Topic:-

Challenges and Opportunities in mainstreaming Madrassa Education in Pakistan

A. Introduction
  a. Hook
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B. Current Status of Madrasa Education in Pakistan.

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  i) Reducing extremism among Madrasa graduates;
    a. By providing identity and social acceptance.
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    a. Dismantling th 3-tier educational system of Pakistan.
  iii) Message of Peace to the world;
    a. By inculcating civic values among madrasa students.
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    a. Striving for removing taboos like "Islamic Extremist" by producing a civilised scholars religions.
  v) Lowering poverty ratio;

a. Equal job opportunities for

Challenges in Mainstreaming
Madrasa Education in Pakistan

i) Reluctance of few religious scholars:

   a. Fear of loosing autonomy.

ii) Structural resistance:

   a. Too much difference in education system of madrasas and schools.

iii) Economic hurdles:

   a. less donations and funding.

iv) Political barriers:

   a. lack of will of governments

v) Cultural unacceptance:

   a. Extreme religious conservativism among few factions of society.

E. Measures to Mainstream Madrasa Education in Pakistan

i) Spreading awareness among public about importance of religious as well as non-religious education.

ii) Policy reforms while maintaing the autonomy of madrasa intact.

F. Conclusion

The Essay

If scientific and technological education enlightens the futures of a person, then religious education enlightens the soul of a person. Balancing both kind of education is necessary to live a fulfilling life. But unfortunately, in Pakistan, there has been a complete separation among the two. Schools and universities majorly focusing on scientific and technological knowledge and madrasas disseminating only islamic education. Though, in recent years there have been steps taken to integrate both kinds of education in the curricula but it is very limited. In Pakistan, madrassa education has been historically been very conservative, intolerant and extreme. Its roots are traced back to the time when sub-continent was under colonial rule which inculcated among the muslims of sub-continent hate and prejudice towards the colonial bodies. The same legacy was followed after independence resulting in religious scholars having extreme ideologies, intolerance and hatred towards other sects.

However, exceptions persists. Not all religious scholars practice the same, but majority of them are on the same path. But in recent years, this has been reduced to a great extent due to narrative building, social media and educational reforms. This can be completely dismantled by eliminating the underlying causes which mayorly are unequal social status of religious scholars, poverty and identity crises. By providing and equipping a madrasa education system a real importance which it actually deserves, a youth of religious scholars could be produced which would be leveraged for the prosperity of Pakistan. In this essay, various opportunities, which will benefit Pakistan by mainstreaming madrasa education system will be discussed and the challenges faced during the process followed by few measures to overcome the issue.

To this day, in Pakistan, there are more number of madrasas than schools which reflects the love of people towards islam and islamic studies. However, major

number of enrolled students, in madrasas belong to to poor or low income families. Madrasas usually provide free education and residency at a very low charges, hence it seems an easy option for such families. Resultantly, when these students graduate, they are exploited by extremists because of poverty and unemployment. "Nizamiyyah Madaris are prevelent in Pakistan along with others. These madrasas spread religious education but have a very limited focus on scientific, technological or literary education due to which graduates from such institutes lag behind in global market. Hence, it is necessary to bring reforms to integrate them into society and make an equitable and just community.

If mainstreaming of madrasa education is done, following are some of the opportunities that could be harnessed.

By integrating madrasa education along with other subjects, extremism among such students could be reduced. Usually, such students are segregated from society

which brings in them hatred and prejudice towards others. By giving them equal social status, identity and acceptance, this extremism could be reduced. When such students are equally respected, provided opportunities — it would break the existing extremist ideas in them. Hence, by mainstreaming the madrasa education, the already prevelent extreme narratives could be broken and a peaceful society could flourish.

Moreover, mainstreaming of madrasa education is a step towards a quality education provision among the madrasa students. When various subjects like maths, science, philosophy, and physics are taught along with religious subjects — it makes a student all rounded. Moreover, it also helps in breaking the three tier educational system of Pakistan which consists of public, private and madrasa system. This segregated educational system is itself a reason of prejudice because of unequal education in all those systems. By integrating madrasa education system

with other subjects, quality education could ~~by~~ be provided for the graduates which is a cornerstone for an equitable society.

Furthermore, a message of peace could be given to world by producing a youth which not only embodies the religious teachings but also the scientific and technological education. In the world full of islamophobic sentiments, disseminating ~~a~~ words of peace is possible only when believers of islam practice the true essence of religion. And, it could be done by acting upon the moderate teachings of islam, instead of being conservative, ~~Hence~~, after mainstreaming the education system of madrasas, it could be harnessed for giving a message of peace to the world and hence building an image of soft power instead of coercive.

Additionally, non-Muslims are usually feared of muslims due to perceived threats of insecurity, terrorism — thanks to propagandas against ~~the~~ muslims after 9/11. But this prejudice and hatred

could be reduced if strategic alterations are done in the existing educational system of madrasas. By integrating values like tolerance, co-existance and respect for others, this could be reduced. Additionally, historically there had been many stigmas associated with muslims such as extrimists, terrorists and so on. By giving a message of peace, holistic education and tolerance, this stigma upon the muslims could be removed.

Lastly, mainstreaming of madrasa education system could be highly helpful in reducing the poverty among madrasa graduates. As already explained, our madrasas focus mainly only on religious education while ignoring the scientific and technological knowledge which is extremely important in todays world. Because of this, most of the madrasa graduates remain unemployed or if employed - highly underpaid. By giving recognition to the educational system of madrasas, equal job opportunities could be provided which would ultimately

help in lowering the poverty ratio in Pakistan.

Opportunities are multiple for harnessing if the educational system of madrasas are mainstreamed strategically, few of which are discussed above. However, there are multiple challenges as well which block the path of the procedure. Few of them are discussed below.

Beginning with the reluctance of few religious scholars, who show resistance in mainstreaming the educational system. Either due to conservativism of such scholars, or due to perceived fear of loosing autonomy, they tend to refuse upon implementing on such ideals. Resultantly, the steps for reforms remain within the papers instead of being executed. The cycle of poverty, extremism, and prejudice persists leading to break down of national image. Hence, it is imperative to aware such scholars and make reforms to mainstream the madrasa educational system.

Another reason could be the structural resistance itself. There is a huge difference between administrative as

well as extra structural system of madrasas and universities. To integrate both, it requires a lot of human and structural resource which is lacking in a country like Pakistan. Though, available but it is very limited which would not fully address the existing gaps. Hence, extreme differences among university and madrasa education system is itself a big challenge which hinders the process of integrating madrasa education with modern subjects.

Additionally, in a country like Pakistan, which is already grappling with harsh economic conditions, designing policies which demand investment is a big challenge. Mainstreaming madrasa education requires curriculum designing, recruiting teachers and integrating technological devices to the classrooms. This in turn requires a heavy investment of money, curtailing the ability of mainstreaming the educational system even if administrative will and structural acceptance exists. Therefore, allocating a specific amount of money for the cause could help in proceeding the procedure.

In addition to above mentioned arguments, the other challenge could be the political barriers. It is highly possible that the politicians or the government becomes a barrier in the process. Historically, politicians have used the name of islam and madrasas for their political gains. If these institutes are mainstreamed, these politicians would not be able to ~~to~~ use the name of madrasas ~~to~~ the way they historically used to. Therefore, ensuring true democracy and accountability of politicians, and not giving opportunity to use the names of such institutes for their political gains, it could be possible that the madrasas are mainstreamed.

Last but not the least, cultural unacceptance in some parts of the country are also a great barriers. Because of historical rigid ideologies about religion, it is unacceptable among many societies of Pakistan to see modern subjects being taught in religious institutes. Even, such institutes ~~so~~ are blamed for operating under foreign agenda. This fear of stigmatization

prevents institutes from doing structural and curricular reforms. Thus, it is important that such factions of society be educated about the importance of modern education so that the obstacles for the mainstreaming of educational system of madrasas could be done efficiently.

To every ill there is a remedy. Where there are challenges, there are multiple solutions as well which aid in overcoming the issue. Therefore, two of the solutions are described below highlighting how the mainstreaming of madrasa education system could be done.

Firstly, spreading awareness could be the most influential instrument in overcoming the challenges. Educating the public about the importance of both religious and scientific education help in mitigating the extreme ideologies from both sides. This dissemination of education could be done by social media platforms, awareness campaigns and news pamphlets as well. Though, time taking procedure, but for long term and sustainable results, it is imperative

that the public should be educated and made aware.

Secondly, bringing policy reforms within the system of government and the madrasa system is imperative. Holding moderate narratives, and integrating both kinds of education is vital for efficient and effective proceeding. Not ~~an~~ disturbing the autonomy of madrasa— means giving limited autonomy— enough that it would not challenge the writ of the state is imperative. This will ensure the religious scholars about their administrative positions while not distorting the overall system of state. Hence, policy reforms while maintaining the autonomy of madrasas intact is necessary.

In conclusion, mainstreaming the madrasa education is as vital for Pakistan as other social issues addressal. Because if not done, it further leads to various social ailments like hate, prejudice, inequality and poverty. To prevent such maladies it is imperative to look into this

this issue and take measures to bring the madrasa education into the mainstream. Multiple opportunities could be availed during the process. This include reducing the extremism among public and fostering a peaceful society. It would further help in equalizing the society by breaking the three tiered educational system of Pakistan and providing job opportunities for madrasa graduates. The lists goes on, however, numerous challenges could also be waiting on the way. Such challenges could be tackled by strategic planning. The challenges might include structural, administrative and even political hurdles. In some factions of society, cultural obstacles might be there but with sustainable and well planned policies, these issues could be overcome. Spreading awareness among youth and elders while harnessing social media platforms could be beneficial. Further, policy reforms that advocate for autonomous madrasa administration while preventing the national interest would help in gaining the cause. After all, mainstreaming the madrasa

education is difficult considering the administrative and economic conditions of Pakistan, but with strong will and faith it is achievable. The time is not far when the madrasa education will get the recognition and acceptance which it deserves and its graduates will be socially respected just like others; paving the way for a prosperous Pakistan.

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