

ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN: PAST AND PRESENT

In Pakistan, the term 'Islamic Schooling' has different meanings for different people, the reason for this is that there is no agreement on the basic question of how much Islam is to be taught. Being tagged as an extremist is the reward you may get if you have ever been near any madrassa or Islamic school. We need to see if madrassas always had this reputation or were they in reality considered esteemed places for knowledge and learning. The Indian Subcontinent has a beautiful history of knowledgeable people with places which helped people quench their thirst for education. The first great expansion of Islam into India came during the Umayyad Dynasty, which was famous for its work in the field of educational and intellectual development. After the formal entrance of Islam into India, different dynasties ruled, from the Ghaznavids to the Mughals, who are portrayed as warriors, conquerors and kings, while ignoring their intense efforts in educating the people. Mahmud Ghaznavi, who was the Wali of the Khalifah, was a great patron of learning. During his rule, Lahore also became a great centre of learning and culture. Lahore was called 'Small Ghazni'. Under the Delhi Sultanate the madrassa education developed considerably and this further developed under the Mughals. It should not be overlooked that in medieval India the education facility was available at least through three forms: formal institutions (in the form of *maktabs and madrasahs*), informal institutions (in the shape of individual centres of teaching) and private teachers and tutors (known as *muallim, muaddib or ataliq*).

One indicator of a civilization is what it has generated in terms of knowledge and how literate its population is. William Dalrymple wrote in his book, *The Last Mughal* (2006), that Delhi was a celebrated intellectual centre and by about 1850 was at its cultural peak with "six famous madrassas and at least four smaller ones, nine newspapers in Urdu and Persian, five intellectual journals published out of Delhi College, innumerable printing presses and publishers, and no fewer than 130 Yunani doctors." He quotes Colonel William Sleeman as admitting that the madrassa education given in Delhi was "quite remarkable". Sleeman himself wrote on a visit to Delhi, the Mughal capital: "Perhaps there are few communities in the world among whom education is more generally diffused than among Mohammadans in India. He who holds an office worth Rs 20 a month commonly gives his sons an education equal to that of a Prime Minister. They learn through the medium of Arabic and Persian, what young men in our colleges learn through those of Greek and Latin — that is grammar, rhetoric and logic."

This gives a brief glimpse into the history of education in India under Islam. The important thing is that people did not go to the madrassas or learning centers to become prayer leaders, but the degree they got from the institute was good enough also to get them a job with the government. Today in Pakistan we see Islamic education being given in three different ways, none of them is designed to meet the cause of raising a child capable enough to live a life that he/she deserves.

- 1) Normal Schools
- 2) Islamic Schools
- 3) Madrassas

Normal schools: These are basically the institutions which were designed by the British in the name of formal education. They considered madrassas to be a danger for the government due to the Islamic ideas that they taught. It's ironic that these are the thoughts of today's government as well. These schools separate religion from life and religion is just taught as an extra subject that has to be kept separate from all worldly affairs. So on one hand the children will be studying evolution in Science and on the other in Islamiyat teaching Surah al Naas describing God as the King of Mankind. Deen is portrayed as a personal matter between a person and the Almighty. All Islamiyat books include incidents from the Prophet's (saw) life that preaches peace and patience, but without relating it to the fact that peace and patience was observed only to obey Allah (swt) and whenever material action was required it was swift and furious. These schools fail to even give the basics of Islam and results in hollow confused

personalities ashamed of their religion, considering it backward, not good enough to answer all the questions of present time nor is it compatible with today's world.

Islamic Schools: These are the schools that emerged in reaction to the secularism that was being taught in the normal schools and the absence of quality learning of worldly education at the madrassas. Parents who were trying to stick to their Islamic values and did not want their children to be westernized found relief in these Islamic schools. These schools are playing an important role in building love for Islam in the little children but they fail to give purpose to this love. The children are taught to take pride in their religion, history and famous personalities but are not taught how to become the source of pride for the coming generations. They try and keep the atmosphere Islamic like promoting the use of khimar and jilbab, but the children fail to understand ; if it is the right behavior then why is it absent from the Society?. This is because the only solution given to eradicate all social evils is personal reform. A child fails to understand that even after doing the right thing he or she is deprived of an ideal Islamic society. Nationalism is promoted and efforts are made to instill the love for country and land. Parents also have to compromise on the standard of education provided, especially after junior school. The main reason for that is that subjects like sciences, mathematics and English demand expert teachers which these schools fail to provide. Most of these schools operate till Matric or 'O' Levels. Parents and children are left wondering where to go for further education while hanging on to their Islamic beliefs. The crux of the matter is that choosing a modern Islamic school in Pakistan is like choosing "one of the lesser evils".

Madrassas: According to a report titled '*The Madrasa Conundrum — The state of religious education in Pakistan*', the number of madrassas in Pakistan has crossed 35,000 from fewer than 300 since the inception of Pakistan. This is not because the State was concerned about the lack of Islamic knowledge in its people, neither was it because the state was helpless and 'religious clerics' deceptively built all these madrassas without the government's knowledge. No, the story is totally different here. These are not the madrassas which were once the symbol of learning in the world and which combined holistically and with excellence the teaching of Islamic knowledge with the empirical sciences and other subjects. Instead, during General Zia's time they were used to produce fighters for the Afghan Jihad. Once the Afghan war was over they continued as they were the only institutions that provided free education and food as well. Though this should not be the purpose of madrassas, the situation kept deteriorating to the extent that students not only lost their credibility as future religious scholars but were also portrayed as the enemies of the State and also branded with titles, like extremists and fundamentalists. The irony is that these madrassas are closely monitored by the intelligence agencies; some of them are even funded by them and some receive grants from the provincial government. All these grants and funds are not given for the betterment of the madrassa children, but to fulfil the government's interests of controlling the minds of the students in its own agenda and regulating what they are taught to fit their secular agenda. The government knows that the Islamic ideology and the secular state policy are not on the same page and that is why they feel threatened and try to limit Madrassah teaching into producing only three things : Imamat of *salat* (leading prayer), *nikkah* (Marriage) and *janaza* (funeral). If they ever tried to go beyond the set limits, then the government makes sure to make an example out of them for others to see - like the incident of Jamia Hafsa in 2008, when the whole madrassa became a battlefield for opposing the government for not having an Islamic system and ended in a massacre of the students by the orders of then President Pervez Musharraf.

Another problem with madrassas is that they are still using Dars-e Nizami that also includes the teaching of mathematics, astronomy, logic and philosophy along with hadith, fiqh and tafsir. However, they are ignoring the finer points of *ilm ul hadith*. For example, a madrassa student reported that authentication of the *rawi* (narrator) is not focused on, even though the teaching of Islamic sciences requires it. In addition, their teaching provides students with a narrow and partial understanding of the Islamic principles and laws without building a deep understanding of their application to real life. Furthermore, the content of the sciences taught are very old-fashioned and outdated. So even though the Alim certificate from a madrassa is equivalent to an MA degree either in Arabic or Islamic Studies, it implies that no major job opportunities await him.

If we look at Leitner's report of 1882, it confirms the educational status of just the Punjab as having 330,000 pupils learning "all the sciences in Arabic and Sanskrit schools and colleges, as

well as... Logic, Philosophy and Medicine were taught to the highest standard". After 1857, when the British system of education took hold, the number of pupils in this form of education diminished to 190,000. Nevertheless, Leitner's analysis of the indigenous system of education proved that it was far superior to that set by the British in 1835 with Macaulay's Minute on Education for the Indian colony. This shows that Muslims were prosperous and safe under Islamic rule, even though in our schools today it is taught that the Mughals were drunken overindulgent rulers. In reality they set up a system that took care of their people's need and that system was not created or designed by the human mind, but by Islam. Indeed, under their rule, each village was provided teachers who taught Arabic to Muslim children. Furthermore, it did not just take care of the Muslims but also took care of its Hindu subjects.

We need to have a look at history as it ought to be looked at and give a true picture to our children. It is their right on us that we show them the light which will solve their problems and give direction to their lives. They need to know that Deen (religion) and Dunya (life) are not two separate things but that they are conjoined, and separating them will cause the loss of both. My dear brothers and sisters, let's join hands to save the future of this Ummah and demand that the Government of Pakistan stop playing with education. Let us make efforts to bring back that glorious system of Khilafah (Caliphate) which once showed the light of Islam to the world, as only a system designed by the Word of Allah (swt) will help us accomplish the task of gaining His Pleasure. Only this system will provide the opportunity to the people to live in a just society under a ruler with whom they can enjoy this world and be supported in securing the rewards of the Hereafter under the shade of Allah's mercy. The Messenger of Allah (saw) said,

«ما من أمير يلى أمور المسلمين، ثم لا يجهد لهم وينصح لهم، إلا لم يدخل معهم الجنة»

"A ruler who, having control over the affairs of the Muslims, does not strive diligently for their betterment and does not serve them sincerely, will not enter Jannah with them."
(Narrated by Muslim)

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Ikhlāq Jehan**

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