cycle which can only be broken by the deliberate efforts of government and the group of scholars from all the sects.

IMPACT OF MADRASAH EDUCATION

Madrasah education has produced a mixed impact on the society. Dars-i-Nizami qualified aspire to become Khateeb in a mosque and the Nazara Quran qualified persons earn their living by teaching Quran to the children. This is by no means a small contribution of Madrasahs to a society where Government has shown a lack of commitment in the wellbeing of millions of its citizen specially the children. An ideal Muslim society perhaps be the one where ordinary citizen is qualified enough to take care of the basic rituals and the Mosque Imams would also be doing a normal job along with leading the prayers. However, till the time this kind of awareness supported by appropriate education is not created, the requirement of above mentioned people will remain there and Madrasahs are the only source for this.

In addition to this the Madrasahs are doing the job similar to NGO's in a way that they help in producing literate people who can subsequently at least support themselves rather than going astray to become street criminals. Their lack of defined vision and rigidity of views remain harmless

unless they engage in sectarianism and militancy. For these two menaces if anyone is to be blamed then it is the state itself.

IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR PROBLEM AREAS

Until the 1970s, Pakistani Madrasahs largely followed the Dars-e- Nizamia curriculum focused on purification of faith for the purposes of knowledge. All this changed in early eighties with Iranian revolution and Soviet invasion. The emphasis in Madrasah curriculum was shifted to the obligation of jihad and reward of jihad. According to Peter L. Bergen, author of a book on Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda group: 'nowhere is bin Laden more popular than in Pakistan's Madrasahs (religious schools) from which the Taliban draw many of its recruits' The twin menaces of militancy and sectarianism not only eroded the image of Madrasahs among the moderate Muslims but also caused a great alarm among the world community.

SECTARIANISM

When General Pervaiz Musharraf made public his plans to reform the Madrasahs in Pakistan in January 2002, he said the move was necessary because some of the private Islamic schools had become breeding grounds for intolerance and hatred. Conceptually, thought wise Madrasahs can be clearly divided into four schools of thoughts; Deobandi, Brelevi, Ahl-i-Hadith and Ahl-i-Tashi. In certain areas they greatly differ with one another. Moreover, in writings, sermons, and conversation, the teachers refer to the pioneers of their own maslak so that the views of the sub-sect are internalized and become the primary way of thinking. Refutation (Radd) in Urdu has always been part of religious education; however, it is only in recent years that it has been blamed for the increase in sectarian violence in Pakistan.

Some of the Madrasahs have become a source of hate-filled propaganda against other sects and the divide has become sharper and more violent. Although there was much more acrimonious logical debate among the Shias and Sunnis and among the Sunnis themselves during British rule than is common nowadays but it is only in the recent times where divergence of views has led to violence. The rise in sectarian conflict, however, cannot be attributed to the teachings in Madrasahs alone, though, of course, at times the excessive awareness of divergent beliefs creates the potential for negative bias against people of other beliefs.

MILITANCY

The Madrasahs became militant when they were used by the state machinery to fight in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation and then in Kashmir in order to force India to leave the state. Pakistan's claim on Kashmir has led to conflict with India and the Islamic militants or Jihadis have entered the fray since 1989. The United States indirectly, and sometimes directly, helped in creating militancy among the clergy. For instance, special textbooks in Dari (Afghan Persian) and Pashto were written

at the University of Nebraska Omaha with a USAID grant in the 1980s. American arms and money flowed to Afghanistan through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence. At that time, all this was done to defeat the Soviet Union. Later, while Pakistan's military continued to use the militant Islamists in Kashmir, United States was much alarmed by them not without reason as events of 9/11 demonstrated later. After this catastrophic incident in which more than three thousand people died in New York, the Americans tried to understand the Madrasahs better. P.W. Singer, an analyst in the Brookings Institute, states that there were 10-15 percent 'radical' Madrasahs which teach Anti-American rhetoric, terrorism and even impart military training.

In a recent survey 59.86 % of the Madrasah students supported an idea of taking Kashmir by an open war with India while 52.82 want to support Jihadi groups to fight with the Indian army. The views of teachers were even more militant where 70.37 supported open war with India. Pakistan's interior ministry estimates that 10 to 15 percent of 'Madrasahs' might have links with internal sectarian strife or militant, terrorist activities outside. In a report, the International Crisis Group (ICG) said that, "Militancy is only a part of the Madrasah problem. The phenomenon of 'jihad' (holy war) is independent of 'Madrasah' and most 'Jihadis' do not come from these schools." "Pro-jihad 'Madrasahs' only play a supporting role of a recruiting ground for militant movements." That there is a connection between poverty and religious violence is not a mere speculation as the proposition does have empirical backing. Leader of the Sipah-i-Sahaba, Maulana Isar al-Qasimi (1964-1991) denounced the Shia magnates of the area, and the peasants, terrorized by the feudal magnates, responded to him as if he were a messiah. In addition to Madrasahs some proper religious parties such as Lashkar-e-Tayyabah, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Harkat-ul-Mujahidin- print militant literature that is circulated among the Madrasahs and other institutions. Although these parties have been banned, their members are said to be dispersed all over Pakistan, especially in Madrasahs. The Madrasahs, then, may be the potential centers of Islamic militancy in Pakistan.

REFORMATION OF MADRASAHS

The present government of Pakistan, in an attempt to control religious extremism, formulated two laws to control the Madrasahs. The first was aimed at bringing the Madrasahs into the mainstream by introducing secular subjects in them. Under the Education Sector Reforms, three main institutions were established: one each at Karachi, Sukkur and Islamabad. These institutions were not welcomed by the ulema. After this another law was introduced to control the entry of foreigners in the Madrasahs and then to keep a check on them. This law Voluntary Registration and Regulation Ordinance 2002 has, however, been rejected by most of the Madrasahs that want no state interference in their affairs, about one-tenth, agreed to be registered and the rest simply declined.

OBJECTIVES AND SALIENT FEATURES OF REFORMS

The Major Objectives of the Madrasah Reforms are:

- a. To introduce/teach formal subjects in 8000 Deeni Madrasahs of Pakistan as under:
- b. English, Mathematics, Social Studies and General Science in 4,000 Madrasahs at Primary Level and in 3,000 Madrasahs at Middle and Secondary Level. English, Economics, Computer science and Pakistan Studies at the intermediate level in 1,000 Madrasahs.
- c. To open the lines of communication with the Ulema (Religious scholars).
- d. To improve and update knowledge of religious teachers in formal subjects through workshops.
- e. To improve quality and scope of education by bearing expenses on salaries, textbooks, stationery and sports item etc.
- f. To provide computers and printers at intermediate level in 1,000 Madrasahs.

The salient features of the Reform Process are:

- a. Prescribed text books in formal subjects will be introduced in Madrasahs.
- b. Examinations will be conducted by the relevant Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) at Secondary and Higher Secondary Levels in the formal subjects.
- c. Madrasahs will be selected by Ministry of Education and Provincial Governments. Funds will be released to provinces, Islamabad Capital Territory, Tribal Areas, Northern Areas and Azad Kashmir and other independent areas.
- d. Total 8,000 Madrasahs will be facilitated phase-wise as 3,000, each during first and second years while 2,000 in the third year of project. Total period of the project is 5 years while each institute will be facilitated for three years.
- e. Four teachers will be provided to each institution. Appointment of teachers will be made by a committee comprising representatives from Education Department, Wafaq/Tanzeem/Rabita and a representative of the concerned Madrasahs.
- f. One-time grant will be released to all Madrasahs for purchase of reference books, furniture and computers for the improvement of their libraries and building etc.
- g. Monitoring and evaluation of the Madrasahs will be the responsibility of education department in the provinces.
- h. Operational staff will be recruited on whole-time basis for 5 years' duration.

Monitoring and evaluation of the project would be carried out by Federal Project Implementation Unit (FPIU), liaison officers and Provincial/Area Governments.

GOVERNMENT PLAN (CURRICULUM)

According to the Education Sector Reforms three model institutions were established at Karachi, Sukkur and Islamabad. Their curriculum ‘includes subjects of English, Mathematics, Computer Science, Economics, Political Science, Law and Pakistan Studies for its different levels. The Ministry of Education will develop textual and instructional material as and when required and its Curriculum Wing would be the focal place solely responsible for the implementation of the project. Recruitment of teachers will be made by the concerned institutions through a committee comprising representatives of Education Department, Wafaq and the concerned institution on contract basis as per policy. The qualifications for recruitment of the teachers will be as: SSC + PTC for Primary, FA/FSc + C.T. for Middle, BA/BSc. + B.Ed. for SSC and MA/MSc. Preferably M.Ed. for HSSC classes. The teachers will be trained through 8 day workshops.

The Madrasah Authority will submit an undertaking to the Education Departments/Education Foundation/Ministry of Education for ensuring arrangements of teaching formal subjects to at least 20 students in each class at Primary/Middle/Secondary/Higher Secondary level as the case may be. The Madaris with different levels of religious education may then be considered for imparting education in the formal subjects so as to provide incentives under this project as mentioned below:

Hifz/Tajweed-wa-Qiraat/Ibtedayia	=	Primary
Mutawassita	=	Middle
Sanviya Aama	=	S.S.C.
Sanaviya Khassa and above	=	H.S.S.C.

DEFICIENCIES IN GOVERNMENT PROPOSED PLAN

The government has proposed a new curriculum without having studied the deficiencies in the existing ones that is being taught at Madrasahs. According to Mufti Ghulam Sarwar Qadri, Madrasah Ghosia Model Town Lahore, “Due to scarcity of time the existing syllabus, (Dars-i-Nizami), is taught partially which results in producing scholars of average caliber. If the Government proposed syllabus is also included in the existing syllabus, then the Madrasahs will not be able to produce *Ulema* of any quality let alone absorbing the spirit of modern education as envisaged by the government”.

LIKELY RESISTANCE

Although the government is offering Madrasahs some carrots for good behavior like free Islamic and modern textbooks and other rewards, including salaries for teachers, most Madrasahs have shrugged off both aspects of the plan and have said they will resist any attempts to secularize education. Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi is spearheading the campaign, on behalf of the religious schools, to reject the government sponsored reforms. “The motive is not clear to us. We believe the government is doing this just to please the United States and that's why we've rejected the idea

altogether," he said. The government brushes aside all this criticism as politically motivated. Mujeebur Rahman Inqalabi, the SSP's (Sipah Sihaba Pakistan) second in command said that Interior ministry in reform package is against Islam and complains that where states have taken control of Madrasahs, such as in Jordan and Egypt," the engine of Jihad is extinguished.

ANALYSIS OF REFORMS

There is a growing belief in the West that militant Islam is the new, post-communist, "global menace" facing the world. Similarly, the US state department's latest annual report on patterns of global terrorism reaches markedly different conclusions from those of previous years. Religion rather than politics has been identified as the primary motivating force behind terrorist activity. If Madrasahs are brought in the mainstream of our educational system, then this large body of over one and a half million students and some thirty thousand teachers can contribute significantly in reshaping the otherwise mutilated image of Pakistani society. The immense power of electronic media, supported by consultative body of Ulema and scholars, can then be used to project the true face of Islam.

SOCIAL IMPACT ON SOCIETY

If the Madrasahs reforms are properly implemented, then there is a great hope that their students will contribute towards socio-economic uplift of the society. It is expected that the project will.

- a. Establish and strengthen the lines of communication amongst the Madrasahs and the Government.
- b. It will educate about 1.5 million students (both male and female) of more than 10000 Madrasahs in formal subjects from Primary to Intermediate level to enable them to continue their studies in colleges and universities.
- c. It will impart training to around 32000 teachers to improve and update their knowledge in formal subjects and teaching methodology.
- d. The reform project will provide books, furniture, computers, printers and sports facilities to improve their education/boarding system.
- e. The reforms will enable the bright Madrasah students to compete with their counter parts from the mainstream institutions for the opportunities in life.
- f. It will, slowly and gradually, eradicate sectarianism and militancy in the country and will cultivate friendly atmosphere and national cohesion in the society.

RELIGIOUS IMPACT ON SOCIETY

The reforms, if taken in proper spirit, have the great potential to unite the nation on religious lines. Although it is difficult to gauge, at this stage, the likely impact of reforms on a society which at present is so badly divided on trivial issues which actually have no link with the true spirit of religion.

However, there are Ulema and great number of citizens who want to bridge the difference between different sects thereby providing a hope for national unity. While it is true that the Madrasah graduates cannot be blamed solely for the sectarian rift in the society but nevertheless an accommodating attitude from them can greatly help relieve the tensions that currently grip the country.

WORLD OPINION

The reforms are likely to change the perception held by majority of the nations, which views the Madrasahs students as the most intolerant of all the other student groups in Pakistan. It is also widely believed that they are also the most supportive of an aggressive foreign policy. The World opinion groups, like ICG (International Crises Group), have rightly understood the internal mechanics of Pakistan's politics and have shown concern about the non-implementation of Madrasahs reforms. Therefore, it is vital for the government to ensure that these reforms are implemented in true letter and spirit not only to satisfy the international community but to set our own house in order.

PROSPECT OF REFORMS

It was on January 12, 2002 that the President General Musharraf first promised to reform the Madrasah sector as he placed before the nation his blueprint for fighting terrorism. The Draft Presidential Ordinance of June, 2002 in fact provoked the religious right to issue warnings of street agitation. The promises remained unfulfilled. Subsequent official initiatives to reform seminaries, like the Madrasah Reforms Project that sought to introduce non-religious subjects in seminaries and facilitate their infrastructural development, however, became a source of government funding to the clerics who were at the time negotiating the text of the 17th amendment.

Cosmetic reforms indeed were followed by even more cosmetic implementation. Any expectation that the clerics trained and groomed in a conservative education environment will understand the importance of opening up new doors to their students is as misplaced as an effort to grow a pine tree in a desert. "Having co-opted the religious parties to gain constitutional cover for his military rule, Musharraf is highly reliant on the religious right for his regime's survival", said Samina Ahmad, ICG's South Asia project director, at a press conference in Islamabad on January 18, 2004 while making public the ICG report. The International community welcomed President's promise to stem Jihadi ideology, but two years on, the lack of results is clear. To date, no presidential ordinance to regulate Madrasahs has been promulgated. In fact, government openly assures the religious leaders that it will not interfere in the Madrasah affairs.

CONCLUSION

Madrasahs provide free religious education, boarding and lodging and are essentially schools for the poor. About one third of all school age children in Pakistan attend Madrasahs. These seminaries run on public philanthropy and produce indoctrinated clergymen of various Muslim sects. Some sections of the more orthodox Muslim sects have been further radicalized by state sponsored exposure to jihad, first in Afghanistan, then in Kashmir. However, the Madrasah problem goes beyond militancy. Over a million and a half students at more than 10,000 seminaries are being trained, in theory, for service in the religious sector. But their constricted worldview, lack of modern civic education and below poverty line living conditions make them a destabilizing factor in Pakistani society. Because of these reasons, they also become highly susceptible to romantic notions of sectarian and international jihads, which promise instant salvation. Since Madrasahs have a long history in Pakistan and in Muslim societies in general and they serve socially important purposes, therefore, it is reasonable for the government to seek to modernize and adapt rather than eliminate them.

While it is true that education in the Madrasah produces religious, sectarian, sub sectarian and anti-Western bias, it may not be true to assume that this bias automatically translates into militancy and violence of the type Pakistan experienced. For that to happen other factors: the arming of religious young men to fight in Afghanistan and Kashmir; the state's clampdown on free expression of political dissent during Zia ul Haq's Martial law; the appalling poverty of rural, peripheral areas and urban etc. must also be taken into account.

President General Pervez Musharraf's umpteenth call to mainstream Madrasah students to practice sanity and moderation is in the broader national interest. But while it is important to keep repeating words in order to set the ball rolling in a certain direction, the Madrasah issue cannot be resolved through mere calls, made in the hope that things will turn out the way they are expected to against the backdrop of a diehard clerical mass that draws its strength from the status quo.

In its new role as key ally in the U.S.-led war on terrorism, Pakistan's military government has toned down many policies that previously fostered militancy and religious extremism within the country and internationally. Action against the Taliban, al-Qaeda and home-grown sectarian terrorists are examples. But the military's confrontation with its former religious allies appears to be, at best, a short-term response compelled by circumstances and foreign pressure. The lack of commitment to Madrasah reforms is evident since so far the seminaries have only been offered carrots by the state, but what is now needed is a deterring legal stick. Pakistan's former Finance Minister Shahid Javad Burki explained in a paper he wrote in 1998 that these two extremes of youth (English medium Vs Madrasah graduates) being produced in the country were a result of the failure of the state to provide free, universal and good quality education. The caution, however, is that a century old

system and institution of theological education cannot be reformed overnight. More importantly all Madrasahs are not producing militants and fanatics. The great majorities of Madrasah students remain dedicated to a pursuit of Islamic study and pose no threat to society. A hasty and ill-planned crack down will produce chaos and strengthen the forces of extremism.

Religious education continues to form an integral part of the Muslim society and culture. It is, therefore, impossible to visualize any Muslim society without appropriate institutional arrangement for religious education. However, religious education should weld into the mainstream education and the mainstream education itself should be permeated with the values of the Muslim society and culture and produce educated men and women who, on the one hand are equipped with the state of the art knowledge and skills needed in our own times and on the other be imbued with idealism, morality and character. That is the defining character of Islamic education

RECOMMENDATIONS

Madrasahs are conveniently used in the garb of fight against terrorism as their appearance and (exaggerated) label of Jihad makes them an ideal object of hatred for most of the western world. The positive aspects of Madrasah education should be projected while an aggressive campaign should be launched by the government of Pakistan to counter those who malign the image of Madrasahs. It is recommended that the Madrasah reforms may be implemented in the following manner.

- a.** The will to reform Madrasahs, in terms of the conduct of their teachers/students and narrow based education system has never figured prominently with the government and the Ulema for the simple reason that the Madrasah students are readily available to serve their vested interest in the time of need. The Madrasah students, therefore, should never be used in future to fight the proxy wars.
- b.** Discrimination on account of sect by the government is one of the causes for fanning sectarianism. The government should abolish the column of sects and caste from all the forms (used in government and private sectors). This will reflect the neutrality of state regarding the personal beliefs of the individuals.
- c.** The books and speeches fanning sectarianism should be strictly banned.
- d.** The state should keep strict tabs on foreign students who seek admission to Pakistani Madrasahs and permit their enrolment only if such religious education is not available in their home countries or they have otherwise been carefully screened by both by their respective governments and the appropriate Pakistani authorities.
- e.** Government funding suits few Madrasahs, but even in those Madrasahs it is rarely used on the welfare of students. In some seminaries the students are regularly beaten while chained, they are physically and sexually abused and there are several incidents of brutal murders: a

trend never really investigated by the government. The government, therefore, should enforce a code of conduct in the Madrasahs along with improved monitoring.

- f.** The government has introduced reforms without analyzing the prevailing anomalies in the existing syllabus. The government, therefore, should constitute a team comprising government officials and Ulema from all school of thoughts to:
- i.** Find the anomalies in the existing Dars-i-Nizami syllabus.
 - ii.** To evaluate the proposed modern subjects in light with the existing capabilities of teaching staff.
 - iii.** To devise a mechanism for the induction of teachers in the Madrasahs.
 - iv.** To design a system for monitoring the progress of new subjects.
 - v.** To assist printing of books based on the curriculum approved by the Government run textbook boards.
- g.** The government should establish without further delay, a Madrasah regulatory authority, to be headed by the interior minister that should:
- i.** Carry out a comprehensive survey of the Madrasahs for purposes of mandatory registration and classification within a specified time period.
 - ii.** Assist the Pakistan Madrasah Education Board in implementing and monitoring curriculum and financing reforms.
 - iii.** Coordinate efforts of various government departments involved in the reform process; and
- h.** The government should Institute curriculum reforms for Madrasahs within six months to ensure that:
- i.** Vocational training programs are included.
 - ii.** More time is allocated for modern subjects in the new teaching schedule
 - iii.** Make recognition of Madrasah certificates and degrees subject to adherence to the new teaching regime.
- j.** The government should establish a system of checking the academic performance of Madrasahs through surprise examinations.
- k.** The government is to ensure that all Madrasahs at the time of registration are required to:
- i.** Declare their annual income and expenditure.
 - ii.** Declare their assets and sources of funding.
 - iii.** Prove that they have no link to any militant group.
- l.** The funds should be evenly distributed among all the registered Madrasahs having a reasonable strength of students (e.g. about 200 students).

- m. The government should immediately close all Madrasahs affiliated with banned militant organizations and prosecute their leaders under existing criminal laws if they are involved in incitement to violence.
- n. The government should ensure that Madrasah reforms are not confined to urban areas but also cover smaller towns and villages.
- o. The state should ensure that Madrasah students interact with other segment of society in activities like competition in games, speech contest and Boy Scout activities etc.

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