

NEED FOR REFORM: MADRASA EDUCATION SYSTEM IN KASHMIR VALLEY

Mudasir Maqbool Najar* and Shahid Iqbal**

Abstract

The Madrasa Education System in Kashmir Valley occupies a significant space within the Muslim community and plays a vital role in shaping societal norms and values. Unlike other parts of India, Kashmir's Muslim-majority nature adds a distinct dimension to its Madrasa system, warranting a separate and detailed examination. This paper delves into the intricacies of the Madrasa system in the Valley, scrutinizing its structure, curriculum, and socio-cultural impact. Through a qualitative approach, which includes interviews with key stakeholders such as administrators, faculty, students, and community members, the study provides valuable insights into the strengths and shortcomings of the current system. It underscores the urgent need for intervention and reform to address the outdated aspects of Madrasa education in Kashmir. By offering concrete recommendations for improvement, the research aims to enhance educational standards and opportunities within the region.

Keywords: Madrasa, Kashmir, Education, System, Reformation, Movement, Islam, India

Introduction

As per Islamic scriptures,¹ it is stated that Allah's initial word revealed to Prophet Muhammad was 'Iqra',² signifying the act of reading or reciting. The Quran's 3rd chapter mentions "Can they be equal, those who know and those who do not know?"³ This verse

*The author is a Doctoral Candidate at the Department of Defence & National Security Studies, Panjab University Chandigarh, India. mudasirmn@pu.ac.in

** The author is a Doctoral Candidate at the Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace & Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia New Delhi, India. shahiidiqbal22@gmail.com

questions the equality of those who possess and those who lack knowledge. Numerous Hadith emphasize the high regard Islam places on education. For instance, the Prophet's statement, "The ink of the scholar's pen is more sacred than the blood of a martyr"⁴ underscores the sanctity of knowledge in Islam. Another Hadith asserts that "the best form of worship is the pursuit of knowledge."⁵ Islamic literature contains numerous Hadiths underscoring the significance of education in Islam. However, a crucial question arises: Does this emphasis refer exclusively to Islamic education, or does it also encompass secular worldly education? This dilemma hinges on two key points. Firstly, if Islam endorses only Islamic education, it raises concerns. Secondly, if Islam also encourages secular worldly education, why does this not reflect in educational practices within Islamic institutions like Madrasas, as pointed out by researchers?

The term 'Madrasa' originates from Arabic, denoting "a place where learning and studying are done." However, in countries outside the Arab region, particularly India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh, the term "Madrasa" typically refers to Islamic educational institutions that predominantly focus on teaching the Quran, Hadith, Arabic, and Islamic jurisprudence.⁶ Only a limited number of Madrasas incorporate secular education into their curriculum.

Kashmir, a picturesque Muslim-majority region within the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir in the northern part of India, is home to numerous Madrasas. These Madrasas primarily emphasize/impart Islamic education like other parts of the country.⁷ The critical concern raised is whether exclusively providing Islamic education is beneficial. While it may serve a religious purpose, the key question arises: does this educational approach adequately equip students in a world driven by science, technology, digitalization, AI, and other advancements? If students from these institutions lack exposure to such knowledge, does it hinder their relevance in the contemporary world? This context prompted the researchers to delve into a comprehensive study of the Madrasa education system in the Kashmir Valley, encompassing its curriculum, infrastructure, faculty, facilities, student demographics, and the post-education trajectory of students. Furthermore, the research aims to explore the impacts of Madrasa education on individual students and society.

Objectives

- To analyse the historical context of the Madrasa Education system in Kashmir Valley

- To critically assess the working of the Madrasa Education System in Kashmir Valley
- To study the challenges and causes for concern in the Madrasa Education system in Kashmir Valley
- To suggest measures to reform the Madrasa Education System in Kashmir Valley

Methodology

The Madrasa education system in Kashmir is under persistent threat due to its outdated educational structure and the absence of necessary reforms. This article aims to evaluate the functioning of this system critically, identify its challenges, and propose solutions. To gather data, the authors employed interviews conducted at various Madrasas selected through convenience sampling, along with utilizing secondary sources.

Historical Context of Madrasa Education in Kashmir Valley

Before the arrival of Islam, the Kashmir Valley was predominantly Hindu. According to historical accounts, the conversion of the masses to Islam in the region was reportedly a non-violent process. It is believed to have resulted from dissatisfaction with the oppressive policies of the then rulers and the perceived elitism of Brahmins, who held sway over the lower castes. While Buddhism gained initial acceptance, it eventually waned, making way for the significant appeal of Islam to the people of Kashmir⁸. Top of Form

The initial preacher in Kashmir was Bulbul Shah Sahib, a Sufi from the Suharwardi Order hailing from Central Asia. He arrived during the reign of the Hindu king, Raja Suha Dev. Although his first stay in Kashmir was brief, he returned during the time of the Buddhist king, Rinchen Shah. It is asserted that Bulbul Shah successfully converted Rinchen Shah to Islam, establishing the foundation for Muslim rule in Kashmir, which endured for centuries. Despite making only a few converts, the return of Hindu rulers followed Rinchen's death. Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani, accompanied by hundreds of disciples, journeyed from Central Asia to Kashmir and played a pivotal role in converting numerous locals to Islam. He and his followers extensively propagated Islam throughout the entire valley. Mir Sayyid preached the Islamic faith and instigated a comprehensive transformation in social, economic, and political realms. Along with introducing new arts and crafts to Kashmir, he and his followers sparked an economic

revolution among the impoverished masses, empowering them financially and garnering widespread appeal among the common people⁹.

Recent studies suggest the presence of Muslims in the Kashmir Valley before the arrival of Sufis. According to legend, Prophet Mohammad sent two envoys to the 7th Century Kashmiri King, Venna Dutt. Impressed by their presentation of Islam, the king adopted a simpler lifestyle, adhering to Islamic principles such as donating a tenth of his produce to the needy. Despite Muslims already being in Kashmir, it was the arrival of that Sufis that played a crucial role in the widespread adoption of Islam, turning it into the prevailing religion. The Sufis established educational institutions and religious centres, and Muslim kings assisted when required, contributing to the expansion of Islam in the region¹⁰.

The history of Kashmir notes that after the Shahmiri Dynasty seized the throne, Islam experienced significant growth, marked by the swift establishment of the Madrasas, Maqtabas, and Khankahas. Those who embraced Islam received fundamental religious education in these institutions. Typically, children were enrolled in Madrasas at the age of five, where they were introduced to the Arabic language and later studied Hadith (sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad and central source of Islamic theology and law, considered to be second only to the Quran in importance), Tafseer (exegesis, usually of the Quran), and Islamic Jurisprudence¹¹. According to some researchers, in addition to Islamic studies, these institutions also provided education in indigenous medical knowledge, archery, swordsmanship, and horse riding. These establishments became sources of hope for the people, crucial in disseminating knowledge about Islam and various other subjects¹².

As decades and centuries passed, the ruling monarchs changed, but the Madrasa system persisted. Under Mughal and Afghan rule, new Madrasas were established, and existing ones received grants and support. However, during the Sikh and Dogra rule, there was hostility towards these institutions, leading to the decline and even deterioration of some¹³. The Dogra administration primarily adhered to traditional educational methods through tsatahals (traditional schools). This involved gurukuls for Pandits, focusing on Sanskrit education, and Madrasas for Muslims, emphasizing Quranic education. Madrasas also provided instruction in the Persian language. Additionally, a widespread network of makaatib existed, associated with major mosques, where children were taught to read the Quran without necessarily understanding its content¹⁴.

Despite the historical tensions between Sikh and Dogra regimes and the Madrasas, these educational institutions continued to play a vital role in Kashmiri society, contributing significantly to the growth of Islam. Following the end of Dogra rule in 1947, a democratic setup was established under the Indian constitution, with Sheikh Abdullah becoming the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Under his leadership, a revolutionary land reform movement endeared him to the masses, and the state government initiated the establishment of new educational institutions, including a Medical College and a Regional Engineering College¹⁵.

After accession to India, religious and revivalist movements, such as Jamiat-e-Ahle Hadith, Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), Anjuman Tablighul Islam, and All Jammu & Kashmir Shariye Shuiyaan, played a crucial role in developing a network of educational institutes. These institutions offered a diverse curriculum encompassing both secular and religious education, and notably, they admitted female students¹⁶. While affiliated to their respective organizations, these institutions represented a fusion of Madrasa and school systems, providing Islamic education without strictly adhering to the traditional Madrasa model. Additionally, these religious organizations established new Madrasas that served as centres for Islamic learning, with some of them being affiliated to government higher education institutions to confer recognized degrees¹⁷.

During the pre-accession period, the stance of the Dogra ruler against Muslims, coupled with the educational endeavours of Christian schools, prompted religious scholars, particularly from the Mirwaiz family, to spearhead a movement for social and religious reform¹⁸. Mirwais Rasul Shah played a pivotal role by founding Anjuman e Nusratul Islam in 1889. Additionally, in 1899, he established the Islamia School under the auspices of Anjuman, providing a significant platform for education among the general population¹⁹. This initiative not only offered an alternative to missionary and government schools in Kashmir but also proved successful in imparting education to Kashmiri Muslims.

As awareness about education grew, numerous young individuals relocated to various regions of India in the early 20th century to enroll in renowned Madrasas and secular educational institutions. Upon completing their studies and returning, they played a crucial role in the proliferation of Madrasas in the Kashmir valley, contributing to the socio-political transformation of Kashmiri society. This trend persisted even after Kashmir acceded to India, leading to a thriving Madrasa system of education. In the later decades of the 20th

century, many Kashmiri youth travelled to Saudi Arabia and Iran²⁰. Upon their return, they established numerous Madrasas to promote their particular interpretation of Islam. These Madrasas remain operational, providing Islamic education to a substantial number of Kashmiri students.

Madrasas in Kashmir have experienced significant growth, with a presence now in every town or big village. They are linked to prominent Madrasas in the valley, which, in turn, are associated with various Madrasas across India, schools of thought, and sects. Each Madrasa adheres to a specific school of thought in its curriculum. Although the course materials are somewhat similar, the Qur'anic interpretation recommended is authored by a scholar from their sect. A similar pattern applies to jurisprudence, where adherence to a single school of thought is the norm, except for the Salafis and Ahle Hadith who may assert independence from any jurist or school of thought. Even in Salafi Madrasas, the prescribed textbooks for jurisprudence are authored by Salafi scholars, often based in Saudi Arabia or the Gulf. Likewise, JeI-affiliated Madrasas incorporate fundamental textbooks and perspectives of Mawlana Maududi and other JeI-affiliated scholars into their curriculum²¹.

It is crucial to note that since the 1980s, the rise in the establishment of Madrasas in Kashmir is also associated with Pakistan and its involvement in promoting terrorism. Pakistan seeks to exploit these Madrasas as a means to target India and its agencies under the guise of religious motives. Given that Madrasas primarily offer religious education, individuals are more likely to be influenced toward fundamentalism. Therefore, it aligns with the interests of Pakistan and its security agencies to increase the Madrasas in Kashmir, serving as a tool for advancing their propagandistic agendas²². Madrasas exclusively focused on Islamic education are particularly susceptible to being used for anti-national propaganda²³. This strategic connection between the establishment of Madrasas and Pakistan's geopolitical objectives underscores the complex dynamics shaping the educational landscape in Kashmir.

Assessing the Madrasa Education System in Kashmir

To enhance clarity, the author has structured the analysis of the Madrasa Education System using distinct sub-headings in this research article. Each sub-heading scrutinizes different aspects of the Madrasa system, elucidating a range of features within each specified category.

1. Curriculum & Course

2. Infrastructure
3. Teachers
4. Assessment and Evaluation
5. Religious focus
6. Funding
7. Background of students
8. Administration

Curriculum & Course

The fundamental purpose behind establishing the Madrasa system was to impart education on the Quran, Hadith, Islamic Jurisprudence, and the pertinent aspects of Islamic history²⁴. The establishment of the Madrasa system is intended to contribute to the well-being and promotion of Islam. Undoubtedly, Madrasas have effectively fulfilled these objectives by producing numerous knowledgeable Muslim individuals well-versed in Islam. Therefore, with the primary goal being the dissemination of Islamic education and the advancement of Islam, it is evident that the curriculum will be centered around Islam, encompassing the Quran, Hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, and historical teachings.

In Kashmir's Madrasas, students undergo the same courses and adhere to a curriculum similar to the top Madrasas across the country. However, each Madrasa aligns itself with the top institutions associated with its sect. Consequently, students are educated based on the teachings of their particular sect. Primarily Madrasas in Kashmir have different courses, included among them Nazira-e-Quran or Tajweed (Fundamentals of Arabic and Quranic language including grammar), Hifiz (memorization of the Quran), Molviyat (Almiyat – pragmatism, and Fazilat – proficiency) and Iftah (Research)²⁵. The educational focus also includes training students in the art of debate, to equip them with argumentative skills to prevail over opponents and assert the superiority of their school of thought. The predominant emphasis in many Madrasas is to categorize alternative schools of thought as deviating from the true path of Islam. The libraries in these institutions predominantly contain extensive literature authored by proponents of their sect, aimed at refuting other sects. Both overt and covert aspects of the curriculum incorporate elements that lean towards sectarian perspectives²⁶.

It's important to mention that nowadays, some Madrasas have started teaching modern subjects alongside their traditional courses. However, the problem is that these courses often remain unchanged and outdated. The main issue here is that these Madrasas are not

officially recognized, so students who study there face difficulties when applying for jobs in both private and government sectors²⁷.

Even though some Madrasas are trying to modernize their teachings, the fact that they lack official recognition is a big obstacle for students. This means that the knowledge and skills they gain may not be accepted or valued by employers when they look for jobs. Getting official recognition for these Madrasas is crucial so that students can have better chances in the job market and transition smoothly from Madrasa education to mainstream professional opportunities²⁸.

Infrastructure

The right infrastructure is crucial for students to thrive in their learning environment. Modern schools include well-constructed buildings, good classrooms, libraries with plenty of resources, labs for practical learning, and facilities for sports and other activities.

However, in Kashmir's Madrasas, while the buildings are generally well-built, there are significant shortcomings. The classrooms are not adequate, and there is a lack of libraries, reading rooms, sports facilities, and medical support. Despite being mostly boarding schools, the accommodation provided is often substandard. In some Madrasas, overcrowding is an issue, with 10-20 students sharing a single room without proper bedding. The food provided is also not of good quality, and students don't receive a balanced diet essential for their overall growth. Addressing these infrastructure gaps is crucial for ensuring that students in Madrasas have a conducive and supportive learning environment.

Teachers

Educators are regarded as the architects of a nation, entrusted with the pivotal role of shaping the minds of future generations. A teacher, ideally, should possess a comprehensive and adaptable skill set, staying well-informed about global affairs. However, numerous studies shed light on the lamentable state of teachers and their instructional capabilities in Madrasas²⁹.

Notably, instructors recruited in Madrasas often hail from a specific educational background, limiting their exposure to modern educational methods. Their expertise is predominantly rooted in Quranic and Islamic teachings³⁰, lacking a broader understanding of contemporary educational practices. Consequently, this limitation

is transferred to their students, impeding the acquisition of diverse knowledge.

A glaring issue lies in the outdated nature of their knowledge and teaching methodologies. The employment of corporal punishment as a means of behaviour-modification is a distressing manifestation of ineffective teaching methods³¹. This not only hampers the learning experience but also raises concerns about the overall educational environment within Madrasas.

Moreover, the dire circumstances faced by teachers extend beyond the classroom. Their financial compensation is often inadequate, falling short of minimum wage standards in certain Madrasas³². Furthermore, the absence of social security measures and medical benefits compounds the challenges faced by educators in these institutions³³. This multifaceted problem underscores the need for comprehensive reforms to uplift both the professional standing and working conditions of teachers in Madrasas. Top of Form

Assessment and Evaluation

The assessment and evaluation methods vary from Madrasa to Madrasa. But they mainly assess through two means, which are Tahreeri (Written) and Takreeri (Oral). Tahreeri tests also vary, some take one written exam annually, some twice a year. The oral exam depends on the course³⁴.

Religious focus

As previously mentioned, Madrasas are educational institutions where the primary focus is on imparting knowledge related to Islam. The very term “Madrasa” indicates their emphasis on Islamic education. The curriculum in Madrasas primarily includes the study of the Holy Quran, teachings from Hadith, Islamic Jurisprudence, and Islamic history. The overarching goal of Madrasa education is to instill a deep understanding and appreciation of Islamic principles and values.

It’s important to note that Madrasas have been criticized by some scholars, who argue that their traditional approach may foster conservative thinking. These critics advocate for reforms in Madrasa education to align it with contemporary times. The objective is to make the education provided in Madrasas more relevant to the current context and, in doing so, enhance the overall benefit for Muslim students, the Islamic society at large, and Islam itself.

The proposed reforms aim to strike a balance between preserving the core tenets of Islamic education and adapting to the evolving needs of the present era. By modernizing the curriculum and teaching methods, there is a belief that Madrasas can better equip students to navigate the complexities of the modern world while remaining grounded in the teachings of Islam. This perspective underscores the importance of ensuring that Madrasa education remains a dynamic and valuable resource for Muslim communities, contributing to their intellectual and social development.

Funding

Zakat³⁵ is a crucial concept in Islam, representing one-fifth of its fundamental principles. According to Islamic law, every financially capable individual is required to donate 2.5% of their wealth. Additionally, there are other mandatory forms of giving, such as Sadaqah³⁶, and Ushr³⁷, especially for those who are well-off. Failing to contribute when able is considered a significant sin in Islam.

Islam also encourages people to donate a portion of their wealth for the advancement of the faith, and Madrasas play a vital role in promoting and serving the interests of Islam. These institutions heavily rely on various donations, including Zakat, Sadqa, and Ushr. During Ramadan, Madrasas collect significant funds, and donations flow in during Eid-ul-Adha when people contribute the hides of their sacrificed animals.

Furthermore, individuals voluntarily donate to support the establishment and operation of Madrasas. Graduation ceremonies and events showcase the progress of Madrasas, encouraging the Muslim community to contribute financially. Madrasas employ various methods, including crowdfunding and dedicated staff like Safer who go door-to-door to collect funds. In this way, Madrasas secure the necessary funds to sustain and operate their institutions, ensuring the continuation of Islamic education.

Background of Students

According to an analysis by the Hindustan Times, data from the All-India Debt and Investment Survey (AIDIS) and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) indicates that Muslims in India face economic challenges, being identified as the poorest religious group³⁸. This echoes findings from the earlier Sachar Committee, which also highlighted the dire economic conditions among Muslims³⁹.

Consequently, some financially struggling families feel compelled to enrol their children in Madrasas, as these institutions offer free education along with food, accommodation, clothing, and even medical facilities⁴⁰.

The majority of Madrasa students, as indicated by research and available data, come from impoverished backgrounds, particularly from the OBC (Other Backward Classes), ST (Scheduled Tribes), and SC (Scheduled Castes) among Muslims⁴¹. This trend is consistent in Kashmir, where most Madrasa students hail from economically disadvantaged sections⁴². Unfortunately, the education provided in Madrasas is often outdated, leading to a concerning cycle of poverty. Upon completing their studies, many Madrasa graduates struggle to find employment opportunities. Some end up taking low-paying positions as mosque imams or Islamic preachers, contributing to their continued financial hardship. This situation underscores the need for addressing the economic challenges faced by the Muslim community and enhancing the quality and relevance of education provided in Madrasas to break the cycle of poverty⁴³. Top of Form

Administration

In Kashmir, Madrasas are set up by different groups such as religious scholars, former Madrasa students who have achieved success, or committees associated with mosques, shrines, and religious movements like Jamaat-I-Islami, Ahlehadees, Tablighi, Sout-ul-Auliya, Karwan-I-Islami, and others. Each of these groups or leaders establishes internal committees to manage and oversee the functioning of their respective Madrasas⁴⁴.

Each Madrasa operates with a committee overseeing its activities, and academic matters are managed by a principal along with recruited teachers. The committees responsible for the Madrasa's affairs typically appoint principals and teachers. Additionally, cooks are hired to prepare food for the students enrolled in the Madrasa. A caretaker, known as Muhtamim, is appointed by the Madrasa committee to supervise and he directly reports to the managing committee. To collect donations, Safeers are employed, and they go door-to-door and mosque-to-mosque, earning a commission on the funds raised⁴⁵.

However, there are drawbacks to these administrative committees. They lack direct accountability to the people, and there is no government regulation to oversee their functioning. These committees often operate autonomously, following their preferences

without adhering to democratic principles in their decision-making processes.

Challenges and Issues of Concern

“Read in the name of your Lord, who created: created man from a clot of congealed blood. Read! And your Lord is the most merciful, who has taught (the writing) by the pen, taught man about which he knew not.” (AL-Alaq, 1-5: The Holy Quran)

In a research paper by Dr. Kamrul Hasan, he mentions that the educational backwardness of the Muslim community is generally attributed to their orthodoxy coupled with their emphasis on theological education with little effort to change the traditional educational system and acquire the knowledge relevant to the needs of the changing world, and Kashmir is no different⁴⁶. In the same article, Dr. Kamrul Hassan states that both Muslim literacy and work participation in India are at a low level because if the level of education is low, employment opportunities will be less available⁴⁷. But only the level of education cannot provide employment, for it has to be seen what the quality of the education is so that those who are getting an education in Madrasas are also able to access the limited fields of employment, and whether they too have been modernized in the Madrasa education so that their chances of employment will increase. The challenges to Madrasa education could be discussed on the following lines;

- *Outdated scheme of Education*

As previously mentioned, the educational framework in Madrasas is antiquated and primarily focused on religious studies. Fundamental subjects such as the sciences, social sciences, English, computer science, and general knowledge are neglected, resulting in students being unjustly deprived of a well-rounded education necessary for personal development and intellectual growth. During the interviews, it was noted that the primary goal of Madrasas is to uphold Islam and promote its principles. While it's understandable that their focus is on serving Islam, this narrow aim neglects other essential aspects of education, which is regrettable. Although Madrasas have the right, as per the Indian constitution, to prioritize religious education, they should also be open to incorporating secular subjects to remain relevant in today's world.

Due to the limited scope of education provided by Madrasas, their

graduates often struggle to compete with peers who have received schooling in more diverse institutions. Consequently, they encounter challenges in securing respectable employment in competitive markets due to their lack of relevant skills. This leads many to pursue careers such as Imam⁴⁸, Moiazzin⁴⁹, or Madrasa teachers, which fulfil their religious aspirations but fail to address their worldly needs, perpetuating a cycle of poverty.

Various governmental and non-governmental agencies have collected statistical data revealing the dire socio-economic conditions of Muslims in India. The Sachar Committee's report, in particular, shed light on the underdevelopment of the Muslim community, highlighting their marginalized status within Indian society⁵⁰.

Therefore, Madrasas must address this issue earnestly. To remain pertinent in contemporary times, they must promptly reform their educational approach and embrace a more comprehensive curriculum that caters to both religious and secular knowledge.

- *Recognition*

Another persistent challenge facing Madrasas is the issue of governmental recognition. In Kashmir, there is largely no formal recognition system for Madrasas and an absence of governmental regulations governing them. While a few Madrasas' degrees are recognized by Kashmir University and other Indian universities, such cases are rare due to the stringent conditions set by the universities, resulting in around 95% of students failing to meet the eligibility criteria for degree recognition. The primary issue stems from the lack of standardized eligibility criteria for admission to Madrasas, with most only requiring Molviyat, which often falls short of universities' basic criteria. For instance, while some Madrasas mandate an 8th-grade education for Molviyat, Kashmir University requires a 12th-grade education and an Aalim Degree from a Madrasa for admission to Master's programs, a requirement many Madrasa students fail to meet⁵¹.

Consequently, the lack of recognition renders Madrasa degrees beneficial only for religious purposes, with no tangible benefits in the wider society. Government recognition is crucial in resolving this issue. If the government were to recognize Madrasas akin to other educational institutions under a distinct board of education, it would address this problem once and for all. Therefore, the pressing need of the hour is government recognition while ensuring that Madrasas retain their autonomy by the principles outlined in the

Indian Constitution.

- *Funding*

Madrasas primarily rely on donations mandated by religion, such as Zakat, Sadaqah, and Ushr, among others. However, a significant challenge arises as these funds are irregular and challenging to collect. Madrasas often expend considerable effort in gathering these donations, which ultimately prove insufficient to maintain their operations adequately. Financial constraints give rise to various other issues within Madrasas, including inadequate teacher salaries, lack of proper infrastructure, and poor facilities.

Through interviews, the author found that people are generally reluctant to donate generously to these institutions. This reluctance stems from the broader economic downturn experienced in the Kashmir Valley, exacerbated by frequent shutdowns due to conflict, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and other factors. Consequently, the financial viability of Madrasas is severely compromised, impacting their ability to provide quality education and essential resources to their students and staff.

So, the heavy reliance on irregular religious donations, coupled with economic challenges faced by the Kashmir Valley, poses significant financial obstacles for Madrasas, ultimately hindering their operational capabilities and educational standards.

- *Orthodoxy & ignorance*

Fundamentalism, orthodoxy, and ignorance have become widespread issues within Muslim society, causing significant setbacks. Discussions regarding the reformation in the Madrasa system and other Islamic practices often provoke a backlash from orthodox Muslims and Islamic scholars. While some of their concerns may be valid, not every reaction is necessary and can sometimes harm their interests. The question arises: why are they resistant to changing their attitudes? It's important to note that reforming the system wouldn't necessarily harm them; in fact, it could eliminate backwardness and bring about benefits.

Ignorance within Muslim society is a major obstacle, preventing many from embracing modern and scientific subjects and instead adhering strictly to age-old syllabi. Responsibility for this lies partly with the entire community but educated Muslims and clerics also play a significant role by failing to take steps toward community

development.

Despite living in an era of digitalization and technology, Muslims often seem stuck in the past, forgetting the importance of education as emphasized by Prophet Muhammad^{52, 53}. Many present-day Muslims even believe that they need to do nothing as God will handle everything for them. However, it's crucial to remember that Allah has mentioned in the Quran that Muslims must take control of their destinies.

A positive change is urgently needed in Madrasas, especially considering that most of their students come from economically disadvantaged families. Continuing to live in poverty after Madrasa education perpetuates a vicious cycle, as religious education alone cannot lift them out of their circumstances upon graduation. Therefore, it's clear that solely religious education is insufficient to change the fate of Muslims; they require both worldly and Islamic education for comprehensive growth and development.

- *Public disinterest*

During interviews, it became apparent that the Muslim community is becoming less enthusiastic about Madrasas. People's attitudes are shifting, and fewer are willing to send their children to Madrasas unless they are economically disadvantaged. Additionally, there is a decrease in direct donations from individuals, with many only contributing what is mandated by Islam, and even then, not always by Islamic law. Furthermore, Madrasa education is losing respect among the public, as it is perceived to offer limited employment opportunities.

These issues are straightforward to grasp, but those involved with Madrasas and the Muslim community overall must acknowledge them. Failure to address these concerns could lead to a decline in the Madrasa education system over time. Therefore, the need of the hour is to reform and reorganize the Madrasa education system to ensure its relevance in tackling present and future challenges.

Impact of Madrasas on Kashmiri Society

The Kashmir Valley covers an area of 15,948 Km² and is inhabited by a population where more than 90% follow the Muslim faith⁵⁴. The society here is heavily influenced by Islam, and ongoing political tensions have led to Islam being exploited as a tool to weaken the Indian state. Pakistan has actively collaborated with various militant

and religious groups to promote fundamentalism among the people of Kashmir, potentially aiding in targeting the Indian state in the region⁵⁵.

There are over a hundred Madrasas spread across the Kashmir Valley, dedicated to teaching Islamic principles. Interviews with faculty, administrators, students, and the general public have revealed that these Madrasas primarily exist to serve the interests of Islam, which is why they hold significant importance in Kashmiri society. The majority of Madrasa students often end up working as Khatibs⁵⁶, Imams, Moiazzins, or teachers in local Darsgahs (academies) or other Madrasas across the Valley. Mosques and Darsgahs are ubiquitous in every part of the valley, ensuring that Madrasa students are present everywhere. Mosques serve as the focal point of Kashmiri society, where people gather daily for prayers, while Darsgahs, typically located in every village or neighbourhood (usually adjacent to mosques), are places where Quran and Hadith are taught to local children in the evening or morning.

While it was observed that many people are reluctant to enrol their children to Madrasas unless they are economically disadvantaged due to the outdated education system in these institutions, it's important to note that this isn't a universal sentiment. Some students still come from middle-class or even upper-strata Kashmiri families. However, there is no hesitation among people in sending their children to local Darsgahs for basic Quran teachings daily. This underscores the significant influence Madrasa students have in shaping the thoughts of young children.

In addition, mosques serve as gathering places for prayers and weekly sermons delivered by the mosque's Khateeb. Madrasa students play a crucial role in influencing the mindset of people during these gatherings and are knowledgeable about day-to-day occurrences, contributing to public awareness. Furthermore, some Imams have initiated daily talks in certain mosques to promote reform in line with Islamic principles. The importance of Madrasas is underscored by the fact that almost every Imam and Darsgah teacher is a Madrasa graduate. This is significant as mosques have historically played a central role in mobilizing people during uprisings and militant activities.

Moreover, Kashmir is a Muslim-dominated society, and there is widespread respect for the moral character of Madrasa students, who are seen as upholders of pure moral values. People expect their children to emulate these values and lead their lives according to Islamic principles.

On the flip side, Madrasa education often leads to financial

instability for the families of students, as graduates typically end up in low-paying jobs such as Imams, Khatibs, or Darasgah teachers, earning below minimum wage rates. This perpetuates a cycle of financial instability across generations, impacting society at large.

In conclusion, Madrasas play a crucial role in Kashmiri society, influencing politics, economics, culture, and social dynamics.

Recommendations

There's no denying that the Madrasa education system in Kashmir is rigid and outdated, requiring urgent reforms to stay relevant in the present and future. Simply focusing on religious studies isn't enough anymore. In today's digital age, individuals need to have a well-rounded education that encompasses various fields crucial for life. The teachings of the Quran and the Prophet make it clear that Islam doesn't restrict Muslims to studying just the Quran and Hadith⁵⁷. Instead, it encourages them to seek knowledge about the world and strike a balance between their worldly and religious responsibilities. There's no evidence to suggest that Muslims must devote all their time to worship and study Islam exclusively.

Kashmir's Madrasas must undergo immediate reforms to ensure that Madrasa students receive quality education in both Islamic studies and worldly subjects. Here are some recommendations for reforming the Madrasa education system in the Valley to ensure that every student receives their rightful education and can develop themselves like students in mainstream schools and colleges:

a. Two-way education system

Madrasas should consider adopting a two-way education system. This approach involves either updating their curriculum to include modern subjects such as science, social sciences, English, computer science, etc., aligning with societal needs, or implementing a dual-track system. In the dual-track system, students would receive religious education in the morning and government-mandated subjects in the evening. This comprehensive approach ensures that students not only receive religious instruction but also gain proficiency in other academic disciplines necessary for success in contemporary society. By following this model, students can acquire knowledge in various subjects, pass standardized exams, and qualify for admission to colleges and universities.

b. Board of Madrasa Education and Recognition & Regulation

The Government of Jammu & Kashmir has recently established a committee with the task of framing a comprehensive draft proposal for the formation of a Madrasa Board⁵⁸. While some Madrasas have expressed support for this initiative, others are waiting for the committee's recommendations before making any comments. Given the sensitivity of the Kashmir region, the government must proceed cautiously and ensure the involvement of all stakeholders. While this step is a positive one, it's important to avoid unilateral decisions that neglect the concerns of different factions within the Kashmir Valley's Madrasas, which encompass various schools of thought.

The establishment of a Madrasa Board serves two main purposes: firstly, it aims to recognize Madrasa education and the degrees they confer, and secondly, it seeks to regulate Madrasas to ensure the provision of quality education aligned with modern educational standards. In an interview with *Outlook*, Dr. Syed Darakhshan Andrabi, Chairperson of the J&K Waqf Board, highlighted the potential benefits of the board, including the opportunity for Madrasas to incorporate science and technology into their curriculum. She emphasized that Muslim scholars leading these institutions have long advocated for such a board, and it's a positive development that the government has taken their concerns seriously⁵⁹.

The Board's role would extend to granting degrees to Madrasa students, akin to the CBSE and Board of School Education. This move signifies a significant step towards integrating Madrasa education into the mainstream education system in the Valley. However, the government must ensure that its actions are in line with the Indian Constitution and that it respects and considers the opinions of the people. Interviews have revealed that Madrasa administrations are supportive of the Board's formation as long as it's done with good intentions.

c. Vocational Education and Training

In contemporary times, the importance of vocational training stands on par with traditional education, extending its relevance not only to Madrasas but also to mainstream schools and colleges. The National Education Policy (NEP) recognizes the pivotal role of vocational training and education by allocating it a significant portion of focus. Vocational education is geared towards equipping students with specialized skills tailored for specific job markets, thereby enhancing their employability prospects. Hence, it is imperative for Madrasas in the valley to integrate vocational training and education seamlessly

into their academic framework, ensuring comprehensive benefits for their students. Through the provision of vocational training, students can acquire practical skills that are in demand in the job market, all the while continuing their academic pursuits uninterrupted.

d. Quality Teachers

The lack of trained, qualified, and competent teachers poses a significant challenge for Madrasas in the Kashmir Valley. Interviews have revealed glaring issues such as the absence of a standardized procedure for teacher recruitment, inadequate training in teaching methodologies, insufficient verification of academic credentials, absence of subject specialization among teachers, and the unfortunate use of corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool. Furthermore, many teachers lack research experience, relying solely on theoretical knowledge without practical application.

Addressing these pressing issues is imperative. Madrasa administrations must prioritize implementing a structured process for hiring teachers, ensuring they possess the necessary qualifications and expertise. Comprehensive training programs should be provided to enhance teaching skills and methodologies, while the practice of corporal punishment must be unequivocally prohibited.

However, it's essential to consider the plight of Madrasa teachers as well. Many endure deplorable working conditions, receiving meager salaries and lacking social security benefits. This aspect also demands urgent attention from the administration to improve the overall welfare of Madrasa educators.

e. Improvement in Infrastructure

It has been widely observed that Madrasas in Kashmir suffer from inadequate infrastructure, particularly with regard to boarding facilities. The essential requirements for running such boarding institutions are often lacking. Therefore, there is an urgent need to address this issue by providing proper facilities. These include adequate classrooms, proper dormitories for sleeping, dining halls, sports facilities, healthcare amenities, hygiene facilities, efficient heating systems for the harsh winters, and robust security measures.

Ensuring the availability of these facilities is crucial for facilitating the overall development of students. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the administration to prioritize the establishment of proper infrastructure in Madrasas, thereby offering students a conducive

environment for their holistic growth and well-being.

f. Administrative reforms

Effective administration is crucial for the smooth functioning of Madrasas in the Kashmir Valley. However, the current state of the Madrasa administration is disorganized and lacks efficiency, transparency, and accountability. There is a pressing need for a well-structured hierarchical administration system that prioritizes accountability.

Presently, the Madrasa administration is predominantly controlled by Islamic scholars and their supporters, leading to a lack of diversity and constructive criticism within the administrative framework. This polarized structure, where leadership and its supporters dominate, stifles innovation and growth. Therefore, reforms in administration are imperative to foster a conducive environment for efficient education delivery and holistic development of students.

It is essential to introduce reforms that promote inclusivity and allow visionary leaders from diverse backgrounds to contribute to the administration. Moreover, the administrative structure should be flexible enough to accommodate reforms aimed at benefiting the entire community. Ultimately, a robust and visionary administration is pivotal in ensuring the common good and overall advancement of Madrasa education in the region.

g. Collaboration with Educational Institutions

Madrasas in Kashmir have the potential to establish collaborations with various educational institutions within Jammu & Kashmir, such as Kashmir University, as well as minority educational institutions across India, including Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Jamia Hamdard, and MANUU. These partnerships could facilitate recognition of Madrasa degrees and provide opportunities for additional courses, workshops, and conferences.

Reports suggest that institutions like AMU, JMI, and MANUU have existing provisions for supporting Madrasas and their welfare⁶⁰. It is now crucial to take concrete steps towards leveraging these opportunities. Through collaboration, Madrasas can enhance the qualifications of their teachers and gain recognition for their educational programs on a broader scale.

Furthermore, Madrasas should actively seek to maximize the benefits available through various schemes offered by the Ministry of Minority

Affairs. By capitalizing on these opportunities, Madrasas can further their mission of providing quality education and fostering academic excellence within the minority community.

h. Online Education

In today's era, online education through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) has become increasingly prevalent. Many esteemed educational institutions from India and abroad offer a wide array of courses through online platforms, often free of charge. Additionally, the Government of India, in collaboration with renowned educational entities, has initiated MOOCs programs accessible to all at no cost. Madrasas in Kashmir must seize the opportunities presented by these open platforms.

By leveraging MOOCs, Madrasas can provide their students with access to diverse courses, fostering their overall development. Furthermore, students have the option to pursue distance education at minimal costs through different institutions. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Madrasa administrations to proactively embrace these opportunities and take requisite measures for the benefit of their students. By doing so, they can ensure a comprehensive education for their students, encompassing both Islamic and secular knowledge domains.

Conclusion

Upon a thorough examination of Madrasa education in Kashmir, it becomes apparent that reform is indispensable for the sustainability of these institutions in the Valley. There is an urgent call for a movement towards reformation within Madrasas, and Islamic scholars, irrespective of their specific theological orientations, must acknowledge this necessity and its potential ramifications. While their apprehensions may be valid at times, holding onto the status quo is no longer tenable. It is time for a shift towards transformative change and comprehensive reformation. Though a few Madrasas have initiated reforms, they are limited in scope; what is urgently required is a holistic overhaul.

In today's world, characterized by advancements in science, technology, and artificial intelligence (AI), it is imperative to acknowledge that outdated educational approaches cannot adequately serve the needs of students. For Madrasas to progress and thrive, they must embrace modernization and abandon

orthodoxy and ignorance. With his vision of modern education and enlightenment, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan should serve as a role model for all Madrasa educators and administrators.

First and foremost, Madrasa leaders must grasp the societal demands and recognize that the public is increasingly disinterested in their traditional educational model. The stagnation of Muslims' conditions can be attributed to their adherence to orthodoxy and ignorance, indicating the urgent need to abandon both.

Secondly, while Madrasas have historically played a vital role in promoting Islam's interests, they must adapt to continue serving the faith effectively. This entails a shift in mindset and a willingness to embrace changes within the educational system to foster progress and development.

Thirdly, Madrasas must acknowledge Islam's emphasis on education, as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad's teachings regarding the duty of seeking knowledge. Education in Islam extends beyond religious studies, and Madrasas must broaden their curriculum to incorporate modern education.

Fourthly, with the government's initiative to establish a Madrasa Education Board, all Madrasas should view this as a positive step forward. Rather than opposing the move, they should actively participate in the process to ensure the Board's inclusivity and benefit for all. Top scholars need to heed the advice of political scientists and seize this opportunity to lead the reformation movement for the advancement of Madrasas and the overall benefit of Islam.

In conclusion, concerted efforts are needed across various fronts to revitalize Madrasas. These institutions should focus on producing more Imams and Madrasa teachers and aim to cultivate leaders capable of steering Muslims toward development and progress. Madrasa stakeholders must acknowledge the current state of affairs and recognize the necessity for positive change. By embracing reformation and modernization, Madrasas can adapt to the evolving educational landscape and better prepare their students for the challenges of the modern world.

Notes

1. By Islamic Scriptures, this paper means the Holy Quran, Hadith, and Fiqah.
2. It is believed by Muslims that the word 'Iqra' was the first word revealed to Prophet Mohammad by Allah.
3. Al-Quran 39:9
4. Abd al-Bar in his book *Jaami Bayaan Al-Ilm waFadhluh* has mentioned this Hadith.

5. Ad-Daylami in his book *Al-Firdaws bi Ma'thoor Al-Khitaab*.
6. Hilal Ahmad Wani "Madrasah Education in India: A Need for Reformation," *ATIKAN: Jurnal Kaijan Pendidikan*, 2:2, 2012, pp. 235-252.
7. Ibid.
8. Prem Nath Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir- Cultural and Political: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, Naya Hindustan Press, Chandni Chowk, Delhi, 1954, p.74-76.
9. Mushtaq ul Haq Ahmad Sikander, 'Living Faith: Madrasa Education in Kashmir,' *The Alamdar*, Vol. XVII (2022). Available at <https://markazinoor.uok.edu.in/Files/43f7d981-9626-4f29-9eaf-1cc7a463a9c1/Journal/08a98650-e7f2-4faa-883d-f0dfa4782e65.pdf>. Accessed 05 May, 2024.
10. Ibid.
11. Nasir Ahmad Bhat Trali, *Madrasa Education in Jammu and Kashmir*, Ikhlas Welfare Society Tral, Kashmir, 2022.
12. Ibid.
13. Mushtaq ul Haq Ahmad Sikander, 'Living Faith: Madrasa Education in Kashmir,' *The Alamdar*, Vol. XVII (2022)
14. Nazir A Qadiri, *The Pride of Kashmir- Biography of Allamah Anwar Shah Kashmiri*, 2015.
15. Prem Nath Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir- Cultural and Political: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, Naya Hindustan Press, Chandni Chowk, Delhi, 1954, p.74-76.
16. Nazir Ahmad Dar, *Religious Institutes of Kashmir*, Jay Kay Publishers, Srinagar, 2015.
17. Ibid.
18. Prem Nath Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir- Cultural and Political: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, Naya Hindustan Press, Chandni Chowk, Delhi, 1954, p.74-76.
19. Basharat Peer, 'The School that helped build Kashmir,' *Rediff News*, July 26, 2004. Available at <https://www.rediff.com/news/2004/jul/26spec1.htm>. Accessed May 05, 2024.
20. K.M. Farooq, *Jamaat-e-Islami Jammu wa Kashmir ki Chand Aham Shaksiyat*, Chinar Publication Trust, Srinagar, 2017.
21. Mushtaq ul Haq Ahmad Sikander, 'Living Faith: Madrasa Education in Kashmir,' *The Alamdar*, Vol. XVII (2022).
22. Peter Chalk, Pakistan's Role in the Kashmir Insurgency, *RAND*, September 1, 2001. Available at <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2001/09/pakistans-role-in-the-kashmir-insurgency.html>. Accessed May 5, 2024.
23. "How Pakistani Madrassas Contribute to Radicalization Dynamics and Religious Terrorism in Indian Administered Jammu and Kashmir," *European Foundation for South Asian Studies* (EFSAS), Amsterdam, April 2019. Available at <https://www.efsas.org/publications/study-papers/how-pakistani-madrassas-contribute-to-radicalization-dynamics-and-terrorism-in-indian-j-and-k/>. Accessed May 6, 2024.
24. During the interviews this statement was repeatedly emphasized by every administrator and faculty along with students.
25. Javeed Mirza, "Madrasa Education: The Need for Reform," *Muslim Mirror*, October 9, 2020. Available at <https://muslimmirror.com/eng/Madrasa-education-the-need-for-reform/>. Accessed May 6, 2024.
26. Mushtaq ul Haq Ahmad Sikander, 'Living Faith: Madrasa Education in

- Kashmir,' *The Alamdar*, Vol. XVII (2022).
27. Naseer Gania, "Madrasa Board In J&K Set To Be Established, Sufis On Board," *Outlook*, February 8, 2024. Available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/Madrasa-board-in-jk-set-to-be-established-sufis-on-board>. Accessed May 3, 2024.
 28. Ibid.
 29. Mushtaq ul Haq Ahmad Sikander, 'Living Faith: Madrasa Education in Kashmir,' *The Alamdar*, Vol. XVII (2022).
 30. This is because the majority of Madrasas don't have the modern system of education and follow the centuries-old system, and teachers are hired from either Kashmir Madrasas only or from the rest of India.
 31. While interviewing the students of Madrasas, it was found that the use of corporal punishment is still prevailing in the Madrasas of Kashmir and there is no check on such crimes by govt. or Madrasa administration.
 32. This is a matter of concern; during the fieldwork for this piece, it was widely found that Madrasa teachers in Kashmir are underpaid which in turn affects the education system in Madrasas.
 33. As known to us, non- recognition of Madrasas in Kashmir is a reality and there is no provision for social security measures for teachers which leads to an overall stressful situation.
 34. Courses like Hifiz (memorization of the Quran) are mostly oral, so the exam is conducted orally. But oral exam also varies from Madrasa to Madrasa, some form a committee (which includes externals also) to conduct oral exams and some just conduct oral exams by their respective teachers and only their authentication is needed.
 35. Zakat is an obligatory form of charity in Islam. It is a specific percentage (2.5%) of one's wealth and assets that must be given to eligible recipients once a year, provided that a certain amount of wealth (nisab) has been maintained over a lunar year. Zakat can only be given to individuals who meet specific eligibility criteria, such as those who are poor, needy, in debt, or stranded travellers.
 36. Sadaqah refers to voluntary acts of charity in Islam. Unlike Zakat, there are no fixed rules regarding the amount or timing of Sadaqah donations. Muslims can donate as much or as little as they wish, at any time, to anyone in need. Sadaqah can be given to anyone, regardless of their financial situation or eligibility criteria. Additionally, Sadaqah and its variant, Sadaqah Jariyah (ongoing charity), can serve as a means of continuous reward for a Muslim even after they have passed away. This can include actions such as building a mosque, digging a well, or supporting educational initiatives that continue to benefit people long after the initial donation. In contrast, Zakat is only obligatory and can only be performed while the individual is alive.
 37. 'Ushr is a tax taken from goods that are used for trading, like goods, animals, crops, or fruits. It is not taken from things that are not used for trading, like clothes, tools, personal items, or food. If someone says the goods they're carrying aren't for trading when similar goods are traded, they need proof to back up their claim. Top of Form
 38. Abhishek Jha and Roshan Kishore, "Muslims are the poorest religious group in India," *Hindustan Times*, June 30, 2023. Available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/muslims-in-india-the-poorest-religious-group-with-high-inequality-and-limited-opportunities-data-analysis-reveals-101688097160955.html>. Accessed May 6, 2024.

39. Kamrul Hasan, "Madrasa Education and Employment Status of Muslims in India," *IJARIE*, 6:5, 2020. Available at https://ijariie.com/AdminUploadPdf/Madrasa_Education_and_Employment_Status_of_Muslims_in_Indian_ijariie12807.pdf. Accessed May 4, 2024.
40. Nasir Ahmad Bhat Trali, *Madrasa Education in Jammu and Kashmir*, Ikhlas Welfare Society Tral, Kashmir, 2022.
41. Devna Soni, "Muslim Education: A Study of Madrasas," *Centre for Civil Society*, Working Paper No. 237, 2010, pp. 1-32.
42. During the interviews, it was widely found that the majority of students studying in Madrasas belong to poor and economically and socially disadvantaged sections of society in Kashmir as well, like in other parts of India.
43. Mushtaq ul Haq Ahmad Sikander, 'Living Faith: Madrasa Education in Kashmir,' *The Alamdar*, Vol. XVII
44. Nasir Ahmad Bhat Trali, *Madrasa Education in Jammu and Kashmir*, Ikhlas Welfare Society Tral, Kashmir, 2022.
45. Mushtaq ul Haq Ahmad Sikander, 'Living Faith: Madrasa Education in Kashmir,' *The Alamdar*, Vol. XVII
46. Kamrul Hasan, "Madrasa Education and Employment Status of Muslims in India," *IJARIE*, 6:5, 2020.
47. Ibid.
48. Imam leads prayers in a mosque.
49. Moaizzin recites azan (call for prayers)
50. Kamrul Hasan, "Madrasa Education and Employment Status of Muslims in India," *IJARIE*, 6:5, 2020.
51. These details were shared by various Madrasas at the time of interview and the same was confirmed from various sources.
52. AL-Tirmidhi:74
53. AL-Tirmidhi: 107
54. Census 2011
55. Peter Chalk, Pakistan's Role in the Kashmir Insurgency, *RAND*, September 1, 2001.
56. Khatibs give Islamic sermons and lectures.
57. 96:1-6 (The Holy Quran)
58. Naseer Gania, "Madrasa Board In J&K Set To Be Established, Sufis On Board," *Outlook*, February 8, 2024.
59. Ibid.
60. Hilal Ahmad Wani "Madrasah Education in India: A Need for Reformation," *ATIKAN: JurnalKajian Pendidikan*, 2:2, 2012, pp. 235-252.