

Challenges and Opportunities in Mainstreaming Madrasa Education in Pakistan

Outline

1 Introduction: The process of mainstreaming madrasa education faces significant challenges in Pakistan, including resistance from clergy, lack of political will, extremist ideology, resource constraints, and a shortage of trained teachers, it also presents some opportunities such as global acceptance, collaboration with NGOs, social cohesion, cultivation of human capital and poverty alleviation.

2 Historical Background of Madrasa Education in Pakistan:

3 Challenges in Mainstreaming Madrasa Education in Pakistan:

- a) Resistance from clergy
 - i) Orthodox mindsets
 - ii) Fear of losing autonomy

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- b) Lack of political will
- i) Fear of losing support from religious parties
 - ii) Voter bank

c) Resource constraints

- i) Lack of adequate infrastructure
 - ii) Inadequate education budget
 - iii) Trained teachers
- d) Illiteracy and resistance from parents

e) Public mistrust and stigma

f) Extremist ideologies

- i) Hurdle in integrating in government policies

Opportunities in Mainstreaming Madrasa Education in Pakistan:

a) Global acceptance

- i) UDHR Article 26
- ii) SDG 04

b) Poverty Alleviation

(World Bank Report)

c) National Integration

d) Curbing Extremism

e) Collaboration with NGOs

(Case in point: Muslim Hands Organization)

5 Conclusion

Since the inception of Pakistan, madrasas have been playing a vital role in providing free education to students belonging to the lower strata of the society. They serve as the nurturing ground for students in areas where mainstream education is not easily accessible. However, these madrasas primarily focus on religious education, which leaves students incompetent in secular fields. While religious education holds obligatory status in Pakistan, understanding of the significance of mainstream education become essential. For this reason, mainstreaming of madrasa education becomes crucial to ensure its reach to the masses. Although, the process of mainstreaming madrasa education faces significant challenges including resistance from clergy, lack of political will, extremist ideologies, resource constraints and a shortage of trained teachers, it also presents some opportunities such as global acceptance, collaboration with NGOs, national policies, poverty alleviation and curbing extremism. This essay comprehensively discusses both opportunities and challenges in mainstreaming madrasa education in Pakistan.

Madrasas have been a crucial component of education in sub-continent. Their history can be traced back to Mughal era and then to colonial period. During colonial period, madrasas like Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband played a vital role in educating Muslims in subcontinent. These madrasas acted as a ground for mobilization of Muslims in British India. After the independence in 1947, madrasas continued playing their part, however, their focus shifted to isolation from worldly affairs. At the time of independence there were 247 madrasas which grew significantly during the Zia-ul-Haq's regime (1970s-80s). Zia-ul-Haq established madrasas with foreign funding to train mujahideen for Afghan War which resulted in rise of extremism. By the end of 1999, the number of madrasas reached 10,000. However, post 9/11 numerous efforts were made to reform madrasa education system, but these efforts faced significant challenges.

One of the major challenge in mainstreaming madrasa education is resistance from clergy. Historically, many reforms have been proposed to mainstream madrasa

education, but faced strong resistance from clerics. The clergy in Pakistan draw its ideals from orthodox ideals and consider modernization heresy. Most scholars label western or secular education a trap of westerners to control the Muslim world. This attitude of clergy is rooted in historical events like fall of Ottoman empire and rise of communism, which make them skeptical of modern education. Moreover, clergy consider mainstreaming of madrasa education a way to snatch their autonomy over religious institutions and seminaries. In Pakistan, clergy enjoys a heightened place in society, especially in rural areas. Clergy fear losing this protocol in the society due to mainstreaming of madrasa education.

Another major issue in mainstreaming madrasa education is the lack of political will. Political parties hold a great support in political sphere as well. They have their own political parties which are crucial in determining effectiveness of government policies. Historically, many efforts of madrasa reforms were opposed by these religious political parties. Government fear losing their support in the political sphere.

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to sustain government in extremely politically unstable environment of Pakistan. Moreover, political parties enjoy a voter bank of these religious parties through coalition. However, the coalition and votes comes at the expense of crucial public policies like mainstreaming of madrasa education. This ~~political~~ ~~coalition~~ ~~and~~ ~~votes~~ makes mainstreaming of madrasa education in Pakistan a distant dream.

Another noteworthy challenge in mainstreaming madrasa education in Pakistan

is resource constraint. Pakistan is facing economic stagnation since its emergence due to corruption and political instability. Pakistan has been witnessing

In fiscal year 2024-25, budget allocated for education is Rs 103.7 billion, which makes 1.7% of the Gross domestic product (GDP) of the country. Whereas the United Nations standard for education spending is 4% of the Gross domestic product (GDP) of the country. This shows that Pakistan is already lacking in its education spending as per global standard.

However, mainstreaming of madrasa education requires hefty amount to establish necessary infrastructure for education. Furthermore, there is a shortage of trained teachers in

Pakistan and the mentors already present in madrasas are not aware of secular knowledge. This shows that teacher training is mandatory which again depends upon economic resources.

Prevalent ~~misconceptions~~ is also a hurdle in mainstreaming education in Pakistan. People in rural and tribal areas resist western education.

These people resist everything related to the western world and believe heavily in conspiracy theories. For instance, polio workers face trouble in tribal areas to perform their jobs, similarly mainstreaming of madrasa education is also resisted by the parents.

Parents consider secular education will lead their children to immorality and infidelity.

Girls are especially resisted from pursuing broad-based education, because of the notion that girls should only remain in domestic spheres and avoid secular education. This resistance from parents fueled by illiteracy poses a challenge in mainstreaming madrasa education.

Similarly, public mistrust and stigma regarding madrasa graduates hinder advocacy for mainstreaming of madrasa education.

Public in urban areas consider madrasa graduates incompetent and incapable of pursuing secular jobs. Moreover, there is a social disconnect between urban and rural areas which make urban people insensitive to the issue of rural people. They avoid advocacy for mainstreaming of madrasa education or when they do, they go to an extent of asking for a complete ban on madrasas. Liberal sphere of the society consider madrasa solely a breeding ground of militancy and sectarianism. The polarization affected the progress of achievements in madrasas respectively.

Finally, the extremist ideologies also play a significant challenge in mainstreaming of madrasa education. To some extent, madrasas promote extremism and sectarianism which make them vulnerable to societal peace. It pose a significant threat for government to integrating them in public policies. Politicians fear being persecuted by the mob lynchings and suicide attacks. Historically, there have been many events in Pakistan that stop policy makers to

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go against the will of the masses. Assassination of former Punjab Governor is an example of this, who was killed by his own security guard. This is how extremism challenges mainstreaming of madrasa education in Pakistan.

Alongside these challenges, there are some opportunities in mainstreaming madrasa education. The most significant opportunity is global acceptance. By mainstreaming madrasa education Pakistan can reduce the number of out-of-school children and improve its image in global communities. Pakistan can fulfill its commitment to ^{Universal} ~~United Nations~~ Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 26, which advocates for education as a basic necessity of human beings. Similarly, Pakistan can accelerate its road to sustainable development goals (SDGs) by fulfilling the goal 04 which demands free education for all. To achieve these goals Pakistan can harness global support for the purpose of mainstreaming madrasa education. Pakistan can seek help from the Muslim world to support the cause in global sphere and open ways for global collaborations.

Another major opportunity that lies

the mainstreaming of madrasa education is alleviation of poverty. Pakistan faces a significant challenge of poverty. According to a World Bank report, poverty rate in Pakistan is 41 percent, which is a severe threat to the well being of the people of Pakistan. By mainstreaming madrasa education and educating madrasa students in secular fields, this poverty can be reduced. The main reason of the poverty in Pakistan is lack of education and skills. If the madrasa students are given quality education as per the standard of private institution, they can earn a better livelihood for themselves and their families. This will not only improve their economic conditions but also produce a reliable human capital for the progress of Pakistan. In this way mainstreaming madrasa education can help reduce poverty in Pakistan.

Moreover, mainstreaming of madrasa education can foster nation integration by mitigating social distress and tensions. Social tensions mainly arises as a result of disparities among resources. Marginalized communities often resort to actions which causes distress and instability.

Moreover, marginalized communities rely on madrasa education in rural and tribal areas by uplifting the education standard in madrasas and bringing them to the level of institutions in urban areas, disparities can be diminished significantly. Furthermore, ~~currito~~ check on curriculum by authorities ^{would} prevent the ~~prof~~ proliferation of anti-national narratives. In this way, madrasa reforms can bring prosperity to Pakistan.

Similarly, mainstreaming of education in madrasas can help mitigating extremist ideologies. Extremism cultivates in the illiterate minds. Through the integration of madrasa education and secular education, this rise of extremism can be ~~mitigated~~. Moreover, reforms in madrasa ~~education~~ will ~~allow~~ government autonomy over these institutions and government can control any ~~sectarian~~ ideologies spreading in the minds of the madrasa students. Thus, mainstreaming of madrasa education will help curbing extremism and fostering a tolerant society needed for national progress.

Another significant opportunity in mainstreaming madrasa education is

collaboration with Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs). Many NGOs in Pakistan are working on providing quality education alongside religious education. For instance, Muslim Hands Organization, a London based NGO is operating 247 schools across Pakistan, working on the principle of integration. These schools provide free education to underprivileged ~~children~~ children in remote areas. Government can collaborate with such organizations and assign madrasas to NGO for better management and smooth transition to mainstream education. These NGOs can provide their expertise to the madrasas by applying their already tested educational models and providing trained staff. Government can introduce an incentive system based on the performance of the organizations. In this way, government can harness the potential of collaboration between NGOs and government.

In conclusion, mainstreaming of madrasa education poses both significant challenges as well as opportunities. However, to harness the opportunities, authorities must have to overcome the potential challenge. The politicians and clergy have

think about the future of the madrasa students in the highly competitive world and devise a way in which these students can benefit from religious as well as secular education. By overcoming these challenges Pakistan can improve its global acceptance, curb poverty and eliminate extremism. Moreover collaboration with NGOs can pave a way forward in achieving this mission.