

THE CRISIS OF MADRASAH GRADUATES: A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN THE PAKISTANI SOCIETY

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Abstract

Madrasah had remained the traditional institution of education in the Muslim history and remained functional in the pre-British era in the sub-continent. Historically, there had been no distinction between the religious and secular education in the madrasahs, but after the arrival of British imperialism which led to the subjugation and oppression of existing institutions which also affected the Madrasah curriculum leading to a gradual decay in Madrasah to play any role in the society. This existential crisis faced by the madrasah—both as an institution and by its graduates—was expected to end with the inception of Pakistan with the support of religious Ulema and the Muslim masses however the adaptation of the modern education system in Pakistan only added more to the existing problem. The current research employed a survey method to explore the professions graduates from madrasahs are adapting in order to play a contributing role for the welfare of the state and society. Results are indicative that a large number of graduates are forced to take up petty professions whose pay is even less than the minimum wage criteria set by the state of Pakistan and the world bank. Analysis of the data indicated that these professions include: madrasah teachers, imams, clerks at madrasahs, writers in low-rated newspapers, small shopkeepers. A large number of graduates join voluntary missionary organizations and religious political parties. Research also shows that few of the graduates indulge in militant organizations.

Keywords: Madrasah, Education, Socioeconomic Development, Identity, Poverty.

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Öz

Medrese Mezunları Krizi: Pakistan Toplumunda Kimlik Arayışı

Medrese, müslüman tarihinin geleneksel eğitim kurumları olarak tarihe geçmiş, Hint alt kıtasındaki İngiliz öncesi dönemde de bu işlevini sürdürmüştür. Tarihsel olarak medreseler sadece din alanında değil, aynı zamanda diğer alanlarda da toplumun ihtiyaç duyduğu insan gücünü karşılamıştır. Ancak Medrese müfredatı da dahil mevcut pek çok kurumun boyun eğmesine ve baskısına yol açan Birytanya emperyalizminin gelişi ile, medresenin toplumda oynadığı rolde yavaş yavaş bir düşüş yaşanmıştır. Medresenin (hem kurum hem de mezunları tarafından) karşı karşıya kaldığı bu varoluşsal krizin, Pakistan'ın kuruluşunda dini Ulema ve Müslüman kitlelerin desteği ile sona ermesi beklenirken, Pakistan'daki modern eğitim sisteminin uyarlanması sadece mevcut problemi artırmıştır. Bu araştırma, medrese mezunlarının devlet ve toplumun refahına katkısını ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Sonuçlar, çok sayıda mezunun, Pakistan ve Dünya Bankası tarafından belirlenen asgari ücret ölçütlerinden bile daha az getirisi olan meslekleri yapmak zorunda kaldıklarını göstermektedir. Bu meslekler arasında şunlar bulunmaktadır: medrese öğretmenleri, imamlar, medreselerdeki memurlar, düşük dereceli gazetelerdeki yazarlar, küçük esnaf.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Pakistan Medreseler, Din Sosyolojisi, Yoksulluk, Kimlik Krizi, Kimlik Arama, Ekonomik Kalkınma.

Summary

The Madrasah had remained the traditional source of education in the Muslim history and remained functional in the pre-British era in the Indian sub-continent. It was not just a religious seminary, but also the provider of human resource for the government bureaucracy. Historically, there had remained no distinction between the religious and secular education in the madrasahs. Both systems of education were integrated into that system. The British imperialism which led to the subjugation and oppression of existing institutions also affected the Madrasah curriculum and the administration of that all-encompassing institute. They intentionally deteriorated the financial, administrative and academic condition of Madrasahs. Evidence suggests that in many places Madrasahs and their books were burnt and at some places forcefully closed by the British authorities (Leitner 2002). Many prominent Ulema, who were responsible for the war of independence were killed. The

graduates of Madrasahs were denied of government jobs while on another hand the graduates of the British and other modern educational institutes were encouraged and promoted. This led to a slow decay in Madrasah as a vital institution to play any role in the society. This existential crisis faced by the madrasah—both as an institution and by its graduates—was expected to end with the inception of Pakistan with the support of Ulema and the Muslim masses because Pakistan was created as an experimental laboratory to revive the Islamic system of life in the modern world – of which, madrasah had to be the necessary part. However, the adaptation of the modern education system in Pakistan only added more to the existing problem. The madrasah and its graduates were gradually marginalized from the mainstream due to wrongly devised policies. Further, after the 9/11 Madrasahs in Pakistan were exposed to the international media as training centers for terrorism. More harsh policies were imposed on Madrasahs following that incident. The current research employed a survey method to explore the professions which the graduates from madrasahs are adapting in order to play a contributing role for the welfare of the state and society. All existing boards of madrasahs – Wifaq ul Madaris al Arabiyah, Tanzeem ul Madaris al Arabiya and Wifaq ul Madaris al Salafiya, which are the representative boards of each school of thought of the Sunni denomination – Deobandi, Barelvi and Ahl e Hadis– were approached. A data of 100 graduates from different madrasahs is collected in this research, who as a snowball sampling led us to 2400 graduates of their respective batches. Results are indicative that a large number of graduates are forced to take up petty professions whose pay is even less than the minimum wage criteria set by the state of Pakistan and the World Bank. Around 30% of the population of Pakistan lives below the poverty line, but Madrasah graduates having a large number of dependent on them – due to large family sizes, live far below the average of this poverty level. Analysis of the data indicated that these professions include: madrasah teachers, imams, clerks at madrasahs, writers in low-rated newspapers, small shopkeepers. Madrasah, apart from an educational institution, is playing its social part as an orphanage and a shelter house for poor, providing free meals, clothes and residence to all without charging any fee. Despite such a philanthropist role in the society, it receives no funding from the government of Pakistan and is totally relied on the charity of the masses motivated by religious reasons. Researchers found out that a large number of madrasah graduates join voluntary missionary organizations and religious political parties. These organizations recruit people to propagate the Islamic teachings both in Pakistan and in other countries. Researches

also shows that few of the graduates indulge in militant organizations. Our emotional attachment to our group memberships have implications for our well-being and it enables us to distinguish our own group the in-group, from out-groups, or other groups. The identity crisis theories suggest that such an attitude towards a section of society marginalizes them. They tell that when identities are blurred or motives are unclear, negative emotions may arise in groups against the other groups creating an avoidance-oriented mindset. It is implied that if this marginalization of graduates of madrasah continues in this way, it will adversify the situation. More militancy and terrorist inclinations will nurture in their minds against the society and the state. It is thus recommended that either the systems of educations are unified this the high-school level in the long run, or for an acute target, the madrasah boards must be included in the mainstream occupational life. Government jobs must include madrasah graduation in the eligibility section of their job advertisements.

Introduction

“Madrasah” an Arabic word translating to a place of learning has enjoyed as being the only centralized system of education in the Islamic world comprising both the secular and the religious education (Bhattacharya 2014). The 19th century colonial rule bought with itself some very interesting challenges to the Muslim societies which also had a trickledown effect on Madrasah as it was the institute responsible for not only centrality of preservation and development of knowledge but also were employed, other than mosques and madrasahs, in the courts, civil bureaucracy, trade and in the offices of kings and ministers according to their specialization and capabilities, which played a central role to the Muslim societies raising questions as to the very necessity of a religious section to the society and it’s a centralized role in all matters of state and public (Zaman 1999). The British imperialism led to the subjugation and oppression of existing institutions also affected the Madrasah curriculum and the administration of that all-encompassing institute. They intentionally deteriorated the financial, administrative and academic condition of Madrasahs. Evidence suggests that in many places Madrasahs and their books were burnt and at some places forcefully closed by the British authorities (Leitner 2002). Many prominent Ulema, who were responsible for the war of independence were killed. The graduates of Madrasahs were denied of government jobs while on another hand the graduates of the British and other modern educational institutes were encouraged and promoted. This led to a slow decay in Madrasah as a vital institution to play any role in the society.

One of the major reasons for which Madrasahs came under the direct onslaught of challenges was their rejection of newly emerging modern ideologies and systems which would eventually lead to a perception of rejecting modernization and alienation, consequently, producing extremism (Sajjad 2009). Muslim societies became polarized between madrasah educated Molvis (the graduates of madrasahs) and the economically prosperous, University educated graduates. Due to the discontinuation of educational funds for Madrasahs by the government, madrasahs still operated on private charity (Moosa 2015).

The post 9/11 world found an even increasing attention towards the madrasahs, in both international media and academic literature. This resulted in calls for regulations and reforms in the Madrasahs from the western world and also from the reformist sections of Pakistani society, of which the first step was the Pakistani Madrasah Education Ordinance accepted on August 18, 2001 (Iqbal and Raza 2015). However the data on the allegations on Madrasah's role with terrorism is quite conflicting, where a group of scholars assert to the fact that these institutions are in fact nurseries of terrorism and originators of terroristic ideologies and hence have no role to play in the modern secularized democratic societies (Haqqani 2002), however, another group of scholars challenge the above mentioned notion indicating that the major operations of terrorist activities were carried out or masterminded by people who were graduates of secular universities rather than madrasahs and that madrasahs have always played the role of promoting peace, looking after orphans, and most importantly providing literacy to those who cannot afford regular education in schools, colleges, etc. (Butt 2012). Investigative reports such as NBR project report prepared by Mushtaq Ahmed (2009) the curriculum of Madrasah is "entirely devoid of political content" and has no such stimuli that creates any political hate towards US or the West. Albeit the diversification of data the problem still is indicated as persistent that a rift exists between those educated under the secular systems and those graduated from religious seminaries (Sajjad 2009).

A reformist-based approach filled with suggestions and recommendations to the registrations, enrollment and revision of syllabi is quite consistent throughout literature which stands on the stance that the change should occur within the Madrasah alone (Iqbal and Raza, 2015). The reform in the madrasah curriculum has not been possible for many reasons. The modernists and the Pakistani government lay the blame on the traditional Ulema authority

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for their rigid stance and conservative position towards reform. On the other hand, the traditional authorities claim that all such proposals for reform were made in haste and by people who didn't have any knowledge of traditional syllabi of the Madrassahs (Ahmed 2009).

Another approach to the problem less explored is that proposed in accordance with Social Identity Theory proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) which indicates the knowledge and emotional attachment to one's group memberships have implications for his well-being and behavior hence creating a process of intergroup differentiation, in which one attempts to distinguish his own group the in-group, from out-groups, or other groups to which he does not belong. Jonas et al. (2014) suggested that when identity motives are endangered, negative emotions may arise in groups against the other groups such as an aversive state of anxious uncertainty or engagement in reactive defense mechanism which creates an avoidance-oriented mindset.

The case of the Madrasah is very much similar to that of an identity loss and an existential crisis. Since the advent of the first organized Madrasah that was established in the city of Fas (Fez) in the ninth century by a woman (Iqbal and Raza 2015) it has played a central and pivotal role of not just educating the masses but supporting the states by providing human resources to run the statecraft machineries and the judiciary (Talbani 1996). Hence, functioning alongside the ruling elite of the society as an integral part, the Madrasah also played a vital role in legitimizing or delegitimizing the rulings of the legal affairs of the state (Noor et. al. 2008). The arrival of the Colonial powers not only just replaced the local governments but also introduced a concept of the dichotomy of state and the church hence marginalizing the role of Madrasah as secondary to none when even the education system was replaced in societies with that of the colonials who sought to enlighten the life of their new subjects considering it to be the "White man's burden (Singer 2001).

The current study focuses on the activities or roles that graduates of Madrasah are taking up and the roles they are acquiring as part of the societies. We also studied regarding the income that they are able to generate and how much content are they with the professional activities they are engaged in and with the roles they have acquired as a part of the community.

Methodology

Sample

The current study employed a snowball sampling of students who had graduated from a recognized madrasah in the past two years or more. These students acted as key informants for the researchers in acquiring information about other students to get a more representative sample of the population under study. As discussed, the Pakistani society mainly follows the pathways of Sunni Islam hence only the Madrasah followed under the boards of Sunni scholars were considered. In this study, hence Shia, and other minor sects and their education systems were excluded due to problems of confidentiality and lack of access, etc. Also, female graduate students were excluded due to restrictions of Hijab in the Madrasah premises. A total of N=100 were selected of which 56 were graduated from Wifaq al Madaris Al Arabiya (Deobandi) 32 from Tanzeem Al Madaris Arabiya (Barelwi) while 12 were from Wifaq Al Madaris Salafiya (Ahl e Hadeeth).

Procedure

A semi-structured interview of the candidates participating in the study was conducted by the authors. A specimen of the questions asked can be seen in Appendix A, the semi-structured interview format helped in probing more and more data from the participants and to ensure that all participants provide the necessary data for the study.

Data Analysis

The collected interviews were transcribed from audio to verbatim in English Language and cross-checked to ensure that nothing is missed or misrepresented in the translations from the original verbatim. The transcribed were then coded and data was assigned to categories in Microsoft Excel for the further statistical analysis reported in the study.

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Results and Discussions

Table 1: Demographics of the Sample (N=100)

Board	No of students
Wifaq ul Madaris al Arabiya (Deobandi)	56
Tanzeem ul Madaris al Arabiya (Barelwi)	32
Wifaq ul Madaris al Salafiya (Ahl ul Hadees)	12

The 100 students acted as key informants in the research and reported about the professional activities of the students from their graduating classes whom they were acquainted with or were in contact after completion of studies. Hence a data of around 2400 students was collected from our sample of 100 students.

Table 2: Professional activities of the graduate students (N=2400)

Profession	No of Students	Percentage
Teaching in a Madrasah	576	24%
Non-Teaching Job in a Madrasah	336	14%
Opened own Madrasah	96	4%
Leading Prayers at a mosque	480	20%
Khateeb at a Mosque	96	4%
Self-employed in small businesses	144	6%
Teaching in Primary schools	96	4%
Affiliated with Islamic Banks/Takaful institutes.	48	2%
Specialization in Islamic Sciences (Fiqh, Hadees, Maliat, Dawat wal Irshaad)	192	8%
Journalism	72	3%
Continuing towards higher education (M.Phil./ PhD)	48	2%
Involved with Tableeghi Jamaat	120	5%
Involved with Dawat e Islami	48	2%
Affiliated with political organizations	48	2%

The collected data on professional activities or involvements after graduating from a Madrasah are limited only to the same circle of Madrasah

education or in limited religious circles and are unable to provide any services in major areas or walks of life. Although a little number of these graduates permanently join the missionary organizations such as Tablighi Jamaat or Dawat e Islami, more than half of the graduates go on a mission with them for preaching faith at least once. Since Madrasahs cater a large number of dropouts of schools and colleges who are unable to perform in the secular education (Andrabi et. al. 2006), we got to know that those who are least interested in education and intellectual interests during the years of study, they are more prone to join the political parties and have an extremist attitude.

Table 3: Monthly income¹ of graduate students (N=2400)

Salary	No of graduate students	Percentage
No Salary (Working on Barter Salary in Villages)	60	2.5%
No Salary (Working in returns for alms from society)	96	4%
5000-7000	156	6.5%
7500-8000	72	3%
8500-10,000	1080	45%
10,500-12000	336	14%
12,500-15,000	144	6%
15,500-18000	72	3%
18500-20,000	168	7%
20,500-22,000	96	4%
22,500-25,000	72	3%
25,000+	48	2%

The data indicates clearly that most of the students of Madrasah are able to earn a salary of around Rs. 10,000 which is far less than the salary of an unskilled laborer according to the Pakistan Labor Laws which is set up to Rs. 15000 in the 2017-2018 budget (Sindhu 2017).

¹ All incomes are measured in PKR (Pakistani Rupees)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Enrollments in Madrasahs of Pakistan had declined till 1975 but from that time the enrollments have been increased and are either still increasing or remaining constant in different districts (Andrabi, Khwaja and Zajonc 2006). It is also observed that the masses in Pakistani society prefer for their children to attain both religious and secular education hence sending their children to go to a Madrasah in the evening or arrange for a religious teacher to come and give lessons at home (Hussain, et al 2014). Moreover, as observed by Zaman (2010) that many attempts to reform Madrasahs have failed or at least in the sense that no significant change was attained through the reforms of 2001, 2002 and 2005, etc.

On the basis of collected data, interviews and existing literature it is recommended that a sense of identity and belongingness be developed in the graduates of Madrasah towards the society by including them in the government jobs as Pakistani government already declares equivalence of Master's degree to a graduate of Dars e Nizami. Furthermore, vocational trainings can be conducted where they can provide their help as most Madrasah graduates from rural areas return back to their own areas to establish madrasahs to provide education to their local children. Such kinds of institutes can be formally given the status of government schools and allocate the budget of education towards them to provide for better facilities and provision of quality education for the rural areas, which can help Pakistan in improving its already poor level of literacy rates as compared to other countries in South Asia.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Which Madrasah did you graduate from?
2. Which year did you graduate?
3. How many students graduated along with you?
4. With how many students do you have contact now?
5. How many of them are teaching in a Madrasah?
6. How many of them have opened their own Madrasah?
7. How many of them work in madrasah other than teaching?
8. How many of them have pursued higher specializations in Madrasahs?
9. How many of them are in mosques as Imams and Khateebes?
10. How many of them are in journalism?

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11. How many of them have their own business?
12. How many of them do school jobs?
13. How many of them pursued higher education in University?
14. How many of them work in Islamic banks and takaful (shariah-compliant insurance) companies?
15. How many of them work with missionary organizations (e.g. Tableeghi Jamaat/ Dawat e Islami)?
16. How many of them have joined political organizations?
17. What are their salaries?