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Challenges and Opportunities in mainstreaming Madrasa Education in Pakistan

Outline:

I. Introduction:

Mainstreaming madrasa education comes with its challenges but it also offers opportunities to alleviate a few of Pakistan's problems.

II. Madrasa Education — A Part of Pakistan's History:

III. Mainstreaming Madrasa Education — The Challenges:

- a. Vast number of institutions
- b. Limited education budget
- c. Education is a provincial subject in Pakistan
- d. Society's natural resistance to change
- e. Mainstreaming curriculum without being termed 'UnIslamic'

IV. Mainstreaming Madrasa Education — The Opportunities:

- a. Providing basic rights through madrasas
- b. Chance to improve literacy rate
- c. Reforming societal practices
- d. Contributing to the international Islamic & intellectuals
- e. Combatting terrorism

V. Way Forward:

- a. Involve esteemed & international Islamic Institutions
- b. Consult Local Stakeholders
- c. Roll out gradual changes

VI. Conclusion:

Mainstreaming religious education in Pakistan is an onerous task but it provides an opportunity to address other issues that plague Pakistan. Madrasa education is an important feature of Pakistan's education landscape. But unfortunately, the reputation of madrasas in Pakistan has been tarnished due to their association with terror outfits. As such, graduates of madrasa graduates are looked upon with apprehension and have trouble gaining entrance into lucrative mainstream job opportunities or keeping up with their peers in secular institutions of higher learning. Several attempts have been made over the years to mainstream madrasa education. But there has been little progress. Various challenges stand in the way of reforms. These challenges include, but are not limited to, financing, lack of federal education ministry, and the madrasas own resistance to change. While some political will exists to mainstream madrasa education, the aforementioned challenges present a ~~formidable~~ formidable resistance. However, the opportunities that will come forward once the change has been made will be worth the effort. Few of these opportunities include, bringing fringe elements of the society into the larger social fabric, improving Pakistan's international reputation in the secular and Islamic world, and providing a chance at a better future to those who would otherwise be overlooked. ~~Thus~~ Thus, implementing reforms to mainstream Madrasa education in Pakistan is the need of the hour. The stakeholders must come together to make these reforms possible.

Historically, madrasa education has been an integral part of Pakistan's identity and history. The foremost example of madrasa education and its impact is seen in the role of Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband. It not only participated in the Pakistan movement but was an important ~~part~~ influence

in framing Pakistan's constitution to include religious provisions. The presence of what may be termed the oldest madrasa institution in Pakistan can still be felt today. However, its madrasa institutes unfortunate linkage with terror outfits has reduced its prestige and credibility.

Pakistan used the madrasa institutions to recruit mujahideen during the Cold War. Ultimately, Pakistan was unable to control the fallout of its experiment. The country saw a rise in terrorism, and the madrasas and its students became pariahs. Moreover, donations made to these institutions led to terror financing, ultimately placing Pakistan on the FATF's grey list twice. Efforts were made to fix this problem but several challenges remain where madrasas are concerned.

Firstly, the sheer number of madrasas makes implementing mainstreaming reforms hard. According to estimates by the Government of Pakistan there are 17,000 madrasas operating in Pakistan. They operate under various religious leaders. They also belong to different sects. Thus, it is difficult to draw up reforms that satisfy all the different denominations. This leads to hesitance on part of the government because it could lead to strained ties with religious institutions if the matter is not handled carefully.

Secondly, Pakistan's education budget is low. On average, Pakistan spends 2% of its GDP on education. This is half the global average spending. Conversely, mainstreaming madrasa education requires providing them with funds. This is money the government does not want to spend. Additionally, the entire process of framing reforms and implementing reforms requires resources that the government does not have.

Thirdly, the issue of education rests with the provinces. According to the 18th Amendment, any authority over educational institutions belongs to the provincial governments. The madrasas are educational institutions. Therefore, the federal government is limited in what it can do. The burden of the task resides with the provincial governments. But given how the provinces are handling secular ~~religious~~ education institutions — the variety of curriculum among other matters — the hope of reforming religious education remains low.

Fourthly, Pakistan as a society does not welcome change. Historically, any attempts to change deeply integrated practices have been met with resistance and protests. As stated previously, madrasa education has been a part of Pakistan's fabric before partition. Thus, making changes to the sector requires changing the people's beliefs that they have long held. The thinking needs to change before the policies can. Because ultimately, the policies in a democracy reflect the will of the people.

Fifthly, changes to religious institutions such as madrasas may be seen as 'un-Islamic'. Pakistan has seen this obstacle numerous times. This reasoning was used to strike down the Domestic Violence Bill and the Transgender Protection Bill. Labelling the mainstreaming of madrasa education as un-Islamic for any reason will be detrimental to the cause. Thus, before any ~~etc~~ bill is brought forth in the provincial parliaments, the local ulemas must be consulted and brought on board.

However, despite the challenges, Madrasa education must be mainstreamed. Mainstreaming these institutions ~~must~~

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provides various opportunities. Firstly, it allows the government to reach out to some of the most underprivileged members of the society. Parents often send ~~student~~ children to seminaries because they ~~provide~~ institutions provide its students with food and shelter. Thus, seminaries have more of their trust than the government does. Mainstreaming will allow the governments to reach out through madrasa to provide basic rights such as education and improved healthcare understanding.

Secondly, government can use this as an opportunity to increase the value of its human capital. Mainstreaming madrasa education will allow better integration of its graduates into the work force. Moreover, it will make horizontal transition ~~to~~ to other forms of education easier. A higher human capital will allow for ~~be~~ improved economic prospects. This could raise a significant portion of Pakistan's population out of ~~po~~ poverty. Ultimately, it will help Pakistan's economy.

Thirdly, it can improve the society. The reforms will allow for better integration ~~be~~ of different parts of the society. A cohesive society is a stronger society. ~~are~~ A stronger society makes for a stronger nation. Further, the integration will allow for people to learn from each other allowing for harmful 'religious' and secular practices to be eliminated. Furthermore, it will provide an opportunity to ~~re~~ combat abuse cases that prevail in seminaries.

Fourthly, mainstreaming madrasa education will ~~allow~~ give Pakistan to contribute to the global body of Islamic scholars. Unfortunately, most Pakistani scholars do not contribute in any significant way to ~~the~~ international Islamic jurisprudence. ~~the~~ This, despite the fact that they possess vast knowledge and great intellect. Reforms that bring Pakistani scholars ~~out~~ in

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contact with scholars from centers such as the Yakeen Institute will help Pakistan contribute to the global religious debates. Ultimately, it will help elevate Pakistan's position in the Muslim world. It will give credence to Pakistan as one of the largest Islamic countries in the world.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it may help Pakistan counter its terrorism problem. As stated previously, the madrasas provide a lifeline to the most disadvantaged members of the society. When these students struggle to find good opportunities for themselves, they become susceptible to recruitment by terror outfits. Mainstreaming madrasa education will allow a chance for the students to escape radicalization. Further, mainstreaming will help combat terror financing. Ultimately, the efforts will help fight Pakistan's reputation of creating radicalized terrorist members.

Over the years, efforts have been made to bring reforms to the sector. The government has attempted to get the madrasas to register themselves. Moreover, the recent Madrasa Registration Bill was a step in the right direction as it involved the religious leaders taking charge of the issue. Any further mainstreaming efforts must also involve religious leader. The efforts must also involve the students and the parents.

Additionally, to ensure that mainstreaming madrasas allows them to retain their religious authenticity, international institutions from the Islamic world must be consulted. Pakistani madrasas need to be made into institutions of reputable learning. Involving internationally recognized scholars in mainstreaming efforts will lend legitimacy to the endeavour.

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Furthermore, the changes must be slow. They must also occur on a smaller scale to assess their effectiveness. Any large scale changes will be expensive. They are also most likely to fail. Conversely, smaller success stories can be used as positive publicity for the reforms. It will help gain approval from stakeholders.

In conclusion, Pakistan's madrasa education has immense potential. But it also has its fair share of challenges. However, any ~~worth~~ worthwhile ~~ende~~ endeavour needs dedicated effort. Though the challenge of financing, shifting mindsets and improving madrasah education is massive, the opportunities that it offers are also significant. Thus, the government must do all it can to tackle the issue.

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