

**The Post 9/11 Demand to Reform Madrasa Education and Its
Response in Pakistan**

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INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of knowledge has been a key characteristic of the Muslim civilization. Madrasas as institutes of learning have remained a central part of the Muslim society throughout history. Different phases in Islamic history, posed different challenges to the Muslim community in general and ulama in particular. Response of the ulama to these challenges shaped the Muslim ideas and cultural norms. From the fall of Baghdad to the invasion of Western modernity, from challenges of the Western domination to the ideological divide of the cold war and finally the unipolarity of the post cold war era to the war on terror of the post 9/11 era ; the challenges continue to confront the Muslim civilization .The response of ulama to these challenges remained crucial for the Muslim world at large.

9/11, 2001 transformed the world in many ways. One country where its impact was felt instantly and most severely was Pakistan. The attacks in Manhattan, New York, brought the Pakistani religious madrasas under the spotlight because of their alleged links to the international militant Muslim organizations. The US Official 9/11 Commission Report dubbed Pakistani Madrasas as “incubators for violent extremism”(9/11 Commission Report, 2004).A number of authors both Western (Singer2001) and Pakistani (Haqqani , 2002),connected madrasas with militancy. Some blamed them as “factories of jihad”(Sareen , 2005) others as “weapons of mass instruction” (Bell, 2007) accusing Pakistani madrasas of producing militant forces like Taliban. Madrassa reform in Pakistan thus became a US national security concern. Strong voices of protest and allegations were raised against Pakistani madaris from the Western circles urging Pakistani government to regulate and control the affairs of these institutions.

This paper aims to analyze different perceptions and perspectives presented by the Western as well as Pakistani media, academia and the government to reform madrasa education and system in the post 9/11 era.

The paper used the qualitative research methods for investigating and exploring its subject. A comprehensive review of the existing literature including high quality books, articles and publications were thoroughly reviewed. In order to take the perspectives of ulama and academics

, in depth interviews were conducted for this study. This study is an effort to explore Western as well as Pakistani perspectives on the subject of religious education in madaris and try to find ways to synthesize these conflicting perspectives.

Madrasas in Pakistan; Post 9/11 Discourse

Initial Perspectives : Apprehensions and Fears

The violent attack of 9/11 convinced the Western world especially Americans that the problem with the Muslim world is that it is ‘unenlightened’ which means that it is pre Renaissance in its mindset(Nasr , 2009). Due to their own historical experience many perceived that the Islamic world is in need of a Religious Reformation. Islamic Madrasas were perceived as the places where traditional, obsolete teachings indoctrinate dangerous values to the young minds. In post 9/11 Western media and public discourse ‘madrasa’ became one word that roused American fears about extremism and terrorism.

Madrasas were seen as institutions involved in the promotion of ‘dangerous ideas’ against the West, spreading notions of ‘global jihad’ and training ‘militant mindset’. Western media as well as government officials propagated this image of madrasa. In an interview on Fox News , Donald Rumsfeld , US Secretary of Defence expressed the need to engage in a ‘battle of ideas’, encouraging young Muslims to learn Science, Math, Language so that they can earn respectable living ; implying that the poor, angry and ignorant students in madaris hold dangerous ideologies which is a threat to American national security.

In addition to print and electronic media, the academia also expressed deep concerns about the state of madrasa enrollment and education in Pakistan. Various think tanks and government agencies published reports and recommendations to resolve the ‘madrasa problem’. The World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), US Institute of Peace, the International Crisis Group (ICG), RAND Corporation , the Congress, the Pentagon and numerous European agencies joined this campaign .Many Pakistani writers, journalists, academics also jumped in and confirmed the Western fears. Their scrutiny of madarasa curriculum and teaching method did reveal disturbing facts ; the anti West , anti imperialist and anti Semitic slander, links with militant organizations, emphasis on aggressive jihad were some aspects that worried these researchers. But this ‘fact finding’ campaign overlooked some important aspects of the big picture (Nasr, 2009).

The Brookings institute, a leading American think tank published an Analysis Paper on Pakistani Madaris in 2001 written by P.W. Singer. The paper stated that although the religious education is an internal affair of Pakistani government, United States does have concerns about it as it has been 'highjacked by the extremism'(Singer , 2001).The report describes the changes brought in traditional madrasa education during 1980s Afghan war. President Musharraf's is quoted as describing the extremist madarasa as places where curriculum supports extremism;

“Hatred is permissible, jihad allows the murder of innocents, and the new heroes are terrorists. Martyrdom through suicide attacks are also extolled, and anti-western speeches are committed to memory. The students are uneducated, young, dependent on the schools, and cut off from contact with their parents for years at a time, and thus highly susceptible to being programmed toward violence. These students from this minority of madrassas are regularly sent abroad to serve in conflicts in Kashmir, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and a number of other wars decided by the school leaders as part of the jihad. In addition, the foreign students of the madrassas return to their home states with a violent outlook and sow the seeds for conflict elsewhere.

The International Crisis Group published a detailed report about the Pakistani madaris in July2002 titled Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and Military. The report traces the history of madrasas in Pakistan and notices the exponential growth in Madrasa numbers during the 1980s , a phenomenon described as ' the Madrasa Boom' in the report. Madaris were termed as the 'supply line of jihad' against the Soviets. It notices that violence in the name of religion was neither originated in madrasas nor is their defining characteristic.Two types of madaris are identified. Majority does not advocate violence. Those who are associated with jihad and sectarianism are few and instantly recognizable.Pro jihadi madrasas only play a supporting role mainly as 'recruiting ground for militant movements'. It is more of an ideological affiliation than direct involvement.

The Crisis Group Report takes into account the role of America in promoting the jihadi culture in madaris during the 1980s Afghan jihad.It states that US and Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence sponsored not only Afghan jihad but also internal sectarianism.The message of jihad was targeted at the Soviets. The Muslims were told through madaris that participation in the Holy War is their sacred duty . There were special text books published by Centre for Afghan Studies in University of Nebraska-Omaha which was funded by USAID. These books were written in

Pashto and Dari by American and Afghan experts. The aim was to promote militant jihad among the Afghan youth. Basic Math was taught by counting dead Russians and Kalashnikov rifles. (ICG Report 2002). University of Nebraska was paid US\$ 51 million from 1984 to 1994 for this project. The textbooks designed for promoting militancy in young minds were distributed among the displaced Afghans. Over 13 million copies were distributed in Afghan refugee camps and Pakistani madaris where many of their children studied. These books continued to be read by students even after the war ended. The Taliban found them useful as well. The report admits that traditional text of madaris does not include militant jihadi content. Afghan jihad and later Kashmir struggle brought the militant elements in madaris.

The 9/11 Commission report which published in 2004 specifically points out the role of Pakistani madaris in spreading ‘ dangerous ideas’;

The enemy goes beyond al Qaeda to include the radical ideological movement, inspired in part by al Qaeda, that has spawned other terrorist groups and violence.....Root out sanctuaries. The U.S. government should identify and prioritize actual or potential terrorist sanctuaries and have realistic country or regional strategies for each,..” (9/11 Commission Report , 2004).

The US Congressional Research Service (CRS) report expressed concerns about the poor state of Pakistan’s public education. It described US interest and investment in Pakistani education. It stated that USAID has signed a \$100 million five year bilateral agreement with the government of Pakistan in 2002. Efforts were made throughout the country to improve the quality of education. It also stated that the government of Pakistan assured them that they will modernize the curriculum in religious madaris and will crack down the ones involved in militant activities.

Daily Jang, the newspaper with the largest circulation in Pakistan published many articles on the subject of madrasa reform. Irshad Ahmed Haqqani the late columnist , in an article published in July 2007; wrote about the need to bring the madaris out of the medieval times and make them enter the 21st century. He expressed hopelessness stating that madaris are resistant to change and they will not accept reform (Haqqani, 2007).

Mahmood Shaam ,another prominent journalist from the same newspaper wrote about the causes of the success of the extremists in Pakistan identifying madaris as centres of extremism .

The post 9/11 campaign for madrasa reform and the resulting pressure built on madaris has been described in different words by the leading ulama of Pakistan.

During his interview conducted for this paper Allama Khalil ur Rehman Nazim-i-Aala Jamia Islamia, Johar Town Lahore , representative Tanzeem Al Madaris ahl-i-Sunnat (Hanafi Bareilwi School) described the situation in the following words;

“We had an agreement with the Musharraf government. The government violated this agreement and raided our madrasas. Especially after the Jamia Hafsa incident madrasas were targeted by the government. They did not find anything. It is pure propaganda that Mujahideen are the product of madrasas. Pakistani Taliban have also been linked with madaris. Many scholars and journalists also went with the flow (and started blaming Madaris for militancy).”

About the demands of the government the Allama informed;

“ They asked us to establish madrasa boards despite the fact that we already had a comprehensive organization. There was an attempt to make an official government (sarkari) board. Ulama wanted to continue following their own mechanism.

There was a demand to expel the foreign students. First they were asked to get NOC from their respective embassies. Later even those who got an NOC were kicked out.

I would like to share a very important piece of information here. In 2002 India had 1200 students studying in 911 madaris. During the next 5 years 2500 new madaris were established, many incentives were given to foreign students , they were encouraged to join madaris in India. It was on these basis that in 2007 India applied for the membership of OIC claiming that they have students from all over the Islamic world studying in India. When we were having a ‘crack down’ against the foreign students , India was welcoming them. Later they accused Pakistan that no foreign student stays there.

Dr.Hasan Madni , Nazim –i-Aala Jamia Rahmania, Lahore, representative of Wafaq al Madaris Al Salfia (Ahl-i-Hadith School) in his interview informed that government pressure was mostly displayed in the media. Not much was done on ground;

“The government did not do much on the ground. They only made statements in the media. We did not face any pressure. Madaris continue to give their traditional education, their system has not been affected at all. However great damage has been done on the media, where the

traditional role of madaris has been undermined, ridiculed and their image has been destroyed in the eyes of the public.”

Later Studies Change Perceptions:

This twist in the Western perspective on Pakistani madaris began roughly around 2005 when numerous studies showing alternative facts began to appear. With time many research projects and papers challenged the earlier studies presenting a different story about Pakistani madaris. This shift in Western and local understanding of madrasa education has raised new questions about madrasa and the correct way to deal with them . A brief review of these new studies has been done in the following pages.

The Madrasa Scapegoat by Peter Bergen and Swati Pandey published in Washington Quarterly in 2006 openly challenges the earlier perceptions about madrasas. The report writes that Madrasas have become a symbol inviting condemnation and fears among the Western countries. It quotes Donald Rumsfeld asking ;“ Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists everyday than the madrasas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?” The concerns expressed by 9/11 Commission Report are also described in the paper. Pandey and Bergen state that out of 79 terrorists involved in recent attacks in New York, Africa, London and Bali ,only a few had ever visited a madrasa.Many of them had university degrees.This raises questions about what kind of education contributes to terrorism.

...madrassas are less closely correlated with producing terrorists than are Western colleges, where students from abroad may feel alienated or oppressed and may turn toward militant Islam.

Given that 27 percent of the group attended Western schools, nearly three times as many as attended madrassas, our sample seems to confirm this trend. The data also show a strong correlation between technical education and terrorism, suggesting that perpetrating large-scale attacks requires not only a college education but also a facility with technology. This type of education is simply not available at the vast majority of madrasas.(Bergen & Pandaey,2006)

According to this study terrorism is not linked to madrasas for the simple reason that madrasas do not have the means to plan organized terrorism.

Because madrasas generally cannot produce the skilled terrorists capable of committing or organizing attacks in Western countries, they should not be a national security concern. Conceiving of them as such will lead to ineffective policies, and cracking down on madrasas may even harm the allies that Washington attempts to help. In countries such as Pakistan, where madrasas play a significant role in education, particularly in rural areas, the wholesale closure of madrasas may only damage the educational system and further increase regional tensions.(Bergen & Pandey, 2006)

The 'Indian Madaris and the Agenda of Reform' by Yoginder Sikand (2006) reviews the madrasa reform effort . It reminds the audience that the purpose of madrasa education is 'providing Muslims with specifically religious education and transmitting the Islamic scholarly tradition.Madrasa education should not be judged by external goals but the ones set by the ulama themselves. It must be remembered that the aim of madrasa education is different from that of the modern school (Sikand , 2006).

In 2008 a major study conducted by Christian Fair was published as a book titled ' The Madrasa Challenge; Militancy and Religious Education in Pakistan'. The study presents a detailed account of the Madrasa education system in Pakistan. The structure of madrasa education and curriculum is discussed at some length. The enrollment figures in madaris are also presented . The study finds that contrary to the earlier assertions the madrasa enrollment figures in Pakistan are not alarming.

The most generous estimates put full time madrasa enrollment well below 10%.and most conservative estimates suggest that it is below 1%.

The book states that various studies reject the idea that madaris are directly related to militancy.

It also suggest that contrary to the common perception madaris might not simply *produce* terrorists rather the intolerant families might *choose* madaris. Madrasa enrollment trends indicate that most Pakistani parents prefer to send their children to private schools if that option is

available in their locality. Many families who choose madaris do it not because of poverty but ideological considerations (Fair , 2008).

Christopher Candland's study "Pakistan's Recent Experience in Reforming Islamic Education" published in 2008 presents a thorough review of the reform effort in Pakistan. The study begins with relating the fact that just a decade ago the whole world used to praise Islamic seminaries in Pakistan for their contribution in Afghan jihad .After 9/11 there was considerable pressure on Pakistan government to monitor the activities of these schools and reform their education system.Government issues two ordinances to establish model madaris and regulate the affairs of regular madaris.

The study goes on to describe the controversy regarding the madrasa enrolment as the earlier figures were strongly contested by the later. The world bank study presented figures which were far lower than the earlier estimates. Some sources that conduct the statistical study might be considered more reliable by one scholar and might not be considered accurate by the other.

The article informs that Pakistani Madaris system was traditionally quite different from their present state. It was only in 1980s under Zia rule that these madaris grew in number and political importance. The number of registered madaris in 1970s was only a couple of hundreds. Sectarianism and militancy for which these madaris are blamed today did not creep in due to any Islamic teaching but due to the government policy of involving them in jihad effort. It was the United States itself which for many years poured in hundreds of millions of dollars worth of weapons. If only a fraction of that amount was spent on developing curriculum and improving teaching standards here in later years, there would have been no militancy. The message of tolerance, an essential part of Islam could have been highlighted. United States had a moral obligation to repair the damage done due to its policies and provide funds for this purpose. But this was ignored once the war in Afghanistan was over. That is one reason we need campaign for reform today (Candland , 2008).

The writer concluded that the reform effort based on the assumption that religious education should be removed from national curriculum is impractical. Such efforts imposed by force shall not enhance tolerance in the society but would be counterproductive. Instead more importance should be given to religious education and dini madaris. With better funding , religious values of

tolerance should be promoted. Better qualified , moderate ulama should be supported. Sectarianism should be discouraged. The Islamic message of peace should be highlighted.

Pakistan Education system and links to Extremism by Jayshree Bajoria published in 2009 emphasizes that the general state of mainstream education in Pakistan is extremely poor. According to the World Bank Report nearly half of the population in Pakistan can't read. The primary school enrollment in Pakistan is the lowest in South Asia. John Brennan the chief counterterrorism advisor to the White House expressed his concern that this weakness if the Pakistani society has been exploited by the extremist groups. This dysfunctional system as whole should be a cause of concern for the policy makers (Bajoria , 2009).

Mapping the Madrasa Mindset: Political Attitudes of Pakistani Madaris by Muhammad Amir Rana begins by discussing the significance of madrasas in the debate on terrorism. The general perceptions about madaris considering them as promoters of extreme religious , sectarian social and political views. Many analysts remained concerned about madarasa role in shaping radical views among the masses. Their political, sectarian and militant affiliations are a cause of concern(Rana , 2009). This finding suggests that madaris are eager to play role in national politics. The Deobandi Madaris have a long history of political activism while the Barelvi school is also politically active. Madaris administration was however reluctant to disclose their sectarian affiliations.

The views of most madaris were the same on the war on terror. While most of them condemned terrorism as evil they did this with qualifications. 57% saw the war on terror as directed exclusively against Islam. Only 13% agreed that Pakistan should be a part of this war , an overwhelming 77% disagreed with this idea. Many described United States as the biggest terrorist itself. Only 7% supported Pakistan's military operation in tribal areas.

Busting Pakistan's Madrasa Myth an article published in 2010 by Graff and Winthrop ,as the name suggest reinforce the scholars view that the earlier ' myth' about madrasas in Pakistan was largely exaggerated. The continued attention of world's media on Pakistan' religious schools was therefore misguided. The article says that education whether public, private or religious is not the main cause of militancy in Pakistan. The overwhelming focus on madaris has been aptly

described by Pandey and Bergen as a scapegoat. The real causes of militancy are ignored (Graff & Winthrop, 2010).

Beyond Madrasas: Assessing the Links between Education and Militancy in Pakistan published in 2010 makes a case for enhancing good education opportunities, improving quality of general education to reduce militancy. It is not religious education but the absence of any education which causes conflict and militancy. This argument has been supported by empirical evidence and statistics. The paper suggests that although the concerns about militancy in madaris had been partly justified. Ignoring the big picture of Pakistan's public education condition has been a grave mistake which has led to misguided policy making and funds allocation .

Madrasa Metrics; the Statistics and Rhetoric of Religious Enrollment in Pakistan and The Madrasa Controversy ; The Story Does Not Fit the Facts present groundbreaking work on madrasa controversy.

The former study challenges the assertions in different reports warning growing number of madrasa schools and enrollment in Pakistan. The writer wonders why such an important issue was reported without the backing of authentic research and survey. This paper is based on authentic data sources and reveals that earlier figures of madrasa enrolment were ' inflated by an order of magnitude'. Many other findings of this survey also contradict earlier reports. Instead of madrasas , it is the private schools which have grown in number and enrollment in Pakistan (Andrabi, Das & Khwaja , 2011).

This study also critically evaluates the reports on madrasa saying that many ideas presented in such investigations were based on weak evidences. The 9/11 Comission Report has also been criticized for relying on layman's interviews and not on authentic sources.

Pakistani Response to the Madrasa Reform Campaign

Response of the Pakistani Government :

The 'war on terror' waged by the US administration after 9/11 especially focused Pakistani madaris for their alleged involvement with Taliban and the terrorists. They were termed as ' the

breeding grounds for terrorism'. The policy reports of international think tanks highlighted the 'dangers of madrasa mindset' (Bano, 2007).

The major explanation given for the growing popularity of madaris in Pakistan was the state's failure to provide good public education. Even before 9/11 , many reports indicated the poor performance of government schools and their lack of capability to cater to the needs of a growing population. After 9/11 two important policy reports pointed out this weakness of Pakistan government which led to the increasing enrollment numbers in madaris. Singer in 2001 warned that this phenomenon is a grave threat to the political and economic stability of Pakistan. Parents who do not have a better option send their children to madrasas where they can get at least some education(Singer, 2001). In 2002 International Crisis Group Report while acknowledging that few madaris are radical or militant but on the whole madrasa education promote extremism and narrow worldviews. The 'romantic' notions of jihad and sectarianism which supposedly promise instant salvation, become the goals of the youth studying in madaris. Such ideas have dangerous repercussions (ICG Report , 2002).

Bano argues that the data collection method of these reports were limited but their impact was huge. Without thorough research , these reports became the main source of information to the policy makers. As a result there was an increasing demand by US administration on Pakistani government to cleanse the madrasas of militancy (Bano , 2007).

The government of Pakistan sensing the threatening tone of the US administration decided to take action to fulfill these demands. Gen. Musharraf , who was personally an admirer of the liberal policies of Kemal Ata Turk of Turkey, insisted that 'reforms' in madarasa education is in the interest of the country. Infact madrasa reform was one of his major policy concerns even before 9/11. The growing sectarianism and religious militancy was a cause of concern for the government. The pressure from US government gave him the opportunity to implement reforms with full force. On Jan 12, 2002 the General announced;

'No organization will be able to carry out terrorism on the pretext of Kashmir'.

From this moment Musharraf government began to publically advocate the need to implement madrasa reforms , insisting that the damage done in the previous decades has to be repaired.

The Madrasa Reform programme of Musharraf government began with the support and financial aid of the US government. General Musharraf as the Chief Executive of Pakistan ordered the establishment of the Pakistan Madrasa Education .

In June 2002 an ordinance related to Dini Madaris was issued. It required all Dini madaris to get registered with the government and declare their finances. In addition to this forceful registration drive government also ordered the foreign students in madaris to get NOC from their respective embassies. But later almost all foreign students were asked to leave. The expulsion of these students caused resentment among ulama and madaris.

Government efforts were directed towards two broad concerns; registration of madaris and regulation of these schools and their products. Another bone of contention between madaris and government was the issue of syllabus development. Although many madaris agreed to government's demand of inclusion of modern subjects they wanted to develop syllabus themselves according to their particular needs.

Response of Ulama to the Reform Campaign: The Missing Perspective

About the post 9/11 Western demand for madrasa reform in Pakistan;

Allama Khalil-ur Rehman Qadri , Nazim-i-Aala Jamia Islamia, Johar Town Lahore

Representative Tanzeem Al Madaris ahl-i-Sunnat (Hanafi Barelwi School)

We had an agreement with the Musharraf government. The government violated this agreement and raided our madrasas. Especially after the Jamia Hafsa incident madrasas were targeted by the government. They did not find anything. It is pure propaganda that Mujahideen are the product of madrasas. Pakistani Taliban have also been linked with madaris. Many scholars and journalists also went with the flow (and started blaming Madaris for militancy).

Dr. Hasan Madni , Nazim –i-Aala Jamia Rahmania, Garden Town, Lahore

Representative of Wafaq al Madaris Al Salfia (Ahl-i-Hadith School)

After cold war the West and US deliberately created an enemy for two basic reasons; first US war industry, weapon industry needed conflict in the world. Secondly US needed a common enemy to stay united, as it consists of many different states and many different cultures, a common enemy is needed for unity.

Dr. Allama Muhammad Hussain Akbar ,

Chief Patron Idara Minhaj-ul-Hussain, Johar Town , Lahore

Representative Wafaqal Madaris al Shia (Fiqah Jafria)

US and its western allies had seen the ideological and intellectual strength of Dini Madaris during the Afghan Jihad. They felt threatened by this force. Although most students who participated in the jihad came back to madaris after the war was over but some of them became agents of external international powers. They became involved in armed struggle in the name of religion.

Maulana Abdul Malik , Muhtamim Jamia Markaz-e- Ulum Islmia, Mansura, Multan Road, Lahore. Rabta al Madaris al Islamia (Jamat-i-Islami)

Representative of Jamat-i-Islami Pakistan

The American occupation of Afghanistan was also illegal. The world does not raise questions about this illegal occupation and American terrorism. But they do raise questions about Madaris involvement in jihad. The Soviet occupation was unjustified so is the occupation of the Americans. The former ended and the later is also going to end soon. Currently America is negotiating with the Taliban so that they may get a safe and respectful exit from Afghanistan.

Maulana Mufti Qari Muhammad Yousaf , Punjab University ,Lahore, Representative of Wafaq Madaris al Arabia (Deobandi School)

Madaris never had links with militancy. They were concerned with education. The US government felt threatened with the implementation of Islamic laws and government in Afghanistan back in 1990s. It was a system challenging their imperialist system based on greed.

The Taliban government would run government affairs with meager resources. It was unlike the system of government anywhere in the world. Our cricket team would have more budget than the total budget of Taliban government. This was a clear challenge to the Capitalist greed based system. That is why they created the drama of 9/11 to make an excuse to curb this system. Now after 10 years it's hard for them to find a safe exit from here.

About Why Pakistani Madaris were linked to Terrorism after 9/11:

Allama Khalil-ur Rehman Qadri ,

In 1990s a kind of unity was being developed among ulama. United they were a force as they catered to approximately ten million students. This large number could bring change democratically without violence. They (state and the West) perceived this as a threat and wanted to control madrasa so that they do not activate. But this was just their perception. Madaris had no such intention. They were working on their own traditional agenda. It was just a threat perception.

Dr. Hasan Madni

Terrorism has never been defined clearly by the West. This term has no clear meaning. According to the Western people, anyone who is in minority and dares to take a different position than the majority is a terrorist. Anyone who refuses to accept the existing norms is a terrorist. This is how this term has been used by the West. Pakistan went for nuclear explosions in 1998. US entered this region within two and a half years of that.

Maulana Abdul Malik

Americans use the term 'reforms' to take control of the madaris. Government also received huge amounts for this purpose. But Madaris had understood their scheme and together they rejected the government's interference in the name of reforms. Today Madaris are as free and independent as ever. Madaris did not accept the American dictation.

Your personal opinion about the need to reform madrasa education in Pakistan?

Allama Khalil-ur Rehman Qadri

In my opinion modern subjects should be a part of madrasa curriculum but ground realities must be kept in mind in this respect. We cannot teach medicine or engineering in madrasas. We have our own system which is quite demanding. But I do think we should teach the basics of Science and other subjects. We should pay special attention to the speaking skills of the students. Current Affairs should also be taught in madaris.

I also think that inter- sect harmony should be promoted in Pakistani madaris. If we (madrasas) are blamed for sectarianism , it is justified. We must put a stop to the existing practice in madaris which promotes sectarian hatred.

Dr. Hasan Madni

Dini madaris are fulfilling about 30 to 40% of their objectives. There is room for improvement.

Madaris were mainstream educational institutions in the past. They used to fulfill all the educational needs of the society. There was no distinction between religious and secular education. With the advent of imperialism a duality emerged in education. Religious education was separated from secular , modern education. Madaris were reduced to religious education alone. This is also a form of secularism. Today both mainstream institutions and madaris are secular in this sense. They separate religion (din) from the world (dunya). The educational ideology of Islam does not differentiate between the two.

Maulana Abdul Malik

There is need for improvement in madaris. Madaris need to teach modern subjects at all levels like they teach the religious subjects. Madaris students must be kept aware of the current developments and languages. They should be given information about the Muslim world, their geography, natural resources, location etc. Modern technology must be used for this purpose. We need to develop good representatives of the Muslim Ummah who can effectively raise their voice on important issues.

Maulana Mufti Qari Muhammad Yousaf

One must understand that there are about 18000 registered madaris in Pakistan where millions of students study. These students come after completing their primary level studies. They are taught Dars Nizami which consists of 25 subjects which have to be covered in 10 years. The teachers teach these subjects from dawn till dusk on a very low salary. The students come from the poorest section of the society. Now madaris teachers are expected to teach 25 subjects as well as the modern syllabus taught in universities to these lower class students with limited ability on an extremely low salary(the maximum they get is Rs.10,000). What exactly are we asking from these poor souls? We should think about it. A university teacher gets an excellent salary and gets tired if he takes four classes in a day. These madrasa teachers are only human.

Conclusion:

The sharp focus of academia and policy makers on Pakistani madaris as the ‘breeding grounds of terrorism’ after 9/11, was largely misplaced as it ignored the weaknesses of Pakistan’s public education which was a key underlying factor of growing extremism and militancy in the region. The post 9/11 discourse on Pakistani madrasas ignored the views and concerns of ulama running these seminaries, thus missing important aspects of ground realities faced by these institutions. The ‘top down’ approach to enforce reform by the government as a result of external pressure was bound to fail as the main stakeholders i.e. the ulama were not taken on board for this effort. Most mainstream ulama, unlike the common perception, understand the need to reform madrasa education but they are unwilling to take Western dictation on this matter. Instead, they support an internal reform process for promoting peace and tolerance and improving education standards in madaris. The role of ulama is crucial in reforming madrasa education. For any genuine change on ground their perspective must be taken into account. The ulama must be made partners in the effort to reduce religious militancy and extremism in Pakistan.

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