Religionspädagogische Beiträge. Journal for Religion in Education
RpB 48 (2025) I, 1–18; https://doi.org/10.20377/rpb-1933

University of Bamberg Press

Madrassah Education in the Indian Subcontinent: Policy Constructs and Social Worlds

Mohammad Talib[a] / Hem Borker[b]

[a] Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies / [b] Jamia Millia Islamia (Central University)

Contact: [a] mohdtalib@hotmail.com; [b] hborker@jmi.ac.in

submitted: 22.11.2025; revised: 04.05.2025; accepted: 23.06.2025

Abstract: This paper focuses on Islamic education transmitted through the institution of madrassahs in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. It overviews existing studies on madrassah education in the Indian subcontinent to highlight the excessive focus of policy frameworks on madrassah modernisation especially curricular reform. It argues that this state driven policy approach targeted at madrassahs as institutions-in-need-of-reform stems from the perceived link between unreformed madrassahs and radicalization, a connection that has been widely changed in popular discourse. This understanding often obscures the field view wherein madrassahs produce a range of faith-based resources. In this process the community of believers is equipped with resilience and navigational capacities to survive and overcome disruptions owing to everyday precarity, casual employment in the informal sector and disasters. Further, the madrassahs as an evolving community institution have a long history of embracing self-initiated reform outside the ambit of the state interventions. By examining the intersection of madrassahs and the policy domain, this paper argues for a conversation between state policy and the lived realities of madrassahs within a democratic framework.
Keywords: Madrassah, Islamic Education, Indian Subcontinent (India, Pakistan Bangladesh), Policy Construct of Curricular Reform, Oriental thinking, Social World of Muslims, faith-based resources in Resilience, Self-Reform.

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Beitrag befasst sich mit der islamischen Bildung, die durch die Madrassas in Indien, Pakistan und Bangladesch vermittelt wird. Er gibt einen Überblick über die vorhandenen Studien zur Madrassa-Bildung auf dem indischen Subkontinent, um die übermäßige Konzentration der politischen Rahmenbedingungen auf die Modernisierung der Madrassa, insbesondere die Reform der Lehrpläne, hervorzuheben. Es wird argumentiert, dass dieser staatlich gesteuerte politische Ansatz, der auf Madrassas als reformbedürftige Institutionen abzielt, auf die wahrgenommene Verbindung zwischen unreformierten Madrassas und Radikalisierung zurückzuführen ist, eine Verbindung, die im öffentlichen Diskurs weithin akzeptiert wurde. Dieses Verständnis verstellt oft den Blick auf die Praxis, in der Madrassahs eine Reihe von glaubensbasierten Ressourcen produzieren. In diesem Prozess wird die Gemeinschaft der Gläubigen mit Widerstandsfähigkeit und Navigationskapazitäten ausgestattet, um zu überleben und Störungen zu überwinden, die auf die alltägliche Prekarität, Gelegenheitsarbeit im informellen Sektor und Katastrophen zurückzuführen sind. Darüber hinaus haben die Madrassas als sich entwickelnde Gemeinschaftsinstitutionen eine lange Geschichte von selbst initiierten Reformen außerhalb staatlicher Interventionen. Durch die Untersuchung der Überschneidungen zwischen den Madrassahs und der Politik plädiert dieses Papier für ein Gespräch zwischen der staatlichen Politik und der gelebten Realität der Madrassahs in einem demokratischen Rahmen.
Schlagwörter: Madrassah, Islamic Education, Indischer Subkontinent (India, Pakistan Bangladesh), Curriculare Reform, Asiatisches Denken, soziale Welt des Islam, Glaube als Ressource für Resilienz, Selbstreform

CC BY

1. Introduction

This paper focuses madrassah education in the Indian subcontinent particularly India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Madrassahs are educational institutions associated with Islamic learning. The term 'madrassah' derives from the Arabic root *darasa*, which means 'to study'. Literally madrassah implies a place of study, an educational institution or 'a school'. Madrassahs represent a very diverse universe of educational institutions differing based on levels of education (from primary to higher levels of education), affiliation to different Islamic sects and sources of funding or recognition (registered for a government grant-in-aid or community-based). They have a long history in the Indian subcontinent from early beginning in the 12th century to contemporary times.

This paper surveys existing studies on madrassah education in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to highlight how Madrassah modernization, especially curricular reform, has been a consistent theme in policy discourse on madrassahs across the three nations. India's Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrassahs (SPQEM), Pakistan's National Education Policy, Bangladesh's Aaliya madrassah system focus on madrassah reform by integrating modern subjects like science, mathematics, and vocational training with Islamic education in madrassahs. The paper questions the prevailing focus of contemporary madrassah studies on madrassah modernisation.

It asks: why do studies on madrassahs across the Indian subcontinent not see beyond the policy frameworks of madrassah modernisation through curricular reform? Is it because scholarly work on madrassahs is limited to modernised or state-aided madrassahs and have overlooked madrassahs which rely on community resources and cater to the burgeoning informal sector in the Indian subcontinent. How do these informal madrassahs cater to the informal sector and needs of marginalised communities which rely on faith-based resources to navigate the precarity of survival?

By keeping field view of madrassahs in the background, the article seeks to contextualize the knowledge acquired in madrassahs and its application in the lives of their students, mostly living in the informal sector of society and economy. It provides two illustrative examples: the first highlights how madrassah graduates use their religious knowledge to navigate and overcome disruptions in their symbolic world, demonstrating resilience rooted in religious cosmology. The second example examines researchers who, while investigating the aspects of resilience in the face of natural calamities in the informal sector of society fail to fully appreciate how the religious symbolism cultivated in madrassahs helps individuals cope with existential crises, thus underscoring the importance of understanding the role of religious education in fostering resilience. This analysis builds up an understanding of the role of madrassahs as not just educational institutions, but as vital components of the social and symbolic worlds of their beneficiaries.

2. Textual Assumptions in Policy: Madrassahs as Institutions in Need for Reform`

The social reality of madrassahs has challenged both state-policy makers and social science observers. What limits the full gaze of a social science observer are the policy concerns that emanate from the wider context of military engagements of global powers in some parts of the Muslim world. This larger socio-political context has a bearing on the studies which continue to view madrassahs, their curriculum and pedagogy in terms of its linkages with radicalization and terrorism. As a result, much scholarly focus has been on the state's efforts to reform madrassahs, driven by security concerns over religiously motivated violence and to modernize curricula as part of solving the issue.

The paper employs Wittgenstein's concept about importance of context of use of language, to highlight how the policy discourse on madrassahs is divorced from lived realities. Further, the paper draws on Edward Said's concept of 'textual attitude' to highlight power dynamics involved in knowledge production, wherein texts shape perceptions and actions, often at the expense of understanding the

complexities of the real-world. Edward Said's concept of "textual attitude", discussed in *Orientalism* (2003) refers to the tendency to rely on texts as authoritative representations of reality, especially in contexts where direct experience is lacking. Said critiques this approach, arguing that it often leads to oversimplified and distorted views of cultures and societies. In *Orientalism* (2003), Said examines how Western scholars and writers constructed an image of the "Orient" based on textual representations rather than lived realities. These texts often portrayed Eastern societies as exotic, backward, or inferior, reinforcing stereotypes and justifying imperialist policies. Said's critique encourages readers to question the assumptions and biases embedded in textual representations.

Two contrasting scholarly imaginaries may be noted in the contemporary literature on Islamic education: first, the madrassahs as an exemplar, are imagined as part of the state-led discourse on curricular reform. The literature on madrassah reform in Bangladesh (Ahmad, 2004); Pakistan (Cadland, 2005; Chaudhury, 2005; Looney, 2003; Singer, 2001) and India (Fahimuddin, 2004; Mazhari, 2005; Siddiqui, 2007) explicating the view seems to suggest that the madrassahs in the present state of their curriculum have produced a mentality that has promoted faith-induced politics in the contemporary world. This imaginary introduces a binary characterization of madrassahs, where reformed madrassahs are seen as exemplars for those that are not. The focus on curricular reform, ignores how curriculum unfolds among the community of beneficiaries, presupposing ideal teachers and learners as if they exist in a homogeneous idealised community free from the limitations of the actual context of use.[1] In the first imaginary, the curriculum is viewed as a discursive object independent of teachers and learners.

The second imaginary, though insufficiently reflected in the studies on madrassah, alludes to the question of how the curriculum is performed across varied social and cultural contexts of the beyond the modern discourse of reforming Islamic education. The word 'beyond' is about the site existing outside the fold of the popular discourse, mostly 'ground zero' from where the researcher observes the empirical field of madrassahs. It is about the institution of religious education, regardless of its official recognition, located within its social context, mostly anchored in their local constituencies.

This paper selects the emphasis of the popular policy discourse on reducing the faith based Islamic studies and substituting them with instrumental-secular sciences. The contemporary representation of the reform of madrassahs is about mainstreaming its curriculum. One hallmark of mainstreaming is to substitute religious subjects with secular disciplines. The employability of madrassah graduates is raised as a salient issue. The remedy of it is proposed through developing skills that are supposed to match the requirements of the modern market. The discourse on mainstreaming madrassahs assumes that the religious curriculum is ill-equipped to supply required aptitude and skills that would enable madrassah students to secure productive roles in the modern industrial market. The view of employment in relation to the modern state and market sector is seen in a purely instrumentalist sense. A skill counts as relevant if it could be exchanged for wage in the modern market. The instrumentalist relation between the skill of a worker and the employment, is believed to be evident in the paid job. The skill is supposed to be instrumental in bringing about certain productive outcomes, like marketized goods or services.

The social science literature on the reform of madrassah education is limited to answering how the institution ought to become more adaptable to the urgencies and requirements of the modern society

[1] The idea that the focus on madrassah curriculum is limiting without an understanding of the ways in which curricular knowledge is performed in a given social and cultural context of their recipients. This idea is drawn from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (2001) where he states in the reflective paragraph 43, "The meaning of a word is its use in the language" (18). He further states in paragraph 116: "What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" (41). This idea has resonance in the field of ethnography of speaking where the emphasis shifts from the textual knowledge to its social and cultural foundations and its active use among the given speech community (Hymes, 2013, 47–93).

and economy. Such a modernist reading of the existing madrassahs is focussed on identifying a certain 'lack' in the curriculum, pointing out a certain knowledge-deficit that renders a madrassah obsolescent in modern market. Following from this recognition, steps are taken to overcome this deficit by bringing the institution closer to the employment market as well as the secular mainstream of modern society. In this manner of thinking, Islamic education is regarded as a passive entity whose only task it is to get adapted to the imperatives of wider national mainstream of economy, polity and society.

The stereotype on the madrassahs, like the complex imagination of Orientalism, is not merely a transient idea but a pervasive discourse. The views on madrassahs, inter-textually connected, are propagated in wide circulation through post-colonial states in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Scholarly preconceptions on madrassahs are produced at a distance from the local contexts where it is applied. The application of the stereotype on a concrete case of madrassah is not for validating its representations, but for exercising policy regulations. For this reason, a textual attitude[2] dominates the literature on madrassah reform where the scholarly gaze gets confined to the content of the curriculum alone.

A binary of a positive and negative madrassah gets portrayed in terms of what is or is not acceptable in terms of the state policy. An acceptable madrassah stands for having reformed its curriculum and conformed to the policy expectations towards the mainstreaming of Islamic education. The proof of this positively evaluated madrassah is usually couched in the teaching of subjects like science, social sciences, mathematics, English language, and computer literacy. In fact, the meaning of reform boils down to the distance and departure of madrassah from the tradition of its own curriculum and allowing modern subjects in the syllabus.

3. Studies on Madrassahs in the Indian Subcontinent: Illustrations and Reflections

3.1 Bangladesh

Ali Riaz (2008, 116–161) offers an insightful description of the comparison of the major curriculum for General education and *Aliya* and *Qoumi* madrassahs in Bangladesh. At the time of independence in 1971, Bangladesh's madrassahs could be categorized into four distinct types: Aliya madrassahs-government-funded following from the tradition of the Calcutta Madrassah in colonial times. These institutions were renamed the Dhaka Aliya Madrassah); Qoumi madrassahs (community managed and patterned after the Deoband Madrassah); Furkania/Hafizia madrassahs (pre-primary educational institutions focused on providing basic Islamic education for around four years, primarily for memorizing the Holy Qur'an); and Nurani madrassahs/maktabs, which offered pre-primary education cantered on literacy and elementary Islamic knowledge. Up to the present time, not only have these types of madrassahs persisted, but their number and influence have grown significantly. Additionally, a new type of madrassah, more orthodox in nature and aligned with a specific political ideology, emerged in the 1990s. While all these madrassahs share the common goal of providing education based on religious texts, particularly the Qur'an and hadiths, they each have distinct curriculum, educational level and relation with the state and their community of beneficiaries.

Aliya madrassahs have five stages—from primary education to the level of master's degree. Although these madrassahs receive government support, only a minority are directly managed by the government. They are generally administered by management committees selected by the patrons of these institutions

[2] The textual attitude becomes part of the policy or scholarly lens when a human reality appears "relatively unknown and threatening and previously distant. In such a case one has recourse not only to what in on one's previous experience the novelty resembles but also to what one has read about it" (Said, 2003, 92–93).

In the early 1980s, the government aimed to modernize the education system of madrassahs in Bangladesh. The index of curricular reform consisted of modern subjects such as English, Bengali, Science, and Mathematics alongside religious subjects and languages. Madrassahs that embraced the updated curriculum became eligible for official recognition and government funding for teacher salaries. These institutions were recorded in government documents as "Aliyah" madrassahs under the official government board. Conversely, madrassahs that chose not to accept government funding or the reformed curriculum remained unrecognized. These madrassahs are part of the Qoumi education board, which broadly standardizes religious education. There are six major independent education boards that oversee Quomi madrassahs. The largest among them is the *Befaqul Madarisil Arabia Bangladesh*. Founded in 1978, Befaq claims to cater to a much higher number of students than official statistics seem to accept.

Asadullah and Chaudhury (2010, 207) observe how the Bangladesh government incentivizes registered private schools and madrassahs to reform their curriculum. This is ensured through the provision of public aid to support the salaries of the teachers. Due to this significant incentive to modernize, the number of unregistered madrassahs is likely low, especially in rural areas. The few rural madrassahs that have chosen not to participate in the modernization scheme rely on external funding and private donations made for religious purposes. These Qoumi madrassahs form a nonformal stream of religious education and have a hierarchy similar to the Aliyah madrassah system (e. g., *hafizia*, *qiratia*, *quaumi*, and *nizamia*, all under the *kharizia* system). There is no single curriculum for all Quami madrassahs, leading to variations in course content. However, the exact differences in their interpretations of religious doctrine are yet to be researched. The authors observed how during casual conversations with people claiming to be knowledgeable about madrassahs, the widespread salience of Deobandi tradition recurred. Generally, Qoumi madrassahs focus on reciting the Quran and learning the duties of the maulvi to prepare students for managing the routine operations of mosques and for engaging with issues arising out of the religious matters in the lives of the believers.

Students in Quomi madrassahs continue to remain an understudied social reality. Al Hussain (2018) points towards the two significant features of the relation between the state and madrassah students who remain outside the mainstream scholarship: one, madrassahs harbour the socially marginalized children who find the institution as a kind of safety net. This is indicative of how madrassahs afford everyday subsistence needs of the learners imitative of the function of the state. The second aspect relates to the government of Bangladesh that claims to increase social protection expenditure. Do the children in Qoumi madrassahs and the social policy provisions earmarked for them ever come together? Hardly a study exists to show how the madrassahs maintain their self-sufficiency in supporting their wards in everyday subsistence. Furthermore, how does the symbolic inputs from the madrassahs strike meaningful relevance in the marginalised world of the communities sending their children to the madrassahs? At the same time, social science scholarship is yet to enquire upfront why the state's well intentioned welfare provisions don't find easy acceptance in the world of madrassahs especially in the informal sector of economy and society? And, as a consequence, the policy driven reform of madrassah-curriculum makes little difference to the learners and stake holders of the world of madrassahs. Why so? The query is rarely answered satisfactorily. Due to lack of such studies, madrassahs remain under explored. The Qoumi madrassahs are described as unrecognized but also missing in official documents of the government (Al Hussain, 2018 quotes Asadullah & Chaudhury 2016, 58). As a result, the stereotypical perceptions about the unrecognized madrassahs beyond the ken of state policy, continue to circulate in policy circles and the wider discourse.

The Aliya madrassa's levels of primary, secondary and higher secondary education are represented in its Ebtedayee, Dakhil and Alim institutions. These levels follow a national curriculum organised under a government madrassah board. Various madrassahs in Bangladesh opting for the national curriculum

get official recognition and the government's board conducts the examinations of *Dakhil /Fazil / Kamil* education in their final years.

Aspects of reform of madrassahs have been detailed in various studies. Asadullah and Chaudhury (2010, 207) points out two significant features of reforming the courses in a typical curriculum: one, the language Urdu as a medium of instruction in madrassahs began to be replaced by Bangla. Thus, curricular reform came to be seen as part of indigenization of the of madrassahs in Bangladesh. Thus, the transmission of Islamic scholarship distanced from its long-term relations with the Deobandi madrassah tradition; two, teaching of Bangla was made compulsory up to the secondary level (*marhala-e Sanvia*).[3]

Unlike the Indian state that only promises to provide financial assistance to madrassahs to teach modern subjects, in Bangladesh, all teachers of a recognized madrassahs qualify for salary payments from the state exchequer. Partly for these reasons, most of India's 30,000 madrassahs have refused to participate in the scheme (Fahimuddin, 2004). The madrassahs that are affiliated to government-sponsored madrassahs education boards are limited to the Indian states of Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal (ibid., 391). Most madrassahs in India today are traditional and independent of the state for funds.

In Bangladesh, the madrassahs that opted for government's scheme of modernization took advantage of government funding. The financial package the Bangladeshi Government offered to modernize the curriculum was substantial. This aid from the government led to the conversion of pre-reformed madrassahs to get converted to their modern format as it promised to cover the wage bill of their teachers (Asadullah & Chaudhary, 2008, 382).

3.2 Pakistan

Madrassahs' role is salient in Pakistan's educational and religious landscape. In 1947, madrassahs in Pakistan primarily focused on Islamic education, catering to the religious needs of the population. They were few in number. In 1962, early reform efforts were made to regulate madrassahs and integrate general education subjects, but the religious leadership was reluctant to adopt these initiatives. This was followed by the second wave of curricular and other reforms of 1979 based on the Halepotha Report. From 1983/84 madrassahs in Pakistan were required to affiliate with one of five governing boards (*wafaq*) responsible for curriculum design, examination and diplomas. The boards fall under the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan (Riaz, 2008).

Historical analysis of madrassa Reforms in Pakistan by Iqbal (2015) examines the evolution of madrassah reforms in Pakistan, focusing on their socio-political and educational dimensions. It highlights key milestones, such as the significant growth of madrassahs during the Soviet-Afghan War and rapid politicisation of madrassah education post the Soviet-Afghan war period. The study also discusses various reform efforts, including the 2001 Madrassa Education Ordinance, which aimed to regulate and standardize madrassah curricula by integrating general education subjects. Despite these initiatives, the study notes challenges such as reluctance of religious leaders, lack of resources, and political complexities, which have hindered the full implementation of reforms. The exact number of madrassas in Pakistan remains unknown. In 2017–2018, according to Pakistan Education Statistics, 31,115 madrassas were functioning, enrolling 4.099 million students.

[3] Asadullah & Chaudhury (2010, 207) quote Mumtaz Ahmad's (2004) the observation on indigenization of madrassahs in Bangladesh.

3.3 India

In India, the madrassah modernisation is one of the principal policies for education of Muslim minorities since 1980s through a range of programmes such as the 'Area Intensive Madrassah Modernization Programme' to the present day 'Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrasas (SPQEM)'. The emphasis on madrassah modernisation has also been the main thrust of international policy documents such as the International Development Department (IDD) report on the state and madrassahs in India (Nair, 2009). The modernization of the madrassah curriculum is imagined in terms of the inclusion of modern subjects as well as to bring Islamic education within state's regulation.

The inclusion or a relative non-inclusion of modern subjects in a madrassah curriculum is laid down as condition of eligibility of a madrassah to get official recognition for state support. In policy parlance, the reformed curricula qualify the institution to receive government's financial assistance or grant-in-aid for the teaching of 'modern education' i. e. NCERT or state board syllabus, minimum teachers' qualifications, provision of play-ground and other facilities; receiving state aid and other support from the central government. At present State Madrassah Boards are operational in seven States namely Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Assam and Rajasthan. Most of the madrassahs affiliated to state madrassah boards follow a curriculum similar to state schools along with certain additional texts on Islamic religion and history (Alam, 2011) and their degrees are recognized at par with other educational boards that operate in regular schools such as Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE).

The second category of madrassahs who have not opted for the adoption of modern courses remain unregistered, unrecognized and 'independent'. Most statistics on madrassahs in India do not include the 'unregistered' madrassahs.

There are several thousand madrassahs spread all across India. Numerical account of madrassahs in India (Nair, 2009 17–18) are usually based on speculative estimates. The various estimates peg the number of madrassahs from 4000 (Kaur, 1990) to 1,25,000 (Badiuzzaman, 2002, as cited in Sikand, 2005, p.313). The most quoted figure is that of the Union Home Minister, Government of India in 2002 according to which the number of madrassahs stood at 32,000 (Sikand, 2005). The details furnished by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (2014) allude to a much larger number of madrassahs as under the government sponsored 'Scheme to provide Quality Education in Madrasas' (SPQEM) alone 32,053 madrassahs received support till November 2013 in 16 states and the target for the next Five-Year plan was to support 52,525 madrassahs. According to information provided by the Ministry of Minority Affairs, India has 24,010 madrassahs, of which 4,878 were unrecognised, in 2018–19 (Wani & Kidwai, 2021) A recent NEIPA reports (2018) states that in the four states of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura and Uttar Pradesh the number of recognised madrassahs is 10,680. The reason for such speculation and wide ranging disparity over the actual number of madrassahs is largely owing to the fact that a 'madrassah' in India can range from being a small study group of few children to one which is highly institutionalised. Further till date there has been no comprehensive survey of madrassahs in India (Alam, 2011; Riaz, 2008).

In 2006, the Sachar Committee Report (Government of India, 2006) emphasized that contrary to popular perception, a small proportion of Muslim children (4%) attend madrassahs. However, the Sachar Committee data on madrassahs came solely from madrassahs operating under various State Madrassah Boards and did not factor in madrassahs operating outside their purview, which are estimated to be significantly more (Alam, 2011). At best the Sachar committee figure is an approximation, not based on any census and hides important regional variations such as attendance of madrassahs is five times higher in north India as compared to the south (Gayer, 2012). Further in many areas a large number of non-Muslim students study in madrassahs occasionally even outnumbering Hindus.

4. Stereotyping Madrassahs: Deficient, Intolerant and Threatening

The stereotypical view often paints madrassahs as problem-ridden institutions by highlighting three motifs. The first is the deficiencies in curriculum, wherein the absence of modern subjects such as science, mathematics, computer sciences in madrassah curriculum is framed as failure to equip madrassah graduates with skills required to integrate them into the modern labour market. The second motif is the institutional non-dependence of some madrassahs vis-à-vis the state. Such madrassahs operating independently of state regulation are perceived to produce a mentality of exclusion, isolating its graduates from the mainstream of society. And finally, the third motif is the supposed 'dubious' independence of a madrassah whose source of funds are not channelled through the state. The motif raises doubts about the operations and motivations of madrassahs by highlighting questions of financial integrity and accountability of madrassahs that rely on external or 'non-transparent' sources of funding, without state oversight.

It is possible to analyse these motifs of a problem ridden madrassah in terms of three supportive myths. The first myth refers to the fact that a student brought up on the curriculum of modern subjects is eventually absorbed in the ranks of the supposedly universal class called the middle class supported by the industrial-bureaucratic institutions. Contrary to this stereotypical expectation, neither the middle classes nor the modern education system have the property of universalism. The stereotype on the madrassah flows from the classical *Pygmalion* syndrome: the mind-set of a professor of linguistics convinced of his ability to teach people with poor dialect to talk like ladies and gentlemen. The principle of *Pygmalion* transposed into perspectives of modern scholarship gives birth to an observer who expects a madrassah to conform to his own image of a modern institution. According to the expectation, a madrassah should be dealing in modern subjects, imparting computer literacy and making provision to watch programmes from satellite TV.

If madrassah graduates are unable to find a place in the modern job market, it is because, according to the myth, they have done *fiqh* instead of physics. Those familiar with developing economies would know that the nature of teaching subjects on their own do not always create jobs in the market. Besides, most students, after receiving madrassah-education, return to the social context of origin, mostly remote to the modern state and the globalised market. Children of the pastoral communities continue to live off within the pastoral communities, those of peasants remain peasants, and wards of parents with tradition of practicing a handicraft, eventually join their ancestral vocation. A state policy on reforming madrassahs should be informed of their varied ethnographic contexts to avoid painting a madrassah with a single brush (Talib, 2018 & 2022).

However, the madrassah education equips their life with symbolic reserves to cope with life crises, or to organise their collective life with religious services, rites and observances. Madrassah education needs to be part of the division of labour between the sacred and secular spheres of a community.

Also, an observer equipped with social sciences requires sensitivity to the idea that reforming madrassahs through modern curriculum may not always lead to the expected outcomes as imagined in policy. It is possible to teach science through rote learning, e. g. memorizing the periodic table by heart. Such a science becomes even more irrelevant in neither informing learner's experiences nor creating skills for employment. Thus, the repeated reference to science subjects is usually not aware of the history of the modernisation of traditional societies, where it was imitation rather than creative learning that dominated their teaching.

The second myth seems to be saying that a madrassah education instils intolerance among its students because its traditional curriculum fails to produce the universal public sphere respectful of democracy and secularism. At this point, madrassah as a category of thought seems to have become a new member

in the latest version of the Orientalist thinking.[4] The "Madrassah" adds to the charmed list of attributes that distinguishes the international 'Us' and 'Them', namely, the societies to which the global powers of the present world belong contrasted with the communities in the Muslim world, deserving to be reformed.

Moving forward, the third myth the belief that an educational institution not dependent on the state-funding, is suspect. This state-centric approach rules out the possibility of resources, other than the monetary, to be supporting madrassahs. The mentality also rules out the exchanges resembling barter between what is produced by the peasant in the field and the symbolic produce of a madrassah. It is widely familiar to those who care for madrassah education to pay the tuition fee of their wards and the salary of the *mudarris* in quantities of food grains, cooked food, and offering their labour for the school upkeep.

The notion of utility comes handy in dismissing the traditional madrassah education. But rarely do we recognize that the utility as cultural category needn't be confined to its extrinsic merit alone. There are deeply intrinsic merits which requires journeying into the madrassah narrative in its own terms. The notion of "useful knowledge, *al- ilm al-nafi*" (Zaman, 2002, 65) figures in the discourses of medieval scholars where among other things, a reference is made of knowledge that supports virtuous acts. Mufti Jamil Ahmad Thanawi from Jamia Ashrafiyya, a prominent madrassah at Lahore, had listed thirty useful purposes madrassahs fulfil in society. To him, useful knowledge for the madrassah is only religious knowledge (Zaman, 2002, 81). Mawlana Abd Sattar who wrote history of the Calcutta Madrassah (1959) notes that the welfare of society allows for various specialists such as farmers, blacksmiths, tailors and clerks, but the issue of 'national interest' is always raised in relation to the religious ulama (Zaman, 2002, 84).

5. Madrassah On its own Terms

5.1 Initiatives of Curricular Reform from Below

It is important for researchers to take account of the institution's own perceptions on Islamic education. This includes the aspect of internal conversations among the institution's stakeholders who have a long-term interest in the production, transmission and reception of the religious knowledge. One observer - Maulana Manazir Ahsan Gilani - on the well-known historic Madrassah Darul Uloom Deoband in north India, comments on how one of the founders of the institution Maulana Qasim Nanotawi spoke about the issue of acquiring basic skills in modern subjects while continuing to study religious sciences (Gilani, 1943, 275). One worry was about borrowing modern sciences as if it were a patch (*pewand*) on the *manqulat* and *ma'qulat* in the madrassah curriculum. The addition of books on modern sciences in the madrassah curriculum is not without problems. It was also suggested that rather than changing the madrassah curriculum, there is another way of allowing the students to pursue modern sciences after they have completed their madrassah degree. Maulana Nanotwi considered different combinations of religious and modern subjects together or one after the other. He clarified that the exercise must not assume the 'ulama to be "empty-headed". Assessing the debate, Gilani (1943) points out that the issue

[4] The oriental gaze of the state policy towards the madrassahs seldom stops in finding faults in its curriculum, pedagogy, its students, the source of funding, the status of formal registration. In India, the recent charge of the disconnect of madrassah with the mainstream education was linked to the violation of the Child rights. See newsreports (Rajagopal, 2024; TOI News Desk 2024) based on the statement by *National Commission for the Protection of Child rights,* 2024, Government of India. The list of negative characterizations of the state's policy provides a perennial rationale to reform madrassahs, a plea for their complete subsumption in the mainstream education.

of reform could be resolved by keeping in view the knowledge outcomes expected of a curriculum. One may later investigate obstacles that prevent the achievement of the chosen goal. It must not be like someone talks about a person's *kurta* made of coarse cotton and proposes to replace it with silk while forgetting that the purpose of wearing kurta was to cover the body. Therefore, while blending the religious sciences with the secular studies, one must not lose sight of the madrassah's wider purposes of imparting the valued knowledge.

The state-driven madrassah reform policies often overshadow internal conversations happening within madrassahs on reform and change. They assume the authority to define what is 'best' for madrassahs and their long-term interests. They recommend models that madrassahs should emulate in achieving their developmental outcomes in relation to curriculum and pedagogy.

Al Rashidi's (2007) report from an annual conference of several madrassahs in Pakistan provides valuable insights into the internal perspectives of madrassahs on the inclusion of modern subjects. Three important points emerged from the report. Firstly, there was complete agreement over the inclusion of the modern subjects. Madrassahs registered with their respective *wafaqs* (education boards) had already integrated subjects like English, mathematics, science, and computer literacy up to the matriculation levels (equivalent to GCSE in the UK). Secondly, Al Rashidi (2007) highlights that the ulama argued that modern subjects were sufficient up to the matriculation level (equivalent to GCSE in the UK). Beyond that, students seeking specialized fields like law, engineering, or medicine could pursue them in dedicated institutions (2007, 57), ensuring madrassahs focus on their specialisation in religious education. The third consideration arises from the author's response to the Governor of Punjab, General Maqbool, who, during his visit to the madrassa Jamia Ashrafiya, claimed that madrassahs were responsible for Pakistan falling behind other nations in science and technology. In reply, Al Rashidi (2007) acknowledged Pakistan's shortcomings in these fields but rejected the notion that madrassahs were to blame. He further pointed out that Arab countries possessed oil reserves but lacked the expertise to extract them. Instead of advancing their own scientific and technological capabilities, they opted to bring in foreign companies for oil extraction, ultimately placing their resources under Western control.

Madrassahs have developed ways to sustain themselves, raising material resources for their institutional subsistence through communities who draw upon symbolic produce from religious education. Madrassahs invariably subsist on the communities who regularly donate their *zakat*, *sadaqa* and *khairat* and other charitable gifts (Al Rashidi, 2007).

5.2 Girls and Madrassahs: Self-Initiated Reform

Inclusion of women in madrassah education, by setting up of girls' madrassahs is a salient example of the evolving nature of madrassahs and their tendency for self-reform. Girls' madrassahs impart education and train women to become *alima* or transmitters of religious knowledge. Girls' madrassahs in the Indian subcontinent, much like madrassahs in general represent a diverse landscape. They operate across various levels, from primary schools to colleges, and are either government-funded through grants or supported by local communities. Additionally, they are often linked to different denominational sects.

Field-based research on girls' madrassahs in the Indian subcontinent highlights a massive growth in girls' madrassahs and a trend of feminization of madrassah enrolments. This is a reform in itself as conventionally madrassahs were largely male. For example, in India an evaluation report of the centrally sponsored 'Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrassahs' in 10,680 madrassahs across four states (Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura and Uttar Pradesh) found that girls' enrolment is either equal to or more than boys', showing an increasing trend from 2014 to 2017 (NIEPA, 2018). In 2006, the Sachar Committee findings indicated that girls comprise 45.9% of the students

enrolled in madrassahs (Government of India, 2006). In Bangladesh Asadullah (2009) highlights that up to the early 1990s, overall enrolment levels for girls in madrassahs were low (as little as 7.7 percent of total madrassah enrolments), however over the years there has been a massive expansion especially in the secondary level enrolment so much so that by 2008, about half of enrolled secondary madrassah students were girls (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2009). In Pakistan, female madrassahs almost unheard of till 1970's, comprised around 15% of the registered madrassahs by 2009 (Butt, 2009).

Field based studies illustrate that rather than religious conservatism, a range of reasons shape the choice for madrassah education including poverty and socioeconomic conditions; changes in education landscape that emphasise girls' education; preservation of identity; the need for religious denominational identity (Alam, 2011; Sanyal, 2020) and gender differentials. In terms of gendered factors, for many Muslim parents, madrassahs serve as a safe and socially acceptable form of schooling for girls. Gender norms in rural communities often constrain female mobility and madrassahs are perceived as 'safe' community institutions (Borker, 2018). The emphasis in the informal curriculum of the madrassah on Islamic etiquettes of modesty through institutional routines, rules and bodily practices is seen as desirable in the making of pious Muslim women who personify the ideal Islamic gender norms of *purdah, adab, amal* and *tarbiyat* enhancing marriage prospects. Bano (2010) writes that growing demand for Islamic education among young women in Pakistan is linked to their ability to offer education to young women from middle-income families, addressing the challenges brought about by economic and cultural changes. Female madrassahs are viewed as complementing, rather than replacing, secular education. Parents and daughters see these schools as fostering piety and family-oriented values. Additionally, they provide knowledge and social connections, particularly for girls from rural areas, and elevate graduates' social status in their home communities.

Girls' madrassahs have contributed to female literacy, women's participation in mosques and created opportunities for some Muslim women to be given advanced religious education to train as muftias or female muftis (Basith, 2003), who can issue fatwas to offer solutions to everyday problems based on knowledge of the shariat. Further there are important social implications of girls' education in madrassahs. In the context of Pakistan, Bano (2009) writes that madrassahs provide girls the opportunity to travel to madrassahs in cities, to be recognised and respected within their local community as religious experts and possibly gain employment as madrassah teachers. Furthermore, their faith in Islamic beliefs allows them to psychologically deal with day-to-day challenges which have no material solutions. Borker's ethnography of girls' madrassahs in India, *Madrassahs and the Making of Islamic Womanhood* (2018) highlights the role of madrassah education in catalyzing new aspirations around education, employment and marriage. She argues that madrassah enhances the students 'capacity to aspire'. It enables students to navigate pressures about marriage and subscribe to other normative gender roles by offering access to friendship groups, alumni networks and opportunities for higher education, employment. By equipping some women with opportunities for mobility, madrassah education is creating a new vocabulary of the pious educated Muslim women, first generational women who embrace Islamic piety and are studying in higher education or working as teachers. Borker (2018) argues that girls' madrassahs play a role in creating socially acceptable possibilities to bring about change in gender norms from within, showing that agency can manifest in different ways.

5.3 Madrassahs as a Lived Social Reality

A shift from stereotypical views to understanding madrassahs within their own terms highlights the importance of lived social realities in evaluating educational practices. This involves juxtaposing contrasting interpretations of what constitutes relevant knowledge and how it aligns with the objectives of a particular society and its culture. This may be illustrated in Bano's (2007, 55) analysis of *hifz* memorization of Quran. From an outsider's perspective, the course on *hifz*, may seem like the rote

memorization or cramming of unintelligible text. However, within the Islamic tradition it is regarded as a meaningful and valued activity practice deeply rooted in faith. This shift in perspective, moving from stereotypical views to understanding the madrassah on its own terms, encompasses its historical reality, its tradition in the pursuit of knowledge, its folklore among the community of beneficiaries, its internally shared stories and its social relevance. The *hifz* course in a madrassah follows from a considered logic, rooted in the madrassah's relation to the community. Bano (2007) highlights how *hifz* is deeply rooted in the community's needs, and madrassahs provide specialized training for taking up such jobs within the religious network. The skill of memorizing the Quran has a context of social and cultural use in the religious calendar of ritual occasions and other life's rites of passage needing resources of faith.

The narrative of the madrassah in its own terms recognizes the institution to be imparting sacred knowledge, but also engaging in self-interpretation of its practices and communicating them to its communities of belonging. A madrassah graduate taking up a job in a village mosque is routinely consulted in various matters specific to everyday life and its breakdowns. The cosmology produced by the madrassahs extends into the social need of living in a community.

5.4 Future/Social Lives of Madrassah Graduates: Beyond the Formal Economy

Viewing madrassahs on their own terms also allows us to understand the future opportunities they create for graduates outside the formal economy and societal structures. After completing their studies, graduates typically follow one of two paths: some take up roles within religious organizations, such as serving in mosques or teaching in other madrassahs, while others return to their ancestral crafts. A number of them also engage in part-time roles, sharing religious knowledge to meet the faith-related needs of their communities. For example, a schoolteacher from Chandpur (Uttar Pradesh), aged 43, who was trained in a madrassa in Saharanpur, explained that local imams provide particular Qur'anic and hadith guidance for addressing physical and psychological issues, as well as organize rituals and prayers for life cycle ceremonies. However, as social scientists note, there is limited evidence showing how madrassahs interact with their communities or how symbolic and material exchanges occur between madrassahs and their stakeholders.

A social science perspective also allows us to enquire how the faithful individuals employ religious resources as part of problem solving in everyday life. This is where madrassah graduates use religious knowledge and their worldviews to support institutions and the cultural life of their community. This section of the madrassa graduates follows a completely different trajectory. Many such students opt for self-employed ventures in trade and commerce as well as occupations relevant to the local economies. However, they remain part-time communicators of religious knowledge needed for everyday practice. This role is performed in an 'informal sector of religion'. It is the contribution of such madrassa graduates that Muslim communities maintain contact with their tradition.

A large proportion of Muslims in the subcontinent are engaged in the informal sector. In Bangladesh, 84.9% of the total working population in Bangladesh close to 60 million are in informal employment and 96.6 percent of the total employed women in Bangladesh are in informal employment (Bangladesh Labour Force Survey, 2022). The informal sector workers are mainly concentrated in agriculture, small-scale trading, garment-related work in Bangladesh. In Pakistan, according to the official Labour Force Survey of 2020/21 the informal sector employs almost 75 % of the working-age population. In India Muslims are overwhelmingly concentrated in unorganised sector and in self-employed activities to meet their livelihood needs. They are particularly engaged in street vending, artisanal crafts, and small-scale manufacturing. In fact, Muslims virtually hold a permanent position in the casual jobs so characteristic of the informal sector of economy. This permanent 'casualization' is seen as helpful in lowering the count of unemployment among Muslims. For computing statistics on unemployment, the

Sachar report, 2006, preferred to use 'daily status unemployment rates over usual unemployment rates' (Government of India, 2006, 89). Menon (2022) emphasizes the significant involvement of Muslim workers in home-based businesses. This is particularly true for Muslim women who rely on home-based work as a primary source of income, despite challenges like low earnings and dependence on intermediaries.

For delving further into the hinterland of madrassahs in the informal sector of society and economy, a question needs to be probed: what are the characteristic motifs of the precarious living that often require sacred symbols for overcoming the crisis of meaning routinely produced in the situation?

Future research should investigate how the symbolic resources derived from Islamic education, particularly those influenced by madrassahs, support individuals in the informal economy and broader society in managing existential crises in their precarious lives. Theoretically, identifying the locations of previously unrecognized madrassahs aims to encourage researchers to ethnographically examine how these faith-based symbolic resources provide widespread remedies for the social and cultural injuries experienced in everyday life. Bano (2007, 56) confirms how madrassah graduates find employment as as qaris, imams, khatibs even before they leave the madrassah. Compared to government schools and colleges, Bano points out how the madrassah students have a better employment rate.

O'Dea's work in the sociology of religion (1966) allows us to understand the role of religion in informal sector, dealing with life's uncertainties. He identifies three salient features- one, contingency (or the uncertainty context): where human well-being is seriously compromised, and is largely unanticipated; two, individuals face powerlessness, the experience of helplessness in the face of unavoidable brute facts: death, suffering or sudden loss of wellbeing. The third feature is scarcity, the experience of being without the required resources to cope or circumvent contingencies of everyday life on the brink. Individuals confront these contexts with what O'Dea, Thomas (1966, 5) calls 'breaking points' as 'breaking beyond' the routine round of everyday life. These breaking points generate, in Max Weber's the 'problem of meaning' in the 'severest and most poignant manner'. The communities facing the breaking points draw upon the religious faith-based resources for overcoming or transcending the break down in meaning.

Angeles' and Aijazi's (2019) paper on madrassah education in Pakistan challenges the conventional association of madrassahs with radicalization. Instead, it focuses on the everyday practices and integration of madrassahs within urban spaces, emphasizing their role in shaping religious identities through lived experiences and routine education. The research examines two madrassa communities in Islamabad, Pakistan. The authors ask why madrassah students and their parents value religious education in a society that is becoming more secular. The study shows that not all madrassah students are poor, and many religious parents believe madrassah education is better than public schools. When choosing schools, parents consider a range of factors such as - cost and quality of schooling and do a comparative analysis between public schools, low-cost private schools, expensive elite private schools, madrassahs, and other religious schools.

The placement of madrassahs within the broader city and community transcends the creation of spaces for religious and educational gatherings; it reflects individuals' choices and preferences for religious education. People visit mosque–madrassah spaces to integrate their lived religion into daily life, voluntarily gathering for camaraderie, friendships, fellowship, livelihoods, network building, volunteering, and philanthropy. After prayers, worshippers can often be seen sitting in circles, conversing, sharing daily events, and reconnecting. Within the madrassah–mosque complex, shopkeepers, itinerant vendors, imams, and teachers earn their livelihoods, while resident students, teachers, and staff temporarily make it their home.

Madrassahs and the broader communities in which they exist are mutually dependent on each other's well-being and shared spiritual beliefs. The performative placemaking by madrassah–mosque attendees is meaningful only when considered alongside their daily religious practices and education. Madrassahs typically depend on community support.

The authors appeal for a more in-depth field-based studies to expand the findings based on the participants' in madrassahs actively engaged in 'world making' (Angeles & Aijazi, 2019, 319) that draws upon their collective memories, lived experiences, and intricate networks of interaction both within and beyond their local areas rather than being seen as a regressive alternative to modern secular education, multiple case studies of religious education in various rural, peri-urban, and urban settings can contribute to a better understanding of madrassahs' diversity, spatial roles, and acceptance as a legitimate and viable educational path. This terrain beyond the curriculum brings in the meaning making inputs of the dwellers of the madrassah world. Beyond the institutional site, the observer would be able to grasp how the curriculum is re-used in making their given world more habitable the second time.

5.5 Individual's crisis of Meaning and Resilience: Role of Madrassahs

There are two distinct approaches to study the experiences of madrassah graduates and the symbolic worlds they navigate. The first approach draws on field-based illustrations where observers have captured the experiences of madrassah graduates who invoke their religious knowledge to address and mend disruptions in their symbolic universe. This perspective highlights how resilience is demonstrated through the cosmological understanding acquired in madrassahs, enabling individuals to overcome challenges by relying on their religious teachings. The second approach presents research where scholars have entered the lived world of madrassahs without fully grasping how the symbolism produced by these institutions plays a critical role in resolving crises of meaning. In this case, resilience is noted, but without acknowledging the crucial influence of religious cosmology learned in madrassahs as a means of navigating adversity.

In Muslim majority countries, Pakistan and Bangladesh the organised human network routinely producing faith-based cosmologies is central to maintaining resilience in face of adversities. The role of mosques and madrassahs in fostering resilience is an understudied phenomenon.

Maîtrot, Wood and Devine (2021) explore human resilience through the lived experiences of extreme poverty in Bangladesh. Drawing on 72 life histories from households participating in the DFID-funded poverty reduction program "Economic Empowerment of the Poorest," the article qualitatively examines fluctuations in well-being. The research, conducted in southwest Bangladesh, presents poverty as a "resilience concept," framing resilience not as a return to previous conditions, but as the attainment of sustained and more secure well-being despite vulnerabilities. While the article emphasizes the role of human agency, subjective dispositions, and capability in securing respect, belonging, and confidence, it remains silent on the role of faith in fostering resilience. Specifically, it does not address how faith-based cosmologies and social solidarities contribute to resilience, helping individuals find meaning and strength to adapt to shocks. The study underlines the need for further exploration of how religious institutions, which are prominent in the region, influence resilience and vulnerability.

A similar study on resilience examines material conditions without considering the influence of symbolic or faith-based resources. Bhuyan's (2021) research focuses on the experiences of Bangladeshi peasants living in coastal areas, coping with disasters caused by natural hazards, and explaining peasant resilience. The study highlights that nearly 70 percent of the villagers relied on agriculture in some capacity before Cyclone Aila, while only a small portion (4 percent) worked as labourers in brick kilns. After Cyclone Aila, many poor people lost their employment in agriculture and were forced to leave

their primary occupations, finding work as brick-kiln labourers or earth diggers, often in other districts of Bangladesh. In extreme cases, peasants had to borrow money or send working-age family members to Dhaka or even to India to secure a livelihood. The authors argue that despite limited resources, coping strategies like casual labouring enabled peasants to survive and begin rebuilding their lives. Although the study acknowledges the presence of imams and madrassahs, it glosses over the role of religious faith in helping people endure adversity, find meaning in their experiences, or build resilience from within.

Cheema's (2022) study highlights the pivotal role of mosques in utilizing faith-based symbolic resources to build resilient communities and effectively manage disasters. Specifically, the study examines the aftermath of Pakistan's 2005 earthquake. Conducted in three rural villages in Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the research employs a case study design and qualitative methods to study interactions between the mosque, state, civil society, and the private sector during disaster phases like response and recovery. The study illustrates that while the mosque's physical structure was destroyed, its institutional presence remained vital, serving as a community hub supporting relief efforts. Despite cultural restrictions limiting women's access to the mosque itself, the institution still played a key role in engaging women in disaster-related activities. By highlighting the role of mosques in leveraging religious faith and community networks to save lives, provide necessities like food and shelter, and enable long-term recovery efforts, Cheema's research argues for greater recognition of the mosque's complex role in disaster management. It proposes that religious institutions should be integrated into disaster risk reduction strategies. The study contributes to understanding the potential of religious institutions to aid in disaster preparedness and recovery.

The above argument illustrates how madrassahs, beyond the ken of policy frameworks, have an internal worldview where faith-based resources empower communities with resilience to navigate adversities and find/salvage meaning in the face of routine disruptions.

6. Conclusion

This paper is directed towards both future ethnographers and policymakers, offering an alternative lens to view madrassahs. It entails three key recognitions. First, madrassah education must be understood through the perspectives of its producers (teachers) and consumers (students), who define its purposes and outcomes. Second, the interaction between madrassahs and society is not necessarily tied to the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy; rather, it consists of a complex system of symbolic and material exchanges, interactions, and relationships that have been shaped over centuries within the tradition of faith. These networks embody both continuity and transformation over time, reflecting the dynamic evolution of faith-based educational structures within broader societal contexts. Third, the state should maintain a stance of deliberate neutrality regarding the content of curriculum and pedagogy. Instead, its role should focus on providing material support to religious institutions in essential areas such as healthcare, infrastructure, and nutrition. This approach aims to foster equitable learning conditions for all. This resonates with the wise counsel of Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman al-Shirbini, the rector of Egypt's al-Azhar (1905–09), "Let the state's reform of madrassah education be limited to the health, comfort and good food for the students" (Quoted in Zaman, 2002, 81).

As regards the stance of policy makers vis-à-vis madrassahs, one ought to consider how asymmetrical relations between state policy and the madrassahs distorts the very project of curricular reform. The debate on reforming Islamic education centres on who has the authority to diagnose the problem in the existing curriculum. Neither the community that fosters madrassahs, nor the state that seeks to modernize it, should be privileged over the other. Currently, in most Muslim societies, the community-based Islamic education and state-recognized institutions are separated by asymmetrical relations of power. Sustainable curricular reform depends on fostering a democratic relationship between the

community and the state. While the community should retain the ability to share and preserve its valued knowledge, state policies should facilitate the organic educational development of madrassahs, ensuring continuity with tradition while aligning with broader societal expectations within a democratic framework.

Drawing upon Jürgen Habermas' exposition of the dialogue between the religious and public sphere in Europe (2006, 1–25) one can infer that the divide between the religious and secular perspectives stems from differing self-understandings and claims of existence. The actors and institutions in both spheres must adopt attitudes shaped through complementary learning processes. However, these processes have their limitations – most notably, the secular state must refrain from imposing its ideological or policy frameworks onto religious institutions through legal or political means. The constitutional guarantee of religious freedom is rooted in the secular character of the state, which enables religious pluralism. A secular state can safeguard both positive and negative liberties: the positive liberty to freely practice one's religion and the negative liberty to remain spared from the religious practices of others.

References

Ahmad, Mumtaz (2004). Madrassa education in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In Satu P. Limaye, Robert G. Wirsing & Mohan Malik (Eds.), *Religious radicalism and security in South Asia* (pp. 101–116). Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies.

Alam, Arshad (2011). *Inside a Madrassah: Knowledge, Power and Islamic Identity in India.* Routledge.

Al Hussain, Abdullah (2018). *State, Qawmi Madrasas and Children in Bangladesh: From a Social Protection Perspective*. International Institute of Social Studies.

Al Rashidi (2007). Deeni Madaris ke baarey men Paanch Sawalat (Five Questions related to the Deeni Madaris). In Al Rashidi & Abu Ammar Zahid (Eds.), *Deeni Madaris ka Nisab-o-Nizam: Naqd-o-Nazar ke aainey men (The Curriculum and organisation of Islamic Madrassas: through the mirror of insight and criticality).* Darul Kitab.

Angeles, Leonora C. & Aijazi, Omer (2019). Revisiting the Madrassa Question in Pakistan: Worlding Lived Religion and Religious Education in Urban Spaces. *Humanity & Society, 43*(3), 295–326. https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597618814878

Asadullah, Mohammad N. & Chaudhury, Nazmul (2009). Holy alliances: public subsidies, Islamic high schools, and female schooling in Bangladesh. *Education Economics*, *17*(3), 377–394. https://doi.org/10.1080/09645290903142593

Asadullah, Mohammad N. & Chaudhury, Nazmul (2010). Religious Schools, Social Values, and Economic Attitudes: Evidence from Bangladesh. *World Development, 38*(2), 205–217. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2009.10.014

Basith, Mohammed A. (2003, August 30). *Women allowed to train as muftis in city*. The Times of India. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/women-allowed-to-train-as-muftis-in-city/articleshow/153652.cms

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Labour Force Survey 2022*. Government of Bangladesh. https://webapps.ilo.org/surveyLib/index.php/catalog/8538

Bano, Masooda (2007). Beyond Politics: the Reality of a Deobandi Madrasa in Pakistan. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, *18*(1), 43–68. https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etl043

Bano, Masooda (2009). Empowering Women: More Than One Way? *HAGAR Studies in Culture, Polity & Identities, 9*(1), 5–23.

Bano, Masooda (2010). *Female madrasas in Pakistan: a response to modernity.* International Development Department, University of Birmingham.

Bhuyan, Mohammad H. R. (2021). Casualisation of Labour as Coping with Cyclone Aila: Peasants' Perception in the Sundarbans Area of Bangladesh. *The Bangladesh Development Studies, 42*(1 & 2), 77–128. https://doi.org/10.57138/JURL7372

Borker, Hem (2018). *Madrasas and the Making of Islamic Womanhood*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199484225.001.0001

Butt, Riazat (2009, May 14). *All-female madrasas boom in Pakistan*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/may/14/pakistan-madrassahs-islam-girls-women

Candland, Christopher (2005). Pakistan's Recent Experience in Reforming Islamic Education. In R. M. Hathway (Ed.), *Education Reform in Pakistan: Building for the Future*. Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

Chaudhry, B. (2005). Bringing Madrasas at par with Modern Schools. In M.K. Jalazai (Ed.) *The Crisis of Education in Pakistan: State Policies and Textbooks*. Lahore: Al-Abbas International.

Cheema, Abdur R. (2022). *The Role of Mosque in Building Resilient Communities: Widening Development Agendas*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-7600-0

Fahimuddin (2004). *Modernization of Muslim education in India*. Adhyayan.

Gayer, Laurent (2012). Safe and Sound: Searching for a 'Good Environment' in Abul Fazl Enclave, Delhi. In Laurent Gayer & Christophe Jaffrelot (Eds.), *Muslims in Indian cities: trajectories of marginalisation* (pp. 213–236). Noida: Harper Collins Publishers India.

Gilani, Maulana (1943). *Pak-o-Hind men Musalmanon ka nizam-e taleem-o-tarbiyat*. Jamal Printing Press.

Government of India (2006). *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India.* Government of India, Cabinet Secretariat.

Habermas, Jürgen (2006). Religion in the Public Sphere. *European Journal of Philosophy*, *14*(1), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x

Hymes, Dell (2013). Sociolinguistics and the Ethnography of Speaking. In Edwin Ardener (Ed.), *Social Anthropology and Language* (pp. 47–93). London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315017617

Iqbal, Abdul R. (2015). Madrassa Reforms in Pakistan: A Historical Analysis. *Journal of Educational Studies and Development*, *22*(3), 4–58.

Kaur, Kuldip (1990). *Madrasa education in India: a study of its past and present.* Chandigarh: Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development.

Looney, Robert (2003). Reforming Pakistan's Educational System: The Challenge of the Madrassas. *Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies, 28*(3), 257–274.

Mazhari, Waris (2005). Reforming Madrasa curriculum. In Akhtarul Wasey (Ed.), *Madrasas in India: Trying to be Relevant* (pp. 37–49). New Delhi: Global Media Publications.

Maîtrot, Mathilde, Wood, Geof & Devine, Joe (2021). Understanding resilience: Lessons from lived experiences of extreme poverty in Bangladesh. *Development Policy Review, 39*(6), 894–910. https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12543

Menon, Kalyani D. (2022). *Making Place for Muslims in Contemporary India*. Cornell University Press. https://doi.org/10.7591/cornell/9781501760587.001.0001

Ministry of Human Resource Development (2014). *Scheme to Provide Quality Education in Madrasas (SPQEM)*. Government of India. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/20upload_document/SPQEM-scheme.pdf

Nair, Padmaja (2009). *The State and madrasas in India*. International Development Department, University of Birmingham.

National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (2007). *Report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector*. Dolphin Printo Graphics.

National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration [NIEPA] (2018). *Evaluation of the implementation of the scheme for providing quality education in Madrasas (SPQEM)*. National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration.

Rajagopal, Krishnadas (2024, September 11). *Madrasas 'unfit' for proper education, child rights panel tells Supreme Court*. The Hindu. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/madrasas-unfit-places-for-children-to-receive-proper-education-ncpcr-submits-in-supreme-court/article68629355.ece

Riaz, Ali (2008). *Faithful Education*: *Madrassahs in South Asia*. Rutgers University Press. https://muse.jhu.edu/book/6078

Said, Edward W. (2003). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books.

Sanyal, Usha (2020). *Scholars of Faith: South Asian Muslim Women and the Embodiment of Religious Knowledge*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190120801.001.0001

Siddiqui, Justice M.S. A. (2007). *Report of the Commission for introducing modern education in madrassahs and for setting up a Central Madrassah Board*. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

Sikand, Yoginder (2005). *Bastions of the believers: madrasas and Islamic education in India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

Singer, Peter W. (2001). *Pakistan's Madrassahs: Ensuring a System of Education Not Jihad*. Brookings Institute Analysis Paper.

Talib, Mohammad (2018). Islamic Education in India. In Holger Daun & Reza Arjmand (Eds.), *Handbook of Islamic Education* (pp. 713–729). Cham: Springer Publications. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64683-1_41

Talib, Mohammad (2022). Does the Religious Education have a Future in 21th Century? An Anthropologist on the Continued Relevance of Islamic Education. In Yusuf Alpaydin & Cihad Demirli (Eds.), *Educational Theory in the 21st Century. Science, Technology, Society and Education* (pp. 119–139). Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-9640-4_6

TOI News Desk (2024, October 12). *Child rights panel NCPCR advises states to stop funding madrasas*. Times of India. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/child-rights-panel-ncpcr-advises-states-to-stop-funding-madrasas/articleshow/114165396.cms

O'Dea, Thomas F. (1966). *The Sociology of Religion*. Prentice-Hall.

Wani, Ayjaz & Kidwai, Rasheed (2021, April 1). *Locating the Madrasa in 21st-Century India* (Issue Brief No. 455). Observer Research Foundation. https://www.orfonline.org/research/locating-the-madrasa-in-21st-century-india

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (2001). *Philosophical Investigations* (50th Anniversary Commemorative Edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

Zaman, Muhammad Q. (2002). *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.