

## **Madrassas Reforms in Pakistan: A Critical Appraisal of Present Strategies and Future Prospects**

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### **Abstract**

*Over the years, there have been several discussions on the mainstreaming of Madrassas in Pakistan with their main focus to provide career opportunities to their students by reforming curriculum, removing hate speeches and adding some additional subjects such as Mathematics, IT and English. The issue of Madrassa reforms particularly came to lime light in the backdrop of post-9/11 developments especially the global war on terror. The terrorist attack on Army Public School in Peshawar in December 2014 provided further impetus for a 20-Points National Action Plan (NAP) for countering terrorism and extremism of which one the important points was that Madrassas would be regularized and reformed. The present study is aimed to highlight the importance of Madrassa reforms by discussing the challenges and sensitivities involved in this process. It also discusses the perceptions and ground realities about the role of the Madrassas in the society by highlighting its various dimensions. The discussion begins with an analytical overview of the history and background of these institutions. It also analysis the prevailing administrative structures controlling the working of various Madrassas. The analysis concludes on presenting various options and strategies for introducing reforms in the Madrassa system in Pakistan by offering some policy recommendations.*

**Keywords:** Madrassa, Islam, Jihad, Pakistan, Extremism, National Action Plan, Interfaith

### **Introduction**

In a Muslim society, religious schools are commonly known as “Deeni Madrassas” which provide not only social cohesion and harmony but also a feeling of solidarity. Therefore, both factors have an important and constructive role in the lives of

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individuals. Meanwhile, in many Muslim societies especially in underdeveloped countries, religion and religious schools have been used as a tool in politics to gain certain objectives, e.g., in Pakistan, during 1980s, a chain of religious schools was established and patronized to meet the challenges erupted from internal and external threats to the country. This was the first time that the state organs involved in promoting the concept of 'Islamization' in Pakistan. Soviet Union's attack on Afghanistan in 1979 and its expansion policy towards South Asia to reach warm waters provided an opportunity to General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, then the President of Pakistan, to promote the element of 'jihad' in Afghanistan. The US and the western world also appreciated the idea of 'jihad' and recognized the role of 'Mujahideen' (Muslim militants and warlords of Afghanistan) in defeating the Soviet army. However, experience of Islamization and Jihad policy changed the entire face and character of the Pakistani society. The graduates from these madrassas participated in Afghan jihad, also remained part of civil war in Afghanistan and later on joined Taliban movement. The unstable situation in Afghanistan even after the establishment of Taliban government in 1996 had negative impacts on the people of Pakistan. During this instability, over three million Afghan refugees came to Pakistan and eventually included the element of radicalization in the country. During this period, authorities in Pakistan were unable to control jihadi elements and organizations working in the country or those militants who returned from Afghanistan. At that time, even no concrete steps were taken to rehabilitate and integrate these militants to the main stream of society. Even some Madrassas remained involved in Afghanistan and enhanced their influence not only in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan but also expanded in other parts of Pakistan.

The incident of 9/11 propagated the concept of terrorism and changed the attitude of the western world toward 'jihad' and Muslims. 'Mujahedeen' in Afghanistan who once were recognized as crucial party in the US strategy against Soviet Union were then labelled as terrorists and fundamentalists. Afghan Taliban who denied to handover Osama Bin Laden (OBL) to the US were also considered terrorists. Likewise, Madrassas in Pakistan were blamed for promoting radicalisation and extremism. In order to meet the imperatives of new realities and global trends, General Musharraf joined US global war on terrorism. Under his government, Pakistan took actions against militant organizations having transnational activities in several countries especially in Afghanistan. The military operations against terrorism saw a new momentum after the brutal terrorist attack on Army Public School in December 2014 in Peshawar. It compelled both the civil and the military authorities to take serious and strong actions against the terrorists. With consensus of the then government and the opposition, a 20-point National Action Plan (NAP) was introduced in 2015 to counter religious extremism and terrorism. Under NAP, Pakistan Security Forces made great successes against terrorism. The military operations *Zarb-e-Azb* and operation *Rudul Fasad* have

been critical in curtailing terrorism in the country. Pulwama attack in the Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) in March 2019 raised concerns on the activities of some militant groups of Pakistan origin, operating in the IOK. Although, the terrorism in India is because of its own policies, however, to reflect Pakistan's commitment to regional peace, Pakistan's security forces further intensified their operations against the militant groups without any discrimination. Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan assured that Pakistan would not allow militant organizations to use its soil for operations in other countries. He added that the situation today is different than that of 1980s when the establishment in Pakistan and the US supported militant groups for waging Jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. He added that "there is no use for these groups anymore" (Jeffrey, 2019). Director General Inter Services Public Relations, Major General Asif Ghafoor also reiterated the resolve of the Armed Forces to eliminate militant organizations. He clarified that this decision was taken in 2014 and operation launched as a result of NAP, much before Pulwama attack took place (Ghafoor, 29 April 2019).

It is ironic that the Madrassas which were once symbol of harmony and unity, now have become a sign of hatred and differences, sectarianism, religious extremism and terrorism. The paper is aimed to highlight the status of Madrassas reforms and usefulness of NAP. This study also elaborates the constructive and positive role of the Madrassas in the society of Pakistan by tracing their historical contributions to Islam and the Muslims communities. It also investigates the destructive role of Madrassas and the need of reforms. Additionally, the study analyses school educational system of Pakistan and addresses the question that why the parents send their children to Madrassas rather than to schools. It presents some viable recommendations to improve education system of Pakistan especially the mainstreaming of Madrassa education by introducing reforms and taking other innovative measures. This study is significant in terms of its scope and its policy relevance as it will promote the ongoing debate on Madrassa reforms and regulation in Pakistan by adding new literature on the subject.

### *Meanings of Madrassa and Its Historical Background*

Madrassas are key component of any Muslim society that spread religious education and maintain norms, traditions and values of Islam. Most of the Madrassas look after mosques, a key institution that provides spiritual satisfaction to the followers of Islam (Khan, 2012. pp.41-44). The term Madrassa is come from the Arabic word 'Dars', which is synonym of word 'Qara'. The meaning of both words is 'read' (Meerthi, 1974. p. 276). The literal meaning of Madrassa is a place where Islamic education is provided to its students. In addition to teaching, usually it also provides residential facilities to its students, a masjid and a library (Parihar, 1992, p. 175). In reality, madrassas are the places where religious education is provided in a traditional way and their curriculum is based on a number of Islamic subjects. In short, madrassa is

a simple religious school or a religious seminary. In Pakistan, religious schools are hence regularly alluded to as 'Deeni Madaris', where 'Deeni' interprets as religious while Madaris is plural of Madrassa in Arabic. For example, Pakistan Education Statistics report for the year 2015-2016, define 'Deeni Madaris' as "educational institutions in which formal religious education is provided" (Vestenskov, 2018, p. 16). With the word of 'Madrassa', now a day it is considered the place where religious education is provided but in past Madrassas were not confined only for religious education.

After the advent of Islam in seventh century, Masjid-e Nabvi was the first center of all learner seats of Muslims where Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself used to teach Quran to his companions on a 'Suffa' (platform). These companions were called Ashab-al-Suffa. They were unmarried, orphan and poor young people (Qasmi, 2005, p. 1-3). Therefore, historically the Masjid Nabvi and Suffa became the first religious institutions of learning and teaching of Islam.

During next four hundred years, Madrassas were shaped and established in all areas where Islam entered and got roots. In Morocco, the Jamia Al-Qarawiyyin, which was founded in 859, and is still one of the leading spiritual and educational centers of the Muslim world, is considered the oldest continuously operating institution of higher learning in the world by the Guinness Book of World Records. Other traces of early Madrassa are found to be established during 1005 AD by Fatimide caliphs for religious teaching of Shiite Muslims. This Madrassa is known to have had all the elements of a modern institution including a huge library containing 6500 volumes on different subjects including architecture, astronomy and philosophy (Munir 1987, p. 283). That was the time when madrassas were established by government and rich community persons. However, mostly madrassas remained independent, having permanent free residential complex with paid staff and academics. Meanwhile, learners were also provided free food, residence and education. It is due to this contribution, Madrassas have played their role to eradicate the illiteracy and enhance the level of education in the Muslim world. Baghdad and Spain were known as credible centers of Islamic education and learning.

Earlier Madrassa were the places where besides pure theological studies, several branches of academic spheres were taught and they produced mathematicians, geographers, physicians, lawyers, politicians, philosophers, linguists, and historians, and so on other than great Islamic jurists, Qura'nic commentators and Hadith scholars. Ibne Sina, Ibne Rushud, Moosa Al-Khawrzimi, Az-Zuhrwi, Imam Ghazali, Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Bukhari and Imam ibn-e-Taimiya were the products of such institutions.

Reportedly, in 1005 AD, Fatimid dynasty established first known Madrassa in Egypt where the Shiite version of Islam was taught along with other subjects such as philosophy, astronomy and architecture, etc. In tenth century, the Egypt was involved

by Sunni Muslims, the Shiite form of Islam in this Madrassa was supplanted with the Sunni adaptation of Islam. Afterward in 1067, a Seljuk Vizier named Nizam-ul-Mulk Hassan Bin Al-Tusi established the first formal and organized Madrassa in Bagdad (Vestenskov, 2018, p. 19). The largest and the most famous of these was the Nizamiya in Bagdad (Ludhianvi, 1995, p. 73).

As concerned the history about the establishment of madrassa in sub-continent, first madrassa was built by Nasir-ud-Din Kabbacha who was ruler of Multan. The name of this first Madrassa was “Madrassa Firozi”. Renowned Scholar Qazi Minhaj Siraaj has written that he had undertaken the charge of that Madrassa in 1226 (Qasmi, 2005, p. 2-4). The same tradition was continued during the Mughal period when numerous Madrassas were established in many parts of India especially around Delhi. The Madrassas were to a great extent casual in their strategy for educating with the educational programs being fairly adaptable in a mix of realist, for example, mathematics and rationales and religious subjects (Vestenskov, 2018, p. 19). People were prosperous and took keen interest in religious education. At that time Madrassas were symbol of peace and harmony in the society. These were backbone of the Muslim society because they were providing citizens’ spiritual and mental satisfaction.

East India Company introduced western education system in sub-continent in 19<sup>th</sup> century with the aim to change dramatically the role of Madrassa education in the region. British education system and especially with the introduction of English as an official language made Madrassas irrelevant to the state as well as economy. Due to this policy a major shift was seen in the curriculum of Madrassas which strictly focused on religious sides (Vestenskov, 2018, p. 19).

The main aim of western education system was to destroy the religious education in Madrassas. With the introduction of English as a language of learning and liberal subjects, the traditional educational system of Muslims was destroyed. The inhabitants of India lost their self-esteem and culture and became slaves of western ideas (Rabbani, 2012, p. 37). Lord Macaulay remained successful while introducing an entirely a new education system after which British created a nation with black colour but British in taste (Mehmood, 2018). Furthermore, British also followed the policy of divide and rule and for this they promoted sectarianism in India as well as around the world. When Indians of the sub-continent were defeat in 1857, the symbolic Mughal Empire ended at all. After this the Muslim population was divided into three factions. One faction led by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was loyal to the British and hence started Aligarh Movement for the expansion of modern western education. He established several western style schools and associations for the Indian population (Rabbani, 2012, p. 37-38). The second faction of the Muslims comprised religious scholars (Ulema) who left the politics and established Madrassas for pure religious education and research

(Rabbani, 2012, p. 47). The third faction was led by the Syed Ahmad Brailvi Shaheed who was in favour of jihad against British and Sikhs (Rabbani, 2012, p. 31).

During this period, the prominent Madrassa was set up in Deoband in 1867 running on the basis of charity from Muslims. Thus, the establishment for Madrassa financing was totally dependent upon charities and it continued until today. The Deobandi development presented a standardized conveyance of Islamic training described by paid staff, a full library, a set educational modules, formal examinations, and affirmation upon graduation. The Islamic researchers of the Deoband Madrassa underscored a rigid school of Islamic idea, which before long prompted the development of fellow Madrassas and today this school of thought has the biggest number of Madrassas in South Asia (Vestenskov, 2018, p. 19).

With the efforts of Ulama, sub-continent became prominent in the entire Muslim world in spreading the religious education and this happened due to continuous struggle of different schools of thought (Ghazi, 2011, p. 288). Madrassa of any school of thought whether Deobandi, Brailvi, Ahle Hadith and Ahle Tashiee, have the basic purpose of spreading Islamic education and experts of creating. These four Sunni schools of thought (Hanfi, Malki, Shafi'i and Hambali), have different point of views regarding the explanation of Islamic teachings. Every school of thought considers itself right and all other schools of thought do not have right views about Islamic teachings. All these Madrassas had two things in common, i.e., they followed Dars-e-Nizami with little variations and also rejected all forms of modern knowledge in retaliation of the Western education system. While Madrassas had continued playing their part in education of South Asian populace, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, established Ali Garh College which aimed at furnishing Indian Muslims with modern education to remain in the main stream of Indian social and political system (Nayyar, 1998, p. 86).

The above stated schools of thought are mostly found in the South Asian Subcontinent. Besides these schools of thought, there are other which have their own point of view regarding teachings of Islam. The followers of these schools of thought are found in some African and Arab countries. Some Muslim countries have the majority of one school of thought or another -Saudi Arabia and Iran are its prime examples. These countries also support the followers of their concerned sects. In this way sectarianism increases at national level as compared to local level. In contrast, according to another point of view, madrassas are not responsible for extremism. It is propaganda of foes of Islam. As regards the difference of opinions, it was also prevalent in the golden period of companions of Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Abbasi, 2003, p. 28). However, in general, it is widely considered that madrassas are playing a positive role in the society.

*Madrassa System in Pakistan*

It is not known the exact number of Madrassas in Pakistan. Reportedly, in 1947 there were around 189 Madrassas in the country (*Madrassas in Pakistan*, 2019) and this number kept on increasing with the passage of time. According to a recent study, there are around 20,000 Madrassas registered with the government and thousands are unregistered where millions of students are studying (Renaud, 2018). According to another report entitled *Pakistan Education Statistics 2016-2017* published by Academy of Educational Planning and Management (AEPAM), the total number of Madrassas in Pakistan is 32,272 with 2.26 million enrolments of students. The three percent of these Madrassas are under public sector and remaining 97 percent are run by private sector. There are 74,648 teachers in these institutions out of which 76 percent are male and 24 percent are female (Shah, 2018).

There are primarily five religious schools in Pakistan which run madrassas at various levels: Deobandi, Brailvi, Shia, Ahl-e-Hadith and Jamat-e-Islami. These five schools of thought have set up their own different madrassa boards, affirmed by the administration and perceived by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) (Vestenskov, 2018, p. 22). These boards are in charge of planning and running the issues of the particular Madrassas with respect to their examinations so that these boards set schedule, direct tests, and control Madrassas in their individual schools of thought. These five boards are:

Table 1  
*Madrassa Boards in Pakistan*

Name	Sub-sect	Place	Date of Establishment
Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al-Arabia	Deobandi	Multan	1959
Tanzeem-ul-Madaris Ahl-e-Sunnat	Brailvi	Lahore	1960
Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al-Salafia	Ahl-e-Hadith	Faisalabad	1955
Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al-Shia	Shia	Lahore	1959
Rabita-ul-Madaris Al Islamia	Jamat-e-Islami/Neutral	Lahore	1983

Source: (Shabbir, Farooq & Khan, 2012. p. 148)

The above mentioned table shows that all the boards of these major schools of thought were established from the year 1955 to 1960. Before this these Madrassas were

working without any separate boards. Before the establishment of their boards, the work and record of these Madrassas kept by the concerned ‘Muhtamum’ (superintendent).

Likewise, the HEC additionally recognizes some independent Degree Awarding Institutions (DAI) that are not associated with any of the previously mentioned Boards (Vestenskov, 2018, p.23). These include:

Table 2  
*HEC Recognized DAI*

Name	Address
Jamia Islamia Minhaj-ul-Quran	Lahore
Jamia Taleemat-e-Islamia	Sargodha Road, Faisalabad
Jamia Ashrafia	Feroz Pura Road, Lahore
Darul Uloom Mohammadia Ghousia	Bhera, Sargodha
Darual Uloom	Korangi Greek, Karachi

As indicated by HEC, the endorsed method of education for acknowledgment of final degrees in religious instruction is seen in the following table (Vestenskov, 2018, p. 23):

Table 3  
*Mode of Education*

Name of Deeni Sanad	Duration	Equivalent to
Deeni Sanad	8 years of study	Middle School Certificate or 8 <sup>th</sup> grade
Shahadatul Sanvia Aama	2 years of study	Secondary school certificate or 10 <sup>th</sup> grade
Shahadatul Sanvia Khasa:	2 years of study	Intermediate, 12-year education
Shahadatul Alia	2 years of study	Graduation, 14-year education
Shahadatul Almiya	2 years of study	MA Arabic/Islamic Studies, 16-year education



### *Types / Levels of Madrassas*

In Pakistan at least four types of Madrassas are functioning. The first type of Madrassas is commonly known as 'Nazira Madrassa' where students get only preliminary knowledge and their teaching is mostly restricted to recitation of the Holy Quran. These Madrassas are located in or near to mosques and need limited resources for their daily function. In these Madrassas students are taught Arabic language and recitation of Quran by the Imam Masjid once a day, i.e., promptly toward the beginning of the morning or at evening. The lecture duration is around an hour or so (Vestenskov, 2018, p. 24).

The second kind of Madrassas is 'Hifz Madrassas' the place notwithstanding fundamental perusing of the Quran, memorization of the Quran is attempted. These Madrassas are arranged inside mosques, either with or without lodging. Hifz Madrassas can be categorized into two types. One is 'Iqamti Madrassa' that means boarding schools and second type is 'Ghair Iqamti' which means day schools. In Iqamti Madrassas students have to stay from two to three years for memorizing the Quran. More finances are required in these Madrassas to fulfil dining and living expenses for students. On the other hand, in Ghair Iqamti Madrassas, students spend around eight hours daily and then go back home. These Madrassas require fewer financial resources for their establishment and daily routine. This type of Madrassa is usually established within a mosque (Vestenskov, 2018, p.24).

Dars-e-Nizami is the third type of Madrassa where eight years of education is imparted to students. The syllabus of this type of Madrassa includes recitation of the Quran and its translation. Tafseer or explanation of Quran is also part of syllabus. Another subject 'Ahadith' based on sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is also taught to students. 'Islamic jurisprudence' is another subject that is very much popular to be taught. Arabic and Persian languages and supporting subjects are included in this type of Madrassas (Vestenskov, 2018, p. 24). The fourth type of Madrassas are known as 'Takhassas Madrassas'. This level of Madrassas offers students specialization courses of 'Mufti' who can issue a Fatwa and 'Qazi' who is a judge in Islamic Sharia Justice System (Vestenskov, 2018, p. 24).

### *Madrassa Reforms Agenda in Pakistan and the NAP*

During the British Raj, Madrassas were excluded from the formal education system and the economy. Unfortunately, the same was continued even after the independence of Pakistan. The issue of Madrassa reforms was first time raised during General Ayub Khan's era 1958-1969. He criticized the then prevailing Madrassa system and wanted to modernize their system. Later on, during 1980s, the government of General Zia-ul-Haq also attempted to reform Madrassas. However, formal reform program was launched in 2001 by General Pervez Musharraf in the back drop of war on

terror (WoT) led by the US. However, religious elite showed severe resistance to these reforms and thus the implementation remained a dream (Vestenskov, 2018, p.19).

In 2015, the government of Pakistan introduced the NAP with the aim to fight militancy and extremism across the country. One of its point was to register and regulate Madrassas. It is observed that registration and regularization of Madrassas was a huge task that has met with severe resistance from the religious circles. Reportedly, a number of actions have been taken against the Madrassas in Punjab and Sindh yet both government and Madrassa elements have not been able to finalize the steps and procedures with reference to Madrassa reforms. It is noted that with the introduction of NAP, government has increased surveillance of Madrassas by gathering intelligence information about their possible interactions with terrorists in the country. Meanwhile, the process of registration of Madrassas is very slow and so far no concrete step has been taken related to curriculum reforms (Rathore, 2015, p.92). The registration process can be improved with the consultation of Madrassa Management or with the help of Boards, these Madrassas are associated.

#### *Madrassas: A Symbol of Harmony in Society*

A major section of society viewed that Madrassas are a symbol of harmony and these are playing positive role in propagating Islamic values and teachings. Furthermore, Madrassas are the places where mostly poor and orphan students can get free education and accommodation. Hence, directly or indirectly, these institutions are also contributing to the economy of the country. An eminent religious scholar Muhammad Amin is of the view that Deeni Madrassas are the forts of Islam and playing their constructive role in the society. He added that the effects of Islamic teachings can be seen in Pakistani society, and this is only because of the efforts of the Ulama and Madrassas. He stated that although Pakistani educational, social, political, and constitutional structure is based on western thoughts and civilization yet the people of Pakistan have adopted teachings of Islam and this is only because of Madrassas (Amin, 2004. p.51).

Amin called it remarkable that religious teaching and training of Islam had been continuing since the lifetime of Holy Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). He said that surely all those people are lucky who are receiving Islamic education and this is because their lips are always moving with the verses of Holy Quran and the sayings of Holy Prophet (PBUH). Also, their hearts are full of love and devotion with the Holy Prophet (PBUH). He further argues that the Ulama of Deeni Madrassas have raised the flag of Islamic education besides the efforts of foes of Islam (Nadeem, 2012. p. 20). There is no doubt that the teachings of Islam are about peace and tolerance so Madrassas help promote a culture of harmony and patience in the Society.

Another religious scholar Syed Banoori is of the opinion that if Ulama did not establish Madrassas, the name of Islam would had been removed from the country. He

added that if there were no Ulama of Islam, no one could stop the flood of Socialism, Communism, Marxism, Liberalism or secularism. With the help of these Ulama, the wealthy religious people also donated their wealth to secure these religious forts. Thus with the connection of Ulama and the rich people, the great task was completed without any Government support (Banoori, 2000. p. 85). Ibn-ul- Hassan agrees with Banori and in his opinion, the role of ‘Moulvis’ and Madrassas cannot be ignored as they made efforts to defend the religion of Islam. He added that if there were no ‘Moulvis’ and Madrassas, the Hindus and the British would have changed the values of Islam (Abbasi, 2003. pp. 132,133).

Saleemullah Khan said that students and teachers of Deeni Madrassas always remained busy in educational activities. In these madrassas mostly teachers and students have devoted themselves for getting the education and for spreading of education. He viewed that in the present age of materialism, attraction of wealth and material goods cannot change their will and purpose. He added that from the classes of madrassas, the commands of Allah and sayings of Holy Prophet (PBUH) are described in different subjects of curriculum (Khan, 2012. p.77). He also added that when any opposite power of Islam tried to harm the belief of Muslims, only Madrassas tried to control the objectives of opponents (Khan, 2012. p.78).

Hanif Jalandhari called Deeni Madrassas and Ulama as ‘power houses of Islam’ because they have played an important role in spreading education and Islamic teachings (Jalandhari, 2011. p.305). He added that the role of Madrassas always remains constructive and welfare based. In his opinion, mostly Madrassas are working without any type of government funding. The opponents of Islam think that the students who are getting education of Islam are the only one who can defend their religion. This is the main reason they think these students are “their enemies”. Therefore, these students are called terrorists and Madrassas are called the nurseries of terrorism by the foes of religion Islam (Jalandhari, p.414).

According to Anwar Ghazi, blame of terrorism on Madrassas is not true. He told that many blames are imposed on Deeni Madrassas with reference to the Shia-Sunni extremism. This is the propaganda that in these Madrassas, the lesson to kill the opponent sect is taught. The reality is that in the elementary level curriculum of Deeni Madrassas, ‘Sharah-e Tahzib’ book is taught in every Madrassa which is written by the author of Iran named Abdullah bin Al-Hussain. Till today no one hesitates to teach this book in Madrassas, actually, which reflects this is propaganda of the Western media against Madrassas (Ghazi, 2011. p.53).

### *Madrassas: A Symbol of Hatred and Hub of Sectarianism?*

While one of the main roles early Islamic Madrassas had undertaken was refutation of Greek philosophy. Madrassas of today emphasise not only refutation of Western philosophies and education system, they also teach their students about

misguidance of the other sub-sects and lay emphasis on the notion that their school of thought is the only right way in the present age while rest all are paths leading away from the true Islam (Rahman, 2005, p.342). Farooq Khan said that by seeing the dress of students and teachers of any Madrassa, you can easily imagine about their school of thought. Similarly, all the teachers and students of a particular Madrassa have links to any particular sect. After serving or spending eight or ten years, student views about that sect become more rigid and strong. So, this is the main reason of increasing sectarianism day by day (Khan, 2008. p.258). These arguments reflect that rather than uniting, the Madrassas of Pakistan are dividing students into different sects.

In the opinion of Malik Ghulam Ali who was once Special Assistant Secretary of Abu-ul- A'ala Madoodi, these Madrassas cannot bring any Islamic revolution and social change. The reason is that, they have lost their effectiveness and their impressive role. Now they are working just like stagnant traditions. Moreover, these Madrassas has lost their relevance and quality of education as well as moral standard (Ahmad, 2012.p.52). The education standard and ethical standards are continuously declining mainly due to ignoring the real teachings of Islam. Another scholar, Irfan Nadeem revealed that the mismanagement of education and teacher training system is the important aspect which is being neglected by the Deeni Madrassas. In this context, initiatives of Shariah Academy Islamabad and Jamia Rashidiah of Karachi which organized training sessions for the religious scholars is appreciable (Nadeem, 2012. p.21).

### *Educational System of Pakistan: A Critical Analysis*

In Pakistan, educational institutions are divided into many groups. In first group, there are government controlled schools and colleges that are mostly Urdu medium educational system. In second group, low level private educational institutions are included. In these schools, source of education is English, the ability of teachers and physical facilities are not up to the standard. In third group, there are institutions which charge very high fees and the medium of instruction is purely English. Although, the quality of education in these schools is very good but they are only limited to cities. These schools follow the curriculum of Oxford and Cambridge. Obviously, the atmosphere in these institutions is totally different from the other categories. This also means that all these institutions are promoting different type of culture and civilization under the supervision of Government (Khan, 2008. p.258).

According to Amin, there are several weaknesses in educational curriculum. The most important one is that the school curriculum in Pakistan is mostly based on non-Islamic material and that is not compatible to mainstream culture of the society (Amin, 2010. p.157). Secondly, a variety of school systems generate division in the society rather than cohesion (Amin, 2010. Saleemullah Khan, also agrees with Amin by

further arguing that this situation is destroying the basic fabrics of Pakistani society (Khan, 2012. p.267).

Interestingly, according to a report of Brookings Institute, it was stated that in Pakistan, Madrassas are not responsible for the promotion of terrorism or related activities rather it is due to the weak and flawed government educational system which is the main root cause of the problem. The report argues that the curriculum of schools and the methodology of teaching are the main causes of promoting intolerance (Ghazi, 2011. p.307-208). The report further states that only a small number of Madrassas are spreading sectarianism and extremism. Due to the activities of these few Madrassas, the whole system is blamed. There is a need to have a check on the problematic Madrassas rather than blaming the whole institution of Madrassa. This will help in correcting the image of this institution and diminishing the negative fallout of small number of Madrassas involved in extremism and sectarianism.

In the context of the above analytical review of the overall situation of Pakistan, following recommendations are being presented for the betterment of the system:

- The nation has come to realize that nearly all social ills germinate from lack of or misdirected education. Thus, there is surging social pressure on the government to overhaul basic education sector of the country, including mainstreaming of Madrassa system. It is a historic opportunity for the political elite to capitalize prevalent popular sentiment and initiate much desired social reformation process. Religious circles may also seize the moment and divert their potential in this drive to move the nation away from frustration, extremism and terrorism.
- Rigorous revision of the Madrassa education is extremely important for addressing the root causes of intolerance, extremism, sectarianism and terrorism in the society. Reforms in basic education sector compatible to education streams and futuristic setting of syllabus will create a whole new generation of true Pakistanis and mobilize the youth to create a progressive Muslim society based on the Islamic values of righteousness, virtue, tolerance and social justice. Besides, research oriented pluralistic approach in higher studies of religious matters and social sciences will revolutionize higher education sector.
- Both government and religious scholars should agree to introduce required reforms in the syllabus and structure of Madrassas in order to meet the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The very first step should be registration of Madrassas as pointed out in NAP. Therefore, government should continue its efforts to change the mindset of religious scholars about the registration and regulation. Their reservations should be addressed by the government. After registration, a comprehensive funding plan should be announced by the

government related to the needs of Madrassas. Meanwhile, Ulama should be given briefings about the use and importance of English language, sciences and technology. This will help in creating flexibility in their approach towards modernism compatible to Islamic value system. Every Madrassa should incorporate English and Computer in their curriculum (Qasmi, 2005. p.12).

- Ulama should realize that a major part of population of Pakistan consists of youth. So, it is their responsibility to teach them the teachings of Islam. They should also not only remain bounded with mosques and madrassa but they should also work for the welfare of the society. If they want Islam in the society then they shall have to form such organizations by which teachings of Islam can be spread easily among the masses especially in youth (Nadeem, 2012. p.34).
- The role of media is very important in promoting religious harmony. A national policy should be adopted in this regard by the government through which media persons should promote nationalism and unity among citizens. There is also a need to promote element of religious harmony among various religious communities. An attempt to hurt the emotions of the followers of any religion or group should be discouraged at all levels. Teachings of various religions as well as their prominent personalities should be legally respected. This will help in promoting peace and religious harmony among various sects and religious communities.
- Any type of foreign funding especially from Saudi Arabia and Iran should be stopped because it promotes extremism and sectarianism. Establishment of any organization whether it is religious, social or economic, should be registered by the government. Activities of foreign organizations and NGOs should be checked and noticed with the help of intelligence agencies.
- There is a great need of delinking the relationship between various religious and militant organizations and Madrassas. In this regard, government should start crack down on those organizations and armed groups which were established in 1980s for jihad in Afghanistan. Even today, some armed groups are still working in the country and defaming the national image around the world. Rehabilitation centers should be established at provincial level where militants may be brainwashed and rehabilitated by making them good citizens of the country. They may be involved in business oriented activities.
- Presently public statements by religious and political figures are under tight scrutiny. However, sensational graffiti on the walls, hate speeches in the mosques, rallies and printing of hate material by informal media is far from being eliminated. This situation reflects that social mobilization is needed at massive scale followed by strict regulation of electronic, print and social media to discourage propagation of hatred contents.

- A system of licensing or certification of religious teachers should be introduced and ensure that maximum teachers with moderate religious inclination should be authorized for teaching in Madrassas. Computer teachers and teachers of foreign languages should be appointed in Madrassas by the government so that students could learn modern knowhow. In this, way the difference of culture between school and Madrassa can be minimized. In addition, training workshops and seminars by government should be arranged for the teachers of Madrassas and schools.
- General arts subjects such as painting, calligraphy, sociology and Islamic economics etc., should be introduced in the curriculum. An obvious example of acceptance of such subjects is Islamic calligraphy, which is approved by all religious scholars. At the same time a parallel system of advanced religious education should be introduced in public sector schools with emphasis on ensuring better quality of education and job opportunities for the students qualifying from these institutions.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion made in this paper clearly reflects that Madrassas have a key position in Pakistani society which are imparting religious education to students mostly who cannot afford mainstream education. It is noted that terms like extremism and terrorism cannot be devoted to Madrassas only. This is because terrorism is a state of mind and actions of a person or a group that uses elements of violence and terror to achieve certain political, economic, social or religious objectives. So in actual sense even some time a person or a group who is graduated from a western modern institution may also become a part of any extremist or terrorist activity. It is observed that the role of Madrassas in Pakistani society is constructive not destructive as it portrayed many times.

The analysis made in this paper also highlight that there is a great need of introduction of reforms in the structure and curriculum of Madrassas. Modern subjects related to computer, science and arts should be introduced. The government has commenced the endeavour to bring all Madrassas under Ministry of Education and introduce a new curriculum encompassing religious and modern education (Ghafoor, Asif. 29 April 2019). There is a great desire that government should start a mega project related to reforms in Pakistan's educational system so that both Madrassas and other public private educational institution could flourish and meet the challenges of 21st century.

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