

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN MAINSTREAMING MADRASSAH EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

1- INTRODUCTION

a. The arrival of British Imperialism and Impact on the madrasas in the subcontinent.

b. Thesis statement:

"There is a variety of challenges at the hands of the policymakers in mainstreaming the madrasa education—ranging from religious resistance groups to the lack of political will among the stakeholders. Furthermore, inadequate infrastructures and diverse ideologies prove to be significant hurdles. These reforms, however, ~~will~~ once implemented will be able to bear fruits strengthening the overall social fabric of Pakistan."

2- PRE-PARTITION MADRASAS AND THE INTELLECTUAL CONFUSION AFTER THE ARRIVAL OF IMPERIALISM IN THE SUBCONTINENT

3. REASONS MAKING THE MADRASA REFORMS INDISPENSABLE.

a. Suggested links to Madrasas as the breeding

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grounds for radical ideologies. ~~✗~~
(Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Mujahideen)

b. Outdated Curriculum. (3.5 million students in 32,000 madrasas).

c. Lack of equity among the Pakistani children. (Rich and poor gap fostering the madrasa and modern education gap).

4. CHALLENGES TO THE MAINSTREAMING OF MADRASA REFORMS IN PAKISTAN

a. Resistance from the Religious Groups.
(Reforms in 2019 and response of Waqaf-ul-Madaris)

b. Lack of strong Political Will resulting in no implementation.
(Prioritizing Vote bank)

c. Inadequate infrastructure for monitoring and enforcement. (Ministry of Interior's report, 2016)

d. Ideological differences among the sects making it impossible for a smooth transformation.
(12 different sects and sub-sects in Pakistan).

5. OPPORTUNITIES IN MAINSTREAMING THE MADRASA REFORMS.

a. Educational Gaps addressed and Madrasa Students equipped for Modern Challenges.

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- b. Countering Extremism and Promoting Tolerance.
- c. Promoting social mobility by providing smooth transition from madrasa to modern educational institution.
- d. Strengthening National development by providing madrasa students as an asset.

6. CONCLUSION.

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The word "Madrassa" literally translates into "a place of study" and the origin of the word can be traced back to Arabic language.

During the Golden age of the Muslims - making significant discoveries in science, astrology, and arts - Madrassah served as the primary mode of education. However, with the Industrial Revolution and Renaissance in the Western Civilization, a strong focus on the separation of religion from the modern studies was posed. As the navigators travelled in South Asia through the British colonisation, thus, overtime the madrassahs were deemed as the focal point of basic religious education, consequently, diminishing the diversity in the courses being offered at a Madrassah. Modern educational institutions offering diverse courses, developed in the consequent decades limiting the scope of the Madrassahs to religious studies only. Since then, the Madrassahs have been totally isolated from the modern forms of education in Pakistan specifically. The Government of Pakistan has, over time,

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made some efforts into bringing the education in Madrasahs on par with the modern education system. However, there is a set of challenges—like the agitation of the religious factions, lack of Political will, lack of enforcement mechanisms and infrastructures and the multiplicity of ideologies prevalent in Madrasahs—that become a hurdle in the way of transforming the Madrasah system of Pakistan. By overcoming the challenges, the Pakistani Government will not only be able to bridge significant gaps between the general populace but will also foster ~~the~~ social mobility and strengthen its workforce.

In the Pre-Partition subcontinent, there was hardly any muslim community without a maktab—a primary unit of Quranic education, while a madrasa brought a much larger canvas of religious learning, including philosophy, history, medicine and languages. With the advent of British Imperialism, the structure of the society submerged into chaos, from economy and politics to education. Consequently,

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a vivid picture of confusion among the Muslims emerged. While the modernist Muslims embraced the English educational institutions and started producing ~~able~~ lawyers, scientists, judges and doctors, the conservative faction, on the other hand, started building madrasas for ^{mere} religious education. Thus, the isolation of the very madrasas began and remained consistent in Post-Partition Subcontinent, specifically Pakistan.

However, in the recent decades, the debates about transforming the madrasas and to bring them on par with the modern educational institutions, have been making rounds in the policy circles as well as the academia. There are various causes for the mainstreaming of the Madrasas in Pakistan including their suggested links to radical ideologies, lack of diverse curriculum resulting in an outdated disciplinary approach, and their isolation from the rest of the Pakistani students fostering more gaps between rich and poor. As a result, the madrasa reforms have become the need of the time.

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In the wake of the Afghan-Soviet war about forty years ago, the proliferation of the radical ideologies in the minds of the young students of madrasas became a norm. At that time of the history, madrasas acted as the breeding ground of the "Mujahideen" and then later ~~of~~ Taliban militias. Thus, forty years after the end of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan still to this date suffers from the after shocks in the form of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan. Thus, to curb such radical ideologies from spreading in their most primary sanctuary, can help Pakistan revolutionize its environment of peace and security.

~~Therefore~~ In addition, outdated and curriculum being frozen in time, is yet another reason to advocate for the madrasa reforms. There are 3.5 million students getting education in the 32,000 madrasas across Pakistan - according to the research made by Arab Centre Pakistan. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise the damage being done to millions of students by providing them education from outdated sources with no improvement or co-relation with the modern

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world. As a result, these students grow to be unfit and irrelevant in the employment sectors of the country making millions jobless.

Moreover, the lack of employment gives ways to foster criminal tendencies and provides space for the radical factions to produce a strong grip. Thus, the outdated curriculum needs to be revised and be brought on par with the modern educational institutions.

The lack of equity among the madrasa students and the modern educational institution's students, is a clear indicator of the gap between rich and poor. Most of the students enrolled in the madrasas come from unprivileged households, where they are usually sent off due to financial burden on the family. This creates a further divide into an already strained society functioning on inequality. To bridge this gap and to bring an environment based on equity among all Pakistani children, madrasa reforms are indispensable.

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There are enough reasons to bring madrasa reforms but more than that, there are numerous challenges in mainstreaming the Madrasa education. The religious groups have enormous street power and they often result in opposing strongly to the mention of reforming the madrasas. Moreover, the lack of strong political will and inadequate infrastructure for implementation, plays another significant role in halting the transformation. Additionally, the madrasas functioning in the country are based on different ideologies due to the sectarian system present in the country. These diverse ideological ^{ess} ~~ess~~ further make it difficult for the reforms to come into reality.

Resistance from the religious factions of the society is the biggest hurdle in the way of mainstreaming the madrasa education. The conservative factions of the society believe that the reforms will dilute the teachings of the religion with the modern studies and the focus of the students will be shifted from modern to

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secular studies. For example, in 2019, the government of Pakistan sought to introduce Mathematics, Science and English into the madrasa curricula, however, groups like Wafaqul Madaris resisted the move and argued that the secular subjects would serve as a distraction from their primary focus on religious studies. As a result, the reforms could not bear the fruit.

Moreover, there is a serious lack of political will among the political parties to reform the madrasas. The parties usually focus more on garnering votes by pleasing the populace, and in turn compromise on the well-being and future of the millions of children in madrasas. Successive governments have tried to bring the reforms, however, with little resistance met from the religious groups, the governments give up in order to not upset their vote banks in a particular region or due to the power of a particular religious group in the vote bank. Consequently, the political will submits in front of the larger

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personal interests of each political party.

The lack of adequate infrastructure and monitoring system to ensure smooth enforcement is yet another hurdle in the way of crucial madrasa reforms.

The National Action Plan introduced in 2014 having madrasa reforms as one of its key objectives exposed many infrastructural and systemic weaknesses in the system, leading to the failure of implementation.

The lack of human and financial resources in the ministries tasked with the implementation of the NAP was the most crucial factor in the failure of implementation. Moreover, a report by the interior ministry in 2016, revealed that only 10% of madrasas across the country had shared their financial details as required by the NAP. Thus, the reluctance in madrasas stemming from inadequate infrastructure, trained staff, dedicated financial auditing, are huge stones in the way of madrasa reforms.

The ideological differences present among various religious schools is another

major hurdle in the way of a smooth transformation. There are approximately 12 sects and sub-sects' believers are scattered across Pakistan. and to customise reforms according to the acceptance and belief of each one of the ideological sect is a very difficult task. Therefore the streamlining of the various religious ideologies serve as another factor in the abundance of hurdles already present to achieve madrasa transformation.

There are handful of opportunities and prosperous outcomes waiting at the end of madrasa reforms. These opportunities include lessening the gaps and equipping the madrasa students for modern challenges, countering extremism and promoting tolerance, fostering social mobility and finally, strengthening Pakistan's workforce in the employment sector.

If the madrasa reforms a cautiously implemented, it will help bridge the mental and educational gap between the madrasa and the rest of the students.

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Additionally, it will equip them with the required knowledge and skill to become relative to the modern society. This will provide them with numerous employment opportunities at the end of their course completion at the madrasa. Thus, fulfilling their lives and pockets to lead a normal life.

Introducing diverse courses in the madrasa along with religious courses will help the "Talibs" relate the religion to modern day issues and science. Such co-relation will prove beneficial in fostering peaceful ideologies as it will convey the true meaning of religion, which is, peace and co-existence. As a result, extremism and radical ideologies will be countered at the very grassroot of the society and will promote tolerance among the madrasa students.

Moreover, when the madrasa students study diverse subjects in their primary and secondary years, they will be able to take admission in any ~~and~~ field.

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of any particular university, according to their will and passion. This process will create a smooth social mobility from madrasa to higher education or graduate course. Thus, no madrasa student will feel irrelevant or outdated at the end of their madrasa education and will be able to contribute accordingly.

The social development of Pakistan will gain a significant boost when there will be millions of talents added to the workforce which were previously either unemployed or involved in extremism. Pakistan, therefore, can take profit from its 240 million population and especially the madrasa students can be prove to be a significant asset instead of a liability or a challenge for the government and the society alike. Thus, the reforms can equip the social development of Pakistan with capable minds.

In essence, there are multiple challenges lying in the way of madrasa reforms which include the resistance from

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the religious factions, lack of political will, inadequate infrastructure and enforcement mechanism, and ideological differences among the sects. These challenges, if overcome by the policymakers and the concerned departments, can bear fruits in the form of bridged gaps among the populace, tolerance in the society, streamline the educational hierarchy and strengthen the national development.

Moreover, the madrasa structure hasn't always been isolated from the modern education. In fact, it used to be the breeding point of scholars, scientists and philosophers but with the arrival of British imperialism in the subcontinent, the definitions of madrasas changed forever. ^{However,} the same madrasas can once again bear fruitful results if the reforms brought by the relevant sectors are successfully implemented.