

# The Seminaries of Lahore: A Challenge or Contribution to Society

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## Abstract

The paper sheds a considerable light on the Madrasa education and its deep rooted impact upon the Muslim scholars in the different parts of Islamic world in general and the lahorites in particular. At the outset, these Madrasas were considered just the places of learning religion ideology. Majority of the knowledge seekers were poverty- stricken. These scholars were kept unaware of scientific education. The Madrasas were run without any definite curricula or system of education. In Pakistan these Madrasa gained power and popularity with the lapse of years. The world underwent a drastic change with the occurrence of 9/11. Most of the European countries and some of the Islamic countries came to believe that the occurrence had a close affiliation with the Al-Qaeda and the Talibans in Pakistan .The students of the Madrasa were suspected to be extremists and terrorists. This article unearths the major impact of the Madrasa education on the students getting education in the Madrasas of Lahore.

## Introduction

**T**he concept of Madrasa education is not new one. It has been strongly established and working since the period of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The transitional period of Madrasa education passed through a lot of difficulties, tragedies and hurdles which did not allow it to set its positive image in society. Although the Madrasa education has been constantly working and performing its role in educating the society yet no positive effort has been made to understand the true nature and structure of their educational system and always considered it as a ‘Dars Gah’ for the poor, miserable and socially deprived class. The success of Madrasa system in Islam is because of spirit of Islamic

religion which developed the strong sense of ‘*Ilm*’ among the Muslim society.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the Madrasa system of education suffered from a lot of problems but still because of Islamic spirit it is considered a charter of ‘*Ilm*’ (Knowledge) and strongly operative among the Islamic states.

Pakistan got inception on 14 August, 1947 on the basis of Islamic ideology; therefore, Pakistan is an Islamic state and Madrasa education system has been playing significant role in educating the Pakistanis since the very beginning.<sup>2</sup> The education system of Pakistan encompasses mixture of western and traditional education system. Therefore, the educational institutions of Pakistan are clearly divided into public institutions, private institutions, Madrasas or Mosques institutions. The Madrasas and Mosque institutions are run by any individual on the basis of religious ideology which is further divided on the basis of sects. The prominent sectarian schools of thoughts are Shiites, Ahl-e-Hadith, Deobandis and Barelvis which are playing significant role in running Madrasa education. It is interesting to note all these schools of thoughts are having their own teaching methodologies and syllabus courses. Their syllabuses are in accordance with their sect beliefs which promote their sectarian school of thought.<sup>3</sup> Therefore; the international community believes that Pakistan’s Madrasa system of education promotes sectarianism which leads toward sectarian violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad A. (Ed.). (2004). *Madrasah Education in Pakistan and Bangladesh In Religion and Radicalism and Security in South Asia*. Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. Ch. 5

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Samina A. (July 17, 2005). Pakistan: Still Schooling Extremists. Washington. *The Washington Post*.

## Historical Background

Historically speaking the region of subcontinent has experienced the Madrasa education since the last decade of 17<sup>th</sup> century which continued after the partition on both sides. In Pakistan it is much influential and freely working because of theocratic democracy but on the other side the Madrasa system is under the complete control of secular democracy. In Pakistan a revolutionary change occurred during the leadership of Zulafiqar Ali Bhutto who really encouraged the Madrasa system of education and also allowed the establishment of Madrasas for foreign financial support. This act of Zulafiqar Ali Bhutto rapidly increased the number of Madrasas inside Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> According to his 'Socialism' ideology he nationalized all the private educational institutions but he never concentrated on Madrasas and left them private and free without any governmental directive. The other major change took place during General Zai-ul-Haq's period, who came in power through military coup. He followed the agenda of Islamization and strongly encouraged the promulgation and spreading of Madrasa education inside Pakistan. The encouraging attitude of General Zai-ul-Haq also led to the rapid growth of Madrasas in Pakistan. He also supported one sect and ignored others which sowed the seed of sectarian discrimination. He strongly supported and financed Deoband school of thought which became a major reason of Deoband growth to a remarkable stage during General Zai-ul-Haq,s period. Therefore, now in Pakistan the number of Deoband Madrasas is larger than any other sect's Madrasas. Further, General Zai-ul-Haq took keen interest in spreading Madrasa education in rural areas of Pakistan by financially supporting Mosque education which resulted into '*Awqaf*' or Mosque primary

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

schools which actually taught religious as well as other education at primary level.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, he tried to extend his interest to teach the children of rural areas religious as well as secular education. The syllabus of Madrasa education deeply depends upon the sectarian influence. The Madrasa education system differs from that of ‘awqaf’ school because Madrasa education is orthodoxical in nature which is limited to religious education only but ‘Awqaf’ school system teaches both courses religious and secular at the same time. Therefore, the syllabus of Madrasa education completely depends on religious education and orthodoxical fundamental mentality with meticulous interest to learn Persian and Arabic languages. After General Zai-ul-Haq the decade of nineteen passed away with calmness and no concern was shown by government which gave free hand to Madrasa establishment to strengthen their contacts with foreign organizations which actually corrupted the system as a whole thus facing a lot of challenges and hatred.

### **Challenges Faced by Madrasas**

The year of 2001 proved to be shocking and outrageous which gave new direction to the whole world. The incident of 9/11 not only disturbed the people of America but also impacted the whole world generally and South-West Asia particularly. The American government declared Al-Qaeda accountable for 9/11 and by using their influence they got the resolution passed from UNSC to fight against them. Al-Qaeda got mingled with Taliban who are the production of Madrasa education which became the main reason of hatred against the West. It is to blink over the fact that the Madrasa system of education got gratuitous interest from international community and especially from the writers who

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

actually were not familiar with the background and real objectives of Madrasa system of education. Therefore, their keen interest, misperception and unjustified hypothesis made a big change and converted Madrasa system of education into brutal, dusty and breeding setup of orthodox Islamic extremists who are spreading terrorism on the basis of their extremist thoughts.<sup>6</sup>

### **How Madrasas Operate in Lahore**

It is important to understand who attend Madrasa educational system and what Madrasa system teaches to attendees. Normally the children of poor class and orphans study at Madras whose ages are between 8 years and 15 years.<sup>7</sup> The students of Madrasa system reside in Madrasa's hostel where they spend most of the time in reciting the Quran and learning other compulsory knowledge of Islam. Other than that, they are totally ignorant of other perspective of society, like they don't have knowledge about television, music, festivals, supports and women. Women are separately taught in separate 'Dars'<sup>8</sup> The females cover the ages of 5 years to 18 years. These are also spending their time in reciting the Quran and learning the Quran and Sunnah. Women receive religious education from Madrasas but they learn the socio-cultural perspective of society at their home.

The number of Madrasa in Lahore has been increasing with the rise of population, poverty, illiteracy and lack of career counselling from the regime of General Zai-ul-Haq who actually gave free hand to Madrasa educations and encouraged them to play significant role in educating Pakistan's society with both

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad N.A. (2009). Returns to Private and Public Education in Bangladesh and Pakistan: A Comparative Analysis. *Journal of Asian Economic*. 20 (1).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

religious and secular knowledge.<sup>9</sup> The famous religious scholar Mumtaz Ahmad says that the Madrasas of Lahore consider themselves real protectors of religion in pure form and from there they control the other branches of their Madrasa in rest of Pakistan.<sup>10</sup>

Currently in Lahore 455 Madrasas are registered where almost 40 thousand students are under learning process. According to Pakistan's ministry of religious affairs survey report 2014 still round about 85 Madrasas are not registered and their students are not enrolled. No doubt Madrasa system of education is playing a positive role in educating Pakistan's society but unregistered Madrasas have fallen victim not only in Pakistan but also in other countries Madarsas are considered a safe haven for extremists and militant groups. Interestingly, most of the Madrasas are funded by foreigners who have their own interests inside Pakistan.

### **Madrasa System as a Challenge for the Government of Pakistan**

Madrasa system of education became a challenge for the government of Pakistan after 9/11 tragedy. Pakistan's Madrasa system became the focus of international community. The writers wrote many books on it and tried to represent the blue print of Madrasa system of Pakistan, how the system is functioning, from where it is getting financial support and how much they are performing positive role in character building in Pakistan's society. These altogether were very serious challenges for General Pervez Musharraf. He showed his leadership qualities and shifted his policies from 'Islamization to

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<sup>9</sup> Candland C. (2005). *Pakistan's Recent Experience in Reforming Islamic Education*. In R. M. Hathway ed. *Education Reform in Pakistan: Building for the Future*. Washington DC UK.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

modernization' and declared that the registrations of Madrasas are compulsory. In June 2000 the government of Pakistan under the leadership of General Musharraf tried hard to register every Madrasa but managed to register only 4350 which was one tenth of total Madrasas of Pakistan. The similar ratio was found in Lahore as well. The rest of Madrasas establishment did not agree to get registered because there was no such punishment announced by the government.<sup>11</sup>

### **Establishment of Pakistan Madrasa Education Board**

The pressure of international community was increasing day by day and General Pervez Musharraf was trying to use different tools and tactics to control evil which was spreading from Madrasas. To counter that, the government of Pakistan established 'Pakistan Madrasa Education Board' in 2001 to regulate Madrasas of Pakistan under the code of conduct of PHEB.<sup>12</sup> This board was not to register Madrasas of Pakistan but to modernize and encourage them to teach both religious and secular education to society. Behind that the government's motive was to keep record of Madrasas and their students. The significant accomplishment of PMEB appeared in Karachi, Sukkur and Islamabad where modern Madrasa system was established under the code and conduct of PMEB but Lahore remained isolated from this board because of strong influence of Madrasa establishment.

Further, President General Pervez Musharraf launched action to reform educational structure of Pakistan. The responsibility of these reforms was given to National Commission of Human Development which was fully supported by the

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<sup>11</sup> Martha B. O. and Bakhtiyar B. (2003). The Terrorist Notebooks. Available on <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/04/the-terrorist-notebooks/> Access on 30-10-2010

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

government. The special attentions was paid to reform the educational structure of Madrasas and tried to include the ‘secular’ system of education and encouraged to teach science, arts and international languages.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, most of the Madrasa leaders showed resistance to get their Madrasas registered because they wanted to remain autonomous. The annual progress report of Pakistan Madrasas Educational Board came in 2002 which showed hurdles and non-cooperation act of Madrasas’ leadership. The international pressure was going to increase on Pakistan leadership especially on Musharraf; therefore, he promised to take severe action against the non-cooperative Madrasas which favored violence and extremism that led toward terrorism.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Musharraf introduced ‘Deeni Madrasas Ordinance’ to reform Madrasa system from religious and fundamentalism to modernization.

### **Regulation Ordinance 2002**

After the failure faced by the government in registering the Madrasas of Pakistan, the government of Pakistan launched ‘Voluntary Registration’ through the ‘Madrasas Regulation Ordinance 2002’ in which the government of Pakistan promised to provide financial support to the Madrasas that cooperated in their registration. The government of Pakistan also announced the Madrasas’ establishment should expel the foreign students before the end of 2005. The fundamentalists strongly opposed the efforts of the government and also tried to put pressure on General Musharraf so that he should not enforce to shut down the non-cooperative Madrasas by the government directive.<sup>15</sup> The ordinance of the

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Keddie, N. (2003). Secularism & Its Discontents. *Daedalus*, 132(3) pp. 14-30

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

government by which they were trying to register the Madrasas have many flaws and anti American factors in Madrasas' leaders played very significant role in resistance; therefore, it failed to achieve satisfactory achievements.<sup>16</sup>

### **Madrasa Reform Project**

Because of political pressure on Musharraf Military regime he used money of 225 million rupees during the period of 2002 to 2003. The main objective of this governmental act was to ascertain confidence between the government and Madrasas' establishment. All this was done to educate 1.5 million students of Madrasas including male and female and make them able to continue their higher studies at colleges and universities.<sup>17</sup> The major concern of the government was to transfer the Madrasas education system from fundamentalism to modernization, and encourage them to teach the formal subjects in their Madrasa like English, Science, computer and etc.

### **Government Effort to Make Madrasa Education Under Interior Ministry**

The government of Pakistan revised educational policy in 2009 in which the government tried to put Madrasas under the authority of Interior Ministry to control the violent act of some individuals and tried to make it responsible and reliable source in educating Pakistan's society. After reviewing the policy the ITMP (Ittehad Tanzeemat-e-Madaaris Pakistan) totally rejected the policy of government and suggested that the Madaris should be under the complete control

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<sup>16</sup> Hetland, A. (2008). *Towards Education for All. The Madrassahs too are Important*. Available From: Download religious\_education\_article\_by\_atle\_hetland\_august\_2008.doc Access on 25-10-2013.

<sup>17</sup> David H. (2004). Thinking Small and the Understanding of Poverty: Maymana and Mofizul's Story. *Institute for Development Policy and Management University of Manchester United Kingdom*. Working Paper No. 22.

of Ministry of Religious Affairs. However, in October 2010 the government of Pakistan succeeded to introduce the secular subject in Madrasas with the agreement of ITMP. Although, it was a remarkable success for Pakistan's government to transfer Pakistani society yet the matters of reforms in Madrasas had become more complicated after 18<sup>th</sup> amendment in constitution under that the religious education went under the Provincial government.

Although the government of Pakistan under the leadership of General Musharraf has tried hard to solve this issue yet the trust deficit remains alive between the government of Pakistan and Madrasas' establishment. However, the Pakistan's leadership proposed technical and financial support to make Pakistan's Madrasas system more effective and reliable source for society.<sup>18</sup>

The Madrasa education system has proved to be very effective. It is playing positive role in educating Subcontinent's society since the last decade of 17<sup>th</sup> century. That is one side of the picture which we cannot neglect but on the other side that time Madrasa system was providing education to the society but now it is limited to teach only religious education which is very alarming for any progressing society. Therefore, it is compulsory to understand the impact of Madrasa on socio-political and economic progress of society.

### **Pakistan's Madrasas Promote Sectarianism**

The Madrasas of Pakistan are separated on the foundation of sects. Pakistan's society is divided into Sunism, Shiaism, and Wahabism. The Sunis are

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<sup>18</sup> Lisa A.C. L. (2007). U.S. Aid to Pakistan: Countering Extremism Through Education Reform. Heritage Lectures. *The Heritage Foundation*.

are further subdivided into Ahl-e-Hadith, Barelwis, and Deobandis. The other two sects are also subdivided into number of sub-sects which need not to be discussed here. Similar situation is present in Pakistan's Madrasas, the Sunis have their own point of view; they are teaching according to their sectarian beliefs. The Shias are also teaching according to their own sectarian beliefs. The subdivided part of Suni Deobandis effectively present in KPK and Barelwis are effectively working in rural areas of Punjab. But these altogether are present in Lahore which is considered to be the head-quarter of all these Madaris. Therefore, it shows that the Madaras are not showing progress and educating society. They are the major cause of diversification in our society on the basis of sect, they are not teaching pure Islam which gives the message of uniformity and brotherhood. Thus, these are considered some serious problems which are the major challenges for the government of Pakistan.

### **Role of Lahore Madrasas in Socio-Political Development of Pakistani Society**

Someone rightly says that Madrasas have been passing through different periods with different character and nature of Madrasas. According to Mr. Bedi the Madrasa remained the hub of both secular and religious education and left positive impact on Muslim society. The students of Madrasas were given preference to teach politics, physics, literature, architecture, i astronomy, maths, philosophy etc. Interestingly, further he says that Madrasa education system has lost its real objectives and only become a place of religious learning. The revolutionary change in the pattern of Madrasas education system has molded Pakistan's Madrasa education system.

### **Political Role of Madrasas**

The leaderships of Madrasas have been involved in state political activities since very beginning. During the formative era of Islam, Madrasa played very vital role in helping and supporting the administrative machinery of Islamic countries. Although Madrasa and state are different institutions yet both have shared similar history from very beginning. Before the partition of subcontinent, the Muslim ruler introduced new policies, curriculum and new teaching methods; therefore, Madrasa played very significant role in socio-political and religious character building of the country.

Interestingly Pakistan's perspective is not different from that of previous era, the political and religious elite of Pakistan frequently used Madrasa and religious means for the pursuit of their socio-political interests. As we know that Pakistan got inception on the basis of Islamic ideology; therefore, the governing class of Pakistan gave preference that Pakistan be based on Islamic ideology not on democracy, Therefore, in Pakistan Islam has straight collision in making the Madras's institutional structure.

Hence, Madrasa system of Pakistan is promoting Islamisation which simply means the supremacy of Islamic religion in every perspective of life. Islamization necessitates a procedure of executive, legislative and permissible actions, according to that an individual spends his life which is actually based on the Islamic principles and teaching of Islam. The socio-political, economic and cultural activities of Pakistan have become similar to the code of conduct of Islamization.

The correspondence between Madrasa education system and Islamisation lies in the actuality that both are harmonized and enhancement for each other. In Pakistan religion has key position in socio-culture structuring of Pakistani society

which means that the cultural heritage of Pakistan society is identified through Islamic value-system; therefore, Pakistan's educational institutions are playing positive role and taking responsibility to inflate the Islamic value-system.<sup>19</sup> Hence, Islamization has very significant position and has always become the major cause of increasing Madrasas in Pakistan on the one hand, but on the other hand it gives free hand to Madrasa administration to make madrasas an autonomous component so as to flourish Islamization on the basis of their ideology and cohorts.

Thus, Pakistan's political structure has remained under the influence of Madrasa education system since it got inception. Currently, if researcher examines Pakistan's political scenario which shows similar result, we are still there where we began from the year of 2014 appeared a remarkable period and provided the new beginning to madrasas study after 9/11 incident which actually changed the whole world. The political activists pressurized the government on some legal ground but the 'Setheia' nature especially from the top responded very cruelly and bluntly and colored the streets of Model town with the blood of innocent madrasa's students. This opened a new chapter in political history of Pakistan. The revolution marched toward Islamabad and 90 days 'Dharna' not only broke the neck iron of the ruler but also transformed Pakistan society and made them aware of their socio-political and economic rights. During this period the leader of Jamet-e-Islami got advantage and made his party prominent and active in political activities of Pakistan's politics. Therefore, the role of madrasas

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<sup>19</sup> Ayesha J. (2008). *Partisans of Allah – Jihad in South Asia*. Cambridge, UK.: Harvard University Press.

in politics of Pakistan cannot be ignored because they have been playing significant role in politics of Pakistan since the very beginning.

### **Educational Role**

Pakistan is a country having low political culture, low literacy rate, low economy, low socio-cultural values, these altogether are because of economic decline which actually is a victim of corruption especially from the top. The 2013 UNDP report shows that Pakistan is standing at 146 number in literacy rate far below Bangladesh. Before inception of Pakistan the Madrasa education system had significant position because it was fully supported by Mughal rulers and for them these were the 'Dars Gahain' which actually taught the subcontinent society<sup>20</sup> But after partition India totally transformed its education system but in Pakistan Madras system has been taken from Islamic ideology. Up to this it was not wrong because the motive of Madrasa was to teach the society both secular and religious education.

The poor administrative structure of Pakistan's government increased trust deficit between the people and the government because the governmental schools were not fully organized, not properly funded, and existence of 'Ghost School' diverted the people toward the Madrasa education system. The Madrasa education system is free; therefore, most economical for the poor class, but the fact is very alarming, these Madrasas were funded by foreign countries to teach only religious knowledge according to their sects which gave birth to backwardness, and diversification on the basis of religion.<sup>21</sup> Currently, after the long effort of General

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<sup>20</sup> Masooda B. (2007). Beyond Politics: The Reality of a Deobandi Madrasa in Pakistan. *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18(1).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

Pervez Musharraf some registered Madrasa started secular education along with religious education which actually is a new beginning in Pakistani society but some are still bound for the religious education and teaching sectarianism which actually are promoting the individuals who are considered to be fire for whole society because their grooming forces them to start revolt against other sects and also against non-Muslims which is actually alarming the West.

### **Conclusion**

Although Madrasa has been playing significant role in socio-political cultural and religious development of Pakistan's society since its inception, yet it could not shape the society with uniform, theological Islamic state, and one national identity. The reason behind this is Pakistan has multi-cultural and socially diversified society. The teaching of sectarian thought also sows the seeds of diversification; therefore, Madrasa system of education has failed to establish uniform society. It is very tough to conclude that Madras's teaching is involved in terrorism but it is the fact which cannot be ignored that the sectarian teaching is creating element of sectarianism and recent study proves that sectarianism leads to terrorism. Hence, I agree that Madrasas are playing a very efficient role in educating Pakistan's society especially the poor class and providing large incentive to the government of Pakistan but when an institution becomes threat not only for one state but also for the whole world and distorting the image of Pakistan, it means Pakistan is paying more than what she gains. To cut a long story short, in current scenario Madrasa system is posing big challenge for Pakistan's government.