



# Al-Azhār



Volume 7, Issue 1 (Jan-June, 2021)

ISSN (Print): 2519-6707

Issue: <http://www.alazhaar.org/index.php/alazhar/issue/view/16>

URL: <http://www.al-azhaar.org/index.php/alazhar/article/view/209>

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46896/alazhr.v7i01.209>

**Title** Madrassa Education and Fundamentalism in Pakistan

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**Received on:** 29 June, 2020

**Accepted on:** 29 May, 2021

**Published on:** 25 June, 2021

**Citation:** Quaid Ali, Dr. Hafiz Ghulam Anwar Al-Azhari and Hafiz Javed ur Rehman "Madrassa Education and Fundamentalism in Pakistan" Al-Azhār: 7 no, 1 (2021)109-121

**Publisher:** The University of Agriculture Peshawar



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## **Madrassa Education and Fundamentalism in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

*The western media has linked most of the madrassas in Pakistan with violence and terrorism. It is also considered by some people as a net of social security for underprivileged people of the society who are ignored by the state's social services. The present paper looks at the Madrassa education in Pakistan to find out whether it has the ability in social, economic and political development of the country and what kinds of reforms are required in this direction. Moreover, the existing madrassas in Pakistan are sometimes considered to be the factories, producing religious extremism. But the basic aim behind the emergence of madrassas is to seek basic Islamic knowledge is not known. Madrassa teachers are satisfied with the madrassa curriculum as far as its basic goals and purposes is concerned. Madrassa education system does not prepare graduates to compete in present day economic market. The data revealed that madrassa education system of Pakistan was peace loving and unjustly blamed for extremism. Therefore the main objective of the study is to understand the changing pattern of madrassa and the role of the Pakistani government to modernize it.*

**Keywords:** *Madrassa, Pakistan, Islam, Fundamentalism, Jihad, Religion*

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According to American Heritage Dictionary of English language (2005) the word “Madrassa” refers to a traditional schools of Islamic teaching or a places of religious learning in Arabic language whose main purpose is the preparation of Islamic scholars to lead the Ummah. All over the world, in these institutes of Islamic learning, generally, education is free for all along with facilities of boarding and accommodation and they impart religious education according to their own curricula without following the government policies. (Ali. H, Mashhadi. A.F, Khan. E.A. 2015). In modern usage “*madrassa*” has acquired negative meaning. Currently, these are considered by some people as centers of indoctrination in intolerance, divisiveness and violence. Unfortunately, the increase of *Madrassas* in Pakistan since 1977 has contributed to sectarian division and militancy.

The first madrassa was established in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SAW). The tradition has been prevailing since that time. Unluckily, this institution is to some extent in a miserable condition. True efforts are not been made to understand the true nature of madrassa, and the actual reason of its establishment and existence. By examining the status of madrassa in the history of Islam it made it clear that its success was due to strong sense of respect among the Muslims for ‘Knowledge’ as advised by the Holy Prophet of Allah (Sanchita Bhattacharya).

It is an interesting fact that since the time of its emergence, madrassa has been innately associated with the policies, activities, and patronage of the state. Madrassas acted as supporters of the Islamic state and played a vital role in assisting the administrative activities in the early stage of Islam. Hence, the two units: state and madrassas have been sharing common history sine long. Muslim rulers in the Indian Sub-continent also established madrassas and even developed new curriculum, teaching methods and educational policies. Madrassas played an effective role in the social structure of the subcontinent before the creation of Pakistan (Talvani, 1996). It preserve, strengthen and communicate the tradition of Islamic learning to new generations, by training and providing firm religious and political leadership to Muslims. These Islamic institutions also played a significant role in reawakening the consciousness of Islamic brotherhood, reproducing Islamic culture and transmitting the genuine teachings of Islam to the Muslims of South Asia (Ahmad, 2002).

### **Status of Madrassa in Pakistan**

Since the independence of Pakistan, the numbers of Madaris has been increasing gradually. Similarly, their role in politics has also increased. The total number of Madaris in Pakistan at the time of independence was between 137 and 245. It increased to 401 till the year of 1960. Furthermore, the number of madrassas in

2001 had reached to 6,870. Till 2013 the number has crossed the limit of 50,000. About 1.5 million students have taken admission in these Madrassas. (Ahmed S, Stroehlein A. 2005).

Madaris in Pakistan are considered as non-governmental organizations providing free education to the people mostly along with boarding facilities according to specially designed curriculum. Religious education is considered as the as important part of educational system along with the other educational system in Pakistan. There are three parallel education systems in country. Government funded schools, private schools, furthermore, Islamic religious schools. Both public and private schools teaches Islamic subjects as a part of their curriculum, while madaris offer absolutely religious education to the students. Regardless of the fact that madaris are opposed by some people of the society, numerous among them keep on supporting them (Anjum. A, 2017).

### **Curriculum of the Madaris in Pakistan**

There are different schools of thoughts among the Muslims of in Pakistan. They are Deobandi, Barelvi, Ahl-i Hadith, Jamat-i-Islami, and Ahl-i-Tasheh. Each school of thought organized madrassas under different boards. These boards are responsible for registration, syllabus and examinations. The detail is as follows:

- 1) **Wafaqul-Madarisul-Arabiya:** This Central board of Sunni Deobandi institutions was established at Mulltan in 1960.
- 2) **Tanzimul-Madaris:** This is Central board of Sunni Barelvi institutions. It was established at Lahore in 1960.
- 3) **Wafaqul-Madaris Shi'a:** This is the board of Shia institutions. It was established in 1959. Its main center is in Lahore. Shia madrassas teach fiqh Jafariya named after Imam Jafer Sadiq, while other madrassas in Pakistan teach fiqh Hanafia.
- 4) **Rabitahul-Madrisul-Islamiya:** This board was established by the Jamaat-i-Islamiat Lahore in 1983, and recognizes the madrassas of all Islamic thought. They teach more modern subjects.
- 5) **Wafaqul-Madarisul-Salafiya:** This board was established by the Ahl-i Hadith at Faisalabad in 1955.

These madrassa education boards supervise, control and monitor all the registered madrassas in Pakistan. They decide schemes of studies for all the levels of education, formulate rules and regulations for registration of new madrassas. They also conduct examinations and award degrees etc. (Rehman, 2004,).

The syllabus in almost all traditional madrassas conforms to the basic structure and scholarly standard of the Dars-i-Nizami. The course of study in all madrassas except that of the Shia, revolves around the teaching of Hanafi fiqh. (Abdul Rauf Iqbal & Ms. Sobia Raza.2015). Arabic; Persian, Quranic memorization; theology; calligraphy; medicine; handicrafts, like leather work; research in the Quran; dar al-ifta, and tabligh. Subjects like grammar, etymology, syntax, Prosody, rhetoric, Arabic, literature, history, strah, munazarah, logic, philosophy, arithmetic, astronomy, tib, kalam, fiqh, usul-I Fiqh, farai'd, Hadith, Usul-i Hadith, Tafsir and Usul-i Tafseer are studied there and for the most part, are based on Dars-i-Nizami. These madaris have their own examination system and award certificates called sanad corresponding to the formal system: (a) Hifz/Tajweel-wa-Quiraat/Ibtedayia, equivalent to the Primary School; (b) Mutawassita, equivalent to the Middle School; (c) the Sanviya AC1117C1, equivalent to the Secondary School Certificate; and (d) the Sanaviya Khassa, equivalent to the Higher Secondary School Certificate. Holders of the Sanaviya Khassa can either continue to higher education within the Madrassa system or in the formal sector. Madrassas are mostly run on a charitable basis. It may be free of cost for students or a tiny fee may be charged. Some madrassas provide free accommodation and boarding. (Shazia Ramzan. Ainee Rabab. 2013)

They are teaching debilitated curriculum divided into two categories named as Uloom Aliya (sciences and Uloom Aliyya (Arts). The first category contains the Hadith, Fiqh and Quran. This first category is compulsory to study for students. The Second category which is based on Arts is quite flexible, but the method used to teach these subjects are burdensome and boring. The curriculum used for teaching Uloom Aliyya is based on the old philosophical logics. Mostly the students of madrassas lack modern knowledge and professional skills, which do not allow them to properly participate in various activities in the society. It requires to add subjects like Political Science, History, Economics and comparative religious studies in the curriculum of madrassa education. The needs of modern curriculum integration with the old curriculum was felt by religious scholars like Allama Shibli Numani about a century ago (Ahmed, 2009). The successful learning of all the subjects included in madrassa curriculum make the student eligible only for the award of graduation degree as a Molvi or Mulla at Mosque or Madrassa. (Ali. H, Mashhadi. A.F, Khan. E.A. 2015).

The faculty members of each madrassa have different qualification and knowledge. Some of them appoints highly qualified staff with special teaching skill

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while the others do not meet these standards. The variation in curriculum along with differences in faculty may cause degradation in quality. The working group on madrassas has proposed numerous reforms to bring into line educational system of madrassas in accordance with the needs of the modern society. They also pointed that administration of most madrassas is unwilling to support the reform efforts. Any policy action that is taken by the government is conceived as threat to their independence (Anjum. U, 2017).

### **Reforms in Madrassa after 9/11**

Madrassa education been strongly criticized at international level since 9/11. General Pervez Musharraf took a step to bring reforms in madrassa education system. His policy proposed to modernize these institutions. The government of Pakistan tried to start the registration madrassas in June 2000. Only 4350 of the Madaris which is approximately one tenth of the total, agreed to be registered. The rest simply ignored the advice of the government. There was no incentive for registration and no punishment if one did not (Singer, 2001).

It is a fact that reforms should be introduced in the Madaris. Nonetheless, every school of thought willing for reforms has its own explanation and goals. US apprehended that Madaris promotes anti-American sentiments after the incident of 9/11 in 2001. Consequently, they embarked on a policy to bring reforms in Madaris. General Musharraf, who was the trusted ally of America, decided to deal with the Madaris with iron hand. His anti-Madaris policy, reportedly, was a blessing of America. Pakistan Madrassa Education (Establishment and Affiliation of Model Deeni Madaris) Board Ordinance (PMEBO) was promulgated during his reign and parleys for development of modalities to implement the law were underway. Special attention was paid within key policy formulations, particularly the Education Sector Reforms (ESR) to the reformation of madrassas. To bring madrassa curriculum into the mainstream of general education system of the country through the inclusion of “secular” subjects such as science was among the stated ESR goals (Kronstadt, 2004). Nevertheless, in 2007, Lal Masjid Operation and later on, Musharraf’s resignation as President in 2008, proved to be serious blows to that effort. Though, the PPP Government led by Asif Ali Zardar, retained the Madaris policy of Musharraf (Fakhr-ul-Islam. 2009).

A new education policy was proposed by the government in September 2009. For the control of the Madaris, a decision was taken to establish a Madrassa Regulatory Authority under the Interior Ministry. Nonetheless, the proposal to work under the Interior Ministry was rejected by the *Ittehad Tanzeemat-e-Madaaris Pakistan* (ITMP). They suggested to set up the authority under Ministry of Religious

Affairs or Education instead. The government succeeded signing an agreement, in October 2010 with ITMP for the introduction of modern subjects in madrassas in their metric and intermediate courses. Yet, after the endorsement of 18th Amendment, the issue of madrassa reforms has become more complex. According to that amendment, the subject of Islamic education has been transferred to the provinces (Zaidi, 2013).

### **Role Played by Madrassas in Pakistan**

Madrassas were established with the end to provide higher studies, where law, Islamic studies and philosophy were taught. There are large number of madrassas in Pakistan. Most of the people send their children to madrassas because of immense poverty. Until 1970s, these madrassas have positive contribution towards the social and economic uplift of the society. When many madrassas got involved in the production of Mujahids for Afghan war; this led to the induction of militarization into madrassas. Latterly, Madrassas and Islamic militancy have become identical words. These traditional schools developed on violent lines along with educating the masses due to the domestic policy of sectarian fragmentation of society started by President Zia-ul-Haq. In the Muslim world, Madrassas provide a traditional education system. Whereas the states handled responsibility to provide the basic necessities of life to the people. Hence there is two-fold education system in Pakistan; the first one is madrassas, and the other teaching both religious and secular subjects to their students for market oriented societies (Tayyaba Tanvir T. 2002).

In the early stage, the basic cause of Islamic Fundamentalism was the provision of government funds to establish mosque schools (madrassas) in rural areas and small towns. Resultantly, militant religious organization grows rapidly. The Afghan war played the role of a catalyst in this social process during the reign of General Zia (Sridhar K. Khatri and Gert W. Kueck, 2003).

Large amount of funds were provided by the Arab world and America to Afghan *Jihadi* groups after the Afghan revolution. They also caught roots in Pakistan. As a result, lawlessness, sectarianism, fundamentalism, terrorism and militancy started in the country. Highly trained and sophisticated militia committed all these acts in the name of Islam. The pre-Islamization period curricula and text-books clearly distinguished the themes of *Jihad* and *Shahdat*. The post-1979 text-books and curricula openly praises *Jihad* and *Shahadat* and encouraged students of madaris to become Mujahideen and martyrs (Nayyer 2003).

The movement of Taliban was started with those mujahideens who were the students of the religious schools in Pakistan. Nevertheless, the supporters of madrassa system claims that most of them are charitable religious institutions that have

assisted in raising the literacy rate in the country. Refugees from Afghanistan and millions of poor Pakistanis would never have had attain education if there would have no madrassas (Synovitz. R. 2004).

### **Social role of Madaris**

Madrassas are playing a key role to increase literary rate in rural areas. They are developing Muslim consciousness, and providing education to the masses through teaching and through their interpretation of Islamic law by issuing *Fatwas* (authentic opinion on point of law). They distribute their views on religious, political and social matters through their newsletters, and magazines. Majority of the students in Madrassas are small children, memorizing the Holy Quran. In 8th class the *Dars-i-Nizami* is taught. From 1982 to 1987 about 371, 905 students had read the Holy Quran without understanding it (*Nazerah*). Only 45,691 had got *Shahadat-I-Almiyah* award. The University Grants Commission/ Higher Education Commission in Pakistan have recognized *Shahadat-I-Almiyah* as equal to M.A. Islamic Studies/Arabic. The final degree, which is equal to M.A. Arabic or Islamic Studies, is used only for teaching purpose. The levels of *Madrassas* education correspond to the level of mainstream state education (Rahman 2000).

The role of Madaris in education of the society cannot be ignored. A deep-rooted educational framework is a necessary component of a socialized state. As it plays an important role in the progress of individual and infrastructure of society, so, its significance is of especially obvious in third world countries. In comparison to the Western educational system, as an alternative, religious education from madaris has played a key role in the history of Islam to fulfill the requirements of Islamic society. Though, madaris are the most traditional Islamic education institutions in Pakistan, they are focal point in discussions on fundamentalism and extremism of society since Pakistan became American ally after 9/11 (Ubair Anjum, 2017)

### **Fundamentalism**

Fundamentalism means to lay emphasis on strict adherence to the fundamental principles of any set of beliefs. This term was originally use for a particular group of Christians who became eminent in USA in nineteenth Century. Between 1909 and 1915, they published a series of booklets called *The Fundamentals: Testimony to the Truth*. In the booklets they defined what they believed to be the completely fundamental doctrines of Christianity.

The term “Islamic fundamentalism” is used for two different kinds of movements. The first one supports a coming back to the basic fundamentals of the



religion. The second one is like that of the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwanul Muslimun*), which came into existence to bring about a political revolution for the solidarity of the Muslims. Behind the Wahabiya and Salafia movements, the former is still the driving force. Moreover, its aim is the internal reform of Muslims. Thus, it has no possibility of conflict with non-believers of Islam. Islam prohibits violence. The Holy Quran stated that: “God does not love the transgressors” (2:205). Similarly in chapter 16<sup>th</sup> it has been stated that: “God enjoins justice, kindness and charity... and forbids indecency, wickedness and oppression.” (Verse: 99). The Holy Quran more specifically says that God loves the charitable (2:195).

It is the belief of the fundamentalists that departure from Islam liberalism and modernization and liberalism has led to steady regression and decline of Muslim community. They advocate adherence to the original beliefs of the religion as laid down in the Holy Quran and traditions of the Holy Prophet. Their appeal for ‘the return to Islam’ has driven political involvement and direct action across the Muslim world to bring about the re-Islamisation of the society. They want to establish an Islamic order according to the fundamental doctrinal vision of the world, popularly known as *nizam Islami* (Islamic order) (Kelsay 1993; Tibi 1998).

However, there is no agreement among scholars regarding the use of the word fundamentalist in the Islamic context. Some of the scholars says that the term is less descriptive than it is critical, others argue that every Muslim believes in the fundamentals of Islam and thus is a fundamentalist in the positive sense of the term (Esposito 1992; Juergensmeyer 1993; Norrani 2002).

Most of the people are of the belief that fundamentalism means to focus on the basic principles of Islam. It has been clearly stated in the Holy Quran that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad (SAW) is the messenger of Allah. The belief in the oneness of Allah, all the Prophets, angels, all the books of Allah, on the day of judgment are the basic principles of Islam. Muslim would follow the orders of Allah like; the regular saying of prayers; zakat; performance of Hajj and fasting for the month of Ramadan. These then are the fundamental pillars of Islam. The Quran says to the believers: “God is powerful and mighty: He will assuredly help those who, once made masters in the land, will attend to their prayers and pay the alms tax, enjoin justice and forbid evil.” (22:41).

Fundamentalism became most of the abused of words. It is equated with extremism. If the teaching of Islam is studied we would know that the best Muslims are the fundamentalists. The fundamentals of Islam are based on peace; indeed the major point of Islam preaches peace. The peoples who are usually described fundamentalist are far from the following the fundamentals of Islamic teachings. On

the contrary they totally reject the teachings of Islam or partially deviate from them. Most of them have seemingly reverted to Pre-Islamic *Jahilliya* way of extreme loyalty to their groups, clans, or tribes to fanaticism.

Islam is not in favour of violence. The Prophet Mohammad (SAW) described human rights in his last sermon in most piercing words that the sanctity of human life, honour and property sacred. The Holy Prophet laid down in the history of mankind, the foundation stone of a judicious, just, humane and moral society, an Islamic society. According the Holy Quran, “whosoever killed a person, it is as if he has killed all the humanity” (Al-Quran, 5:32). A society could claim to be Islamic only when it preserves the sanctity of human life, honor and property, otherwise not.

It is very much important to analyz sectarianism, fundamentalism and terrorism and to avoid the existing culture of victimization. It is a great sin to gun down a fellow human being in the name of Islamic preaching. The Holy Prophet had forgave his opponents on the occasion of victory in Makkah. In the early days of Islam, the image and message the Caliphate was facilitated to spread because the non-Muslims were impressed by the humanitarian and kind characteristics of Islam. It were based on economic and social equality, tolerance and universal brotherhood. It is necessary that Muslims must present the true and real image of Islam by discouraging violence and militancy (Tariq, M.M. 2011).

### **Causes of fundamentalism in Pakistan**

In Pakistan, in the most populated province of Punjab as well as the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a large number of Madrassa students are people who are trying to get their political rights through militant means because their rights have not been given to them. The upper classes, liberals and the leftists have favoured English language. They should have favoured Urdu and indigenious languages of the people. It creates ground for a future struggle for power between the leftists and the rightists. English language is required for jobs in the country. Madrassa student have little know how in English. On these grounds, they are deprived of jobs. It gives a chance to them for jobs and their rights. (Rahman 2002: 163)

The western world has been repeatedly criticizing Islam since the last few years. It has been apprehended in the West that Islam stands for rigidity, fundamentalism and militancy and extremism. With the emergence of unipolar world after 1990, terrorism has become the common foe of the west. Unfortunately, it has been linked with Islam, particularly, after 9/11. Taliban were blamed for these attacks.

It is perceived that Taliban were students educated in the madaris of Pakistan and were also assisted by Pakistan. These students (known as Talib) were given their trainings of jihad (religious war) against the non-Muslims (*The Muslim*, February 21, 1995). The Taliban were a Sunni expansionists skilled to create sectarian problems. They have also been involved in sectarian riots in Pakistan (Khan. Z. December 1996). The Taliban were trained in the religious madaris of Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam,, and provided with military training and equipment by the ISI. They captured Kabul in 1996 ( Ahmed. I. 2006).

There are numerous groups of Taliban. Some of the religious groups in Pakistan are involved in drug trafficking in order to sponsor their militancy since the Afghan jihad (Jalalzai. 2008). The spread of sectarian groups and their interpretations of the concept of religious war strongly supported by the establishment damaged the civil society in Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif and Benazir surrendered to their religious rights but this menace could not be curbed effectively during that democratic era (1988-1999). During the government of Nawaz Sharif, extremist Sunni parties became more powerful (Ahmed. K, 2003).

## **Conclusion**

The saints and Sufis of who the followers of Islam launched movements and peacefully persuaded the people. Their target was not the state but individuals. Their task involved the spiritual reform of people's hearts and minds, so that they might lead their lives as new, transformed human beings. They adhere to the policy of persuasion and did not resort to violence. Nowadays Tablighi Jamaat provided another example of peaceful persuasion on a large scale for the reformation of the society. The emergence of an educated group of persons who understand Islam to be a religion of justice, of peace and knowledge is the only hope to save Pakistan from fundamentalism and extremism. Hopelessness and deprivation will be produced in the minds of the people if there would be Political injustice, poverty and illiteracy in the country. Madrassas are considered as a medium which promotes religious fundamentalism, extremism which resultantly creates terrorism. There is a need to change the curriculum of madaris. Some additional valuable and productive subjects must be added to the curriculum. It would enable these madaris graduates to become pragmatic and valuable individuals of the society. Educational system of madrassa is unable to provide easy and valuable job opportunities to its students as compared to that of modern education system. It is the main reason that after the completion of education, the graduates of these madaris got involved in unlawful activities. The students of madrassa are aware of the fact that the knowledge of Science, Economics and Mathematics is likewise important in the modern era. Internet and computer is a vital source of education but the teachers of madrassas are not skilled in this modern

technology. Traditional leaders of the Madaris resist any change in their system as they believe that they need teachers and molvis to prepare people for the life to come after death. According to them, the prevailing curriculum is sufficient to produce the required people. Nevertheless, it must be realized by them that they have the capability of producing stuff for other professions. The over-all system, curriculum and different other aspects of Madaris are not free from mistakes. In order to accomplish demands of the modern era, the clergy of madaris should reconsider their approach and make alterations in the system and curriculum. The paused process of dialogue of Government with the Ulama of Madaris should be reinitiated. Madaris should not be enforced by the Government for reforms from above. Rather, religious group and religious political parties should be involved in order to bring reforms in these religious institutions.

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