 Role of Madrassa Education in Present Globalized Society: Perspectives of Religious Teachers of Southern Punjab

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Abstract
The main purpose of this qualitative study was to document the perspectives of religious teachers regarding the role of madrassa education system in present globalized society. All the teachers of the madrassas of the four major sects of Muslims (Bashri, Ahlehadith, Deobundi, Ahletashsho) serving in Southern Punjab constituted the population for this study. To achieve the objective, twenty eight (28) madrassa teachers, seven (07) from each sect (05 male+ 02 female) were purposefully selected as sample from madrasas of Multan city keeping in view their experience and extent of willingness. Data were collected through a self-developed semi-structured interview protocol and analyzed by applying qualitative techniques. It was found that madrassa teachers were satisfied with the madrassa curriculum as far as its basic goals and purposes were concerned. Madrassa education system does not prepare graduates to compete in present day economy market. The data revealed that madrassa education system of Pakistan was peace loving and unjustly blamed for extremism. The religious teachers urged that multi-social roles of madrassa education system justify its existence even in present globalized society. It was suggested that radical reforms were imperative in some areas of madrassa education to bring it in line with modern education system.

Keywords: Madrassa Education, Pakistan, Globalized Society, Religious Teachers, Southern Punjab

I. Introduction
Globalization is advancing at a consistent pace with liberalization and privatization, bringing the world closer with the help of modern technology. Undoubtedly, it is causing remarkable changes in all the spheres of life including socio-economic and cultural values but its influences in the education field are far reaching. Knowledge has been acknowledged as a powerful tool for rapid progress in all the
spheres of life in the 21st century. If Pakistan manages its knowledge resources and trains its youth accordingly, it can emerge as a competitive player globally. However, the educational systems across the globe, are encountering constant and vigorous transformation as a result of multi-dimensional economic changes and technological innovations occurring under the impact of globalization.

The word “Madrasa” according to American Heritage Dictionary of English language (2005) refers to a traditional school of Islamic teaching or a place of religious learning in Arabic language whose major purpose is to prepare a generation of Islamic scholars for leading the Ummah (Ahmed, 2009). In these centers of Islamic learning all over the world, education is generally free for all along with facilities of boarding and lodging and they impart religious education according to their own curricula without following the government policies (Andrabi et. al, 2005).

The history of modern madrassa education system of Muslims started from Masjid Al Nabavi in Madina and Al-Suffa (a platform in Masjid Al Nabavi) is considered as the first madrasa of Islam. As regards the present madrassa system in Pakistan, it represents the heritage of the spectacular resurgence of Islamic religious education in united India which started with the inauguration of madrassa Deoband in 1867.

Since its beginning in sub-continent, the madrassa education system played a pivotal role in serving all the walks of society as well as state (Talbani, 1996). It served the society by preserving, strengthening and communicating the orthodox tradition of Islamic learning to new generations, by training and providing determined religio-political leadership to Muslims. More importantly, these Islamic seminaries played an effective role in reawakening the consciousness of Islamic solidarity, reproducing Islamic culture and transmitting the genuine teachings of Islam to the Muslims of South Asia (Ahmad, 2002).

In Pakistan, there are three levels of madrasa education categorized as (i) Ibtedai (elementary level) (ii) Vustani (includes Shahadat-ul-Aamma and Shahadat-ul-Khassa certificate level which is equivalent to matriculation and intermediate level of main stream education system and (iii) Fauquani (Higher level) includes Shahadat-ul-Aalia (Bachelors level) and Shahadat-ul-Aalamia (higher level equivalent to master of Arts). At elementary level the Quran (Holy book of Muslims) is taught and memorized, curriculum for Vustani level consisted of selected books from Dars-e-Nazami while at higher level all the books of Nizami curriculum along with research methods are taught (Ahmad, 2002). The successful learning of all the subjects included in madrassa curriculum make the student eligible for the award of graduation degree as a cleric (maulvi, maulana or mulla).

There are five different sect-based central boards functioning in Pakistan to regulate madrassa education (Shabir et al., 2012) namely Wafaq ul Madaris (Deobandi), Tanzeem-ul-Madaris (Brailvi), Wafaq-ul- Madaris (Shia) Pakistan (Ahl-e-tashsho), Rabita-ul-Madaris-al-Islamia (Jamaat-e-Islami), Wafaq-ul-Madaris-al-Salfia (Ahl-e-Hadith). These madrassa education boards supervise, control and monitor all the registered madrassas in Pakistan. They decide schemes of studies for all the levels of education, formulate rules and regulations for registration of new madrassas, conduct of examinations and awarding of degrees etc. (Rehman, 2004.).
As regards availability of reliable data about actual number of madrassas presently functioning in Pakistan, various sources according to Butt (2012) report different number of total madrassas that range from 8000 to 50000 with a different estimate of enrollment of students in these institutions from 1.7 to 2.0 million. Among these Pakistani madrassas, majority is catering the educational needs of the dominant Sunni sect (Brahvi, Ahlehadith, Deobandi are Sunni sub-sects), and about 4 to 10% minority madrassas belong to the Wafaq-ul-Madaris (Shia) madrassa board.

II. Review of Literature

Review of literature depicts that there is ambiguity and divergence of views in international scholarship after 9/11 event in America about madrassa system of Pakistan. One group of scholars considers it as contentious educational institution and security threat for international community which promotes radical ideologies in Pakistani youth (Haqqani, 2002; Loony, 2003; Fair, 2008; Imitiaz, 2011). They think about these Islamic seminaries as jihadi factories and training networks of various extremist groups (Stern, 2004; Riaz, 2005, khokhar, 2007) having no linkages with social services but connected more with political and terrorist activities.

However, there is another group of scholars and academicians (Knapp, 2003; Rehman, 2005; Andrabi et al., 2005; Ali, 2009; Ahmad, 2009; Winthrop & Graff 2010) who highlights its positive roles and views it as social security net for deprived sections of society, promoter of peace, literacy and pro-social attitudes among Pakistani youth.

Bergen & Panday, (2006), and Moulton, (2008) are of the opinion that the underlying reasons for majority of above mentioned concerns are actually a part of a political game, mainly based on misperceptions created by negative propaganda of popular press after 9/11 incident in USA. They asserted that all the renowned extremists involved in the high profile militant attacks were not madrassa graduates, yet they were highly educated doctors, military academy graduates, engineers and economists etc., having professional degrees from mainstream educational institutions.

Generally, following are the two major objections being raised against the madrassa system of Pakistan. Firstly, they teach old-fashioned curriculum which neither match with the social requirements of the modern society nor with the demands of economy market. Opponents are of the view that madrassa curriculum darkens the economic and social of its students by making them economically dependent and socially alienated and thus, a burden on the resources of society (Malik, 2008). Secondly, according to Brookings, (2009) this curriculum injects extreme political and social views to Muslim youth. It is also believed that the conglomeration of both the radical socialization and economic deprivations lead the madrassa graduates to religious extremism (Imtiaz, 2011).

III. Purpose and Significance of the Study

Madrassas education system of Pakistan has become the target of international scrutiny as well as of some Pakistani institutions because of world’s war against terrorism after the 9/11 calamity in USA. Therefore, it is the need of the time to collect factual information from the most relevant stakeholders’ i.e. religious teachers to understand the madrassa education system and clarify its realistic position in society. The present research study was conducted to explore the perspectives of religious teachers teaching in
Pakistani madrasas on permanent basis to understand the actual role of madrassa education system in present globalized society.

This research study is valuable for the concerned Pakistani institutions, international community and sociologists to understand the role, need and significance of madrassa education system in Pakistani society. It may also be constructive and useful for the policy makers for setting the patterns of madrassa education and that of the society as whole. The study is also expected to serve as a guideline for researchers who are interested to investigate about the socio-economic and political role of Pakistani madrasas in modern globalized world.

IV. Objectives of the Study

Following were the objectives of this study:

1. To explore the perspectives of religious teachers regarding the role of madrassa education system in the present globalized society.
2. To suggest measures to improve the madrassa education system in Pakistan and for guidance of future researchers.

V. Research Methodology

The following procedure was adopted for this qualitative study.

A. Population of the Study

All the teachers of the madrasas of the four major sects of Muslims (Baiulvi, Ahlehadtees, Deobundi, Ahltashsho) serving in Southern Punjab constituted the population for this study. Madrassas of Jamaat-e-Islami school of thought were not included due to non-accessibility. In this paper, ‘teacher’ refers to a person who teaches in a madrassa on permanent basis.

B. Sample of the Study

Due to difficulties in accessing the madrasas, a small but representative sample of religious teachers was selected from the madrasas of Multan city only. Madrassa teachers were approached through their administrators at their institutions in working hours for seeking their consent to participate in interview. From the willing teachers, total twenty eight (28), seven (07) from each sect, (05 male+02female) were purposefully selected keeping in view their experience and extent of willingness.

C. Instrument and data collection

Keeping in view the common perceptions prevailing nationally and internationally about Pakistani madrassa education and different aspects of madrassa life style, the researchers developed a semi-structured interview protocol for madrassa teachers which comprised six questions. The tool was translated into national language Urdu, got validated from professionals and expert teachers and then improved according to their suggestions. Researchers personally visited the madrasas for collection of data. All the interviews were conducted in national language Urdu and each interview lasted about 30-45 minutes. Female participants were approached by a female member who was the part of this study. Researchers not only audio-taped the discussions but also took the written notes where needed with the consent of administration and teachers.
D. Data analysis

The teachers’ audio-recorded responses on each of the six interview questions were transcribed word for word and translated into English language. These responses reflect the viewpoint of religious teachers regarding the role of madrassa education in present globalized society. For validation of transcribed data, the initial write-up was discussed with the participants and improved according to their suggestions. The analysis of data was done collectively without referring to participant’s sect and gender (due to gender-based and sect-based sensitivity). According to emerging themes, classification of data was done into four separate categories.

V. Findings

The major purpose of this research study was to explore the perspectives of religious teachers regarding the role of madrassa education system in present globalized society. The researchers strived to dig out the views of the most aware and relevant stakeholders i.e. teachers, through specific questions related to madrassa education. The questions were: (i) Do you think that the curriculum being taught in madrasas prepares graduates well for jobs in the modern society? (ii) Does your institution prepare your graduates well for fulfilling the demands of contemporary society? (iii) Do you think that your institution is preparing students well to counter the present wave of terrorism in Pakistan? (iv) How will your graduates serve the society after completing the education? (v) Do you think that educational system of deeni madrassas has the capability of fulfilling economic and social needs of graduates? (vi) What is your opinion regarding the role of madrassa graduates in the present globalized world? The detailed views of the participants were presented as under:

A. Effectiveness of madrassa curriculum for jobs

Responses of the religious teachers about the suitability of the curriculum were mixed. A great majority of the teachers (79%) opined that no doubt the curriculum fulfills the basic goals and objectives of madrassa education i.e. training as religious scholars for what it is meant for but it is unable to prepare them for competing in economy market. They admitted that employment opportunities are limited for madrassa graduates only in religious market as compared to students of mainstream education. They emphasized the need of reforms in curriculum without changing the core subjects of “Dars-e-Nizami” keeping in mind the basic purpose of madrassa education. They also stressed the need for introducing the subjects of mainstream education particularly subjects related to social sciences, English, Mathematics, ICT (Information communication technology) and vocational training at all the levels of madrassa education. Remaining (21%) participants mentioned that curriculum does not matter and according to our faith the livelihood is in the hands of Allah Almighty. They further asserted that this curriculum trains them for preservation of Quran and Hadith and for earning success in life after death which is permanent world. They argued that they can earn livelihood through teaching, by serving in mosques, even seeking jobs in main stream educational institutions and by their own business.

B. Social Role of Madrassa Education System

Responding on the questions related to the social role of madrassa education in Pakistani society, the teachers expressed their views in following different manner. Majority of the participants expressed that the failure of Pakistani government in providing social services to all the population justify the need of madrassa system. They
mentioned that madaaris are a blessing of Allah for the poor families who are unable to send their children in mainstream educational institutions due to financial problems. In this way, madrassa helps state by enhancing literacy rate, by providing employment opportunities and by producing peaceful citizens of society. They further pointed out that madrassa and mosque provide space to wealthy segments of society to pay their charities as *Sadqah* (an Arabic term used in the meaning of “voluntary charity” in Islam), *Zakat* (Payment made annually under Islamic law on certain kinds of property and used for charitable and religious purposes, one of the Five Pillars of Islam), and *Khairat* (generous actions or donations to aid the poor, ill, or helpless) those are obligatory by Allah and these are spent for serving the poor. In this way, “the presence of this Islamic institution is a blessing for both the rich and poor sections of society” the participants argued.

Some of the participants also emphasized that madrassa plays an important role of transmitting and preserving divine knowledge as per directions of Allah and Prophet of Islam which is not observed in mainstream education. Therefore, they argued that “existence of madrassa is inevitable in an Islamic society.”

While discussing services of madrassa for society, a great majority of interview participants highlighted its healing function of psychological and spiritual problems of people. They told that people not only come to madrassa and mosque for *taviz* (a piece of paper with written material on it that is kept by a person to avoid illness or misery), *Dua* (an act of begging something from God) and *Dam* (recitation of Quranic verses for the removal of sickness etc. of the person who comes with a problem) for their children, patients, even for animals ailments but also for guidance about religious matters and proper leadership regarding the solution of their domestic problems.

C. Madrassa and present wave of terrorism in Pakistan

To know the opinions and reactions of madrassa teachers, a question was put before them on the subject of terrorism in Pakistan. In response to this issue, the views of almost all the participants were similar. They argued that madrassa is unjustly blamed under the influence of coordinated campaigns of powerful Western media. They pointed out that madrassa education system also existed before 9/11 as very peaceful system without any symbol of extremism and violence. Many of them claimed that “there is no association between madrassa education system and Taliban extremism” and “there is no role of madrassas in converting the Taliban into militants” the teachers maintained.

A large number of the respondents mentioned that madrassa imparts their graduates the teachings of Islam based on universal brotherhood, love, peace and humanity not of militancy and extremism, then how can the graduates of such a system commit heinous acts of terrorism. They further expressed that madrassa education makes students contended, mentally satisfied, peace loving and develop calmness in them. They have no tension of seeking jobs as this system provides them vast opportunities in religious market according to their talent as teacher, Alim, Imam in mosques and even in mainstream educational schools as Qari, Arabic /Islamic study teacher etc. Almost all the participants agreed on the point that global socio-economic inequalities and injustices and resultant mental stress among youth, were the major causes of promotion of violence not the madrassa education system of Islam.
D. Role of Madrassa Graduates in the present globalized world

Majority of the participants stressed on social and religious services as inevitable need of Islamic society. They mentioned that our graduates can play very effective role because they travel all around the world and they better understand the modern world. They can serve the society by imparting religious knowledge, by serving in mosques, by becoming a role model of Islam, by promoting peace, love and harmony as directed in Quran and Hadith. Some of the respondents viewed that madrassa student’s can also serve the Muslim Ummah by spreading the message of Allah all over the world and by conveying the genuine teachings of Islam to the followers.

VI. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this qualitative study showed that majority of the religious teachers was satisfied with the madrassa curriculum as far as its basic goals and purposes are concerned. However, in regard to competing in present day economy market, they showed some reservations and emphasized that reforms are needed in some areas of madrassa education. These results are consistent with the study of Laghari, et al. (2011). They conducted a study to find out the perceptions of madrassa students about their education system and concluded that government should take serious steps to modify the curriculum according to the needs of modern global challenges.

The data revealed that the religious teachers had consensus regarding any relationship between madrassa education and promotion of extremism. They were of the view that madrassas were unjustly blamed for terrorism and militancy under the influence of popular media and unscientific scholarship (Ali, 2009). Some of the participants pointed out that Pakistani Madrassa system became controversial due to association with Taliban as some of the renowned militants were the alumni of these madrassas. The same findings have also been stated in the study of Khalid (2008).

The data also explored that most of the madrassas in Pakistan are still stuck to only imparting religious education with same curriculum considering it key to success in this world and life hereafter, as they did centuries ago. This result points to the fact that technically, in this age of latest scientific and technological discoveries, madrassa curriculum is unable to produce militants by imparting only religious training. These findings are consistent with the studies of Rehman (2004); Bergen and Pandey (2006) but contradict the study of Brookings (2009) who concluded that the curriculum taught in madrassas injects ‘radical socialization’ in Muslim students.

Majority of religious teachers perceived that the strong justification in favor of madrassa education system is its need and importance for Islamic society even in present globalized era. The participants pointed out the multi-social roles of madrassa education system i.e. provision of free education to underprivileged population, delivery of religious knowledge, provision of space for paying charities (Sadqat, Khairat, Zakat etc.), production of literate and peaceful citizens for society and helping state by creating employment opportunities. They also highlighted its healing function for psychological problems. The same socially accepted roles of madrassa education system have been described in Ayyob (2000), Bano (2007) and Khalid (2008).

This study, like all researches, also has certain limitations. Following four limitations of this study are worth mentioning. Firstly, due to difficulty in accessing the
madrassa graduates particularly female, a comparatively small sample was selected for data collection. Secondly, Madrassa teachers of Jamaat-e-Islami school of thought could not be included due to non-accessibility which limits the generalizability of findings over the madrassas of all the sects. Thirdly, the sample was selected from madrassas of Multan city only; therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized all over Pakistan. Finally, in the context of controversial and hotly discussed role of madrassa education system in present day society, followed by the problems faced by madrassa teachers and graduates, the participating teachers concentrated more on highlighting the socially accepted functions of madrassa system for defending their education system rather than interpreting the specific roles of madrassa education in present globalized society.

VII. Recommendations

In the light of the findings, discussion and conclusions, the following recommendations were made.

1. Government of Pakistan should make serious and integrated efforts to bring madrassa education system in line with the main stream of education.
2. Reforms in madrassa curriculum should be made without changing core subjects of Dars-e-Nizami. The basic objective and purpose of madrassa education (to produce religious scholars) should be kept in mind while introducing any reforms in madrassa system and modifying the curriculum.
3. Government should take serious steps to own madrassa education system by defending it before international community, by providing funding and missing facilities essential for facing the challenges of present globalized society.
4. Further research may be done with increased sample size of teachers and involvement of students, larger geographical area and using triangulation methodology to find out the potential role of these Islamic seminaries in preparing religious scholars also fit in modern economy market.

References


