

Reforming The Madrassah System Of Education In Pakistan

Hafiz Muhammad Inamullah, Kohat University (KUST), Pakistan

Hafiz Hifazatullah, Kohat University (KUST), Pakistan

Muhammad Sarwar, University of Sarghoda, Pakistan

Naeemullah Khan, Education Department Punjab, Pakistan

Khalid Sultan, Kohat University (KUST), Pakistan

ABSTRACT

The unfortunate attacks of 9/11 forced the government to reform madrassah education programs. The aim of this article is to discuss the reform and its results and points of view, as well as the reaction of the Islamic seminaries toward these madrassah reforms.

Keywords: Madrassah, Pakistan, Reforms

BACKGROUND

According to the education sector reforms (2001), three model institutions were subsequently established; one each at Karachi, Sukkur and Islamabad. Their curriculum includes English, Mathematics, Computer Science, Economics, Political Science, Law and Pakistan Studies. However, these institutions were not welcomed by the Ulema. Later, another law was introduced to control the entry of foreigners in the madrassahs and to keep a close check on them. This law - the Voluntary Registration and Regulation Ordinance (2002) - has also been rejected by most of the madrassahs that want to state interference in their affairs.

The Musharraf Administration announced a number of measures to force Deeni madrassahs to participate in the modernization programme. These reforms included a five-year, one billion dollar Education Sector Reform Assistance (ESRA) plan to ensure the inclusion of secular subjects in the syllabi of religious seminaries and a one hundred million dollar bilateral agreement to rehabilitate hundreds of public schools by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Musharraf had once again given a deadline to religious seminaries or madrassahs across Pakistan to get them registered with the Wafaqul Madaris or face the music.

Musharraf said nothing new in his July 25th televised address to the nation. He reiterated his government's resolve to confront head-on the menaces of terrorism and extremism, and he outlined a number of steps he intends to take. However, most of these measures had been announced before and by none other than the General himself in his historic January 2002 speech. The campaign to reform the country's Deeni madrassahs was launched by Musharraf in a bid to fight extremism in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks on the United States. Musharraf's madrassahs went into the mainstream by introducing secular subjects in the curriculum taught at these schools. This ordinance, called the "Pakistan Madrassahs Education (Establishment and Affiliation of Model Deeni Madaris) Board Ordinance" (2001) was promulgated on August 18, 2001.

Madrassahs were forced to register under Societies Act 1860-1994. Thousands of the madrassahs have been registered under the said Act, but in 1994, the Banazir government imposed a ban on the registration of madrassahs. When Musharraf came into power, he issued the "Modal Deeni Madrassah Ordinance" on 10 August, 2001; however, the Ittihad-i Madaris Denia rejected this ordinance.

One year later (on June 19, 2002), the government issued another “Madrassh Regulatory Ordinance” and finally, the Interior Ministry lifted the ban on registration of madrassahs under Notification No. 40/30/99/P11-20.

There are some 20,000 madrassahs in Pakistan. The government, with the help of the United States, has embarked on several initiatives to combat zealotry by broadening educational offering. A little over 300 madrassahs have introduced elementary subjects, like English, Mathematics, Science and Computer, and the United States’ funding has revitalized some. The reforms include:

1. A five-year, one billion dollar plan, introduced in 2003, aimed at putting secular subjects on the syllabus and bringing madrassahs under the purview of the education ministry.
2. A one hundred million dollar commitment to rehabilitate public schools, signed in 2002 by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).
3. A 2002 law requiring madrassahs to audit their funding for foreign students and to register with the government. The number of foreign religious students has since dropped from thousands to hundreds as the government issued and renewed few visas to religious students.

Higher Education Commission (HEC) had accepted madrassah graduates and post graduate degrees conditionally for teaching purposes only and the degree holders were required to pass two formal subjects to get their degrees equivalent to recognized degrees (www.hec.gov.pk).

The government formed the Madrassahs Reforms Board under the leadership of the Education Minister. The government, making amendments the Societies Act 1860 to incorporate changes, needed to regularize and register the seminaries. The reforms board stressed Madrassahs to bring about changes in their syllabus and introduce modern subjects like English, Mathematics, Science, and Computers. The government promised to help the Madrassahs in setting up laboratories and computer centers to train existing teachers in modern pedagogy. Moreover, the government will pay salaries to the teachers who will teach modern subjects in the Madrassahs (Hussain, 2005).

The Registration of Madaris will help bring the religious seminaries into mainstream, enabling them to continue to play a positive role in religious and general education. After welcoming the recently promulgated amended societies registration ordinance by Ulema and religious scholars, the process is likely to be completed in a short time. According to official sources here, more than 6,000 (out of 12,000) Madaris have already been registered across the country.

Initially, it seemed that a large number of madrassahs would rush to get themselves registered in order to receive easy money to run their affairs; but three years down the road, the results the government has achieved are far from satisfactory. The failure has been attributed to a variety of reasons; i.e., lack of the resolve to enforce them, the reluctance of madrassahs and their non-dependence on funds provided by state, and the tussle that went on for a long time among federal education, interior and religious affairs ministries as to who will lead the reforms process (Iqbal, 2005).

REACTION OF ISLMIC SEMINARAIES

ITTEHAD-E-TANZEEMAT-MADRIS-E- DENIA, which is the union of Islamic seminaries, expressed some reservations, doubts and suspicions about these reforms. They demanded that for their five groups, a separate examining university charter be given. They proposed that a simple way of doing this is when the National Assembly is not in session, the president should pass this ordinance. Later, it should be ratified as in the past 15 years the president and other provincial government officials issued many such ordinances in favor of private sector universities, which are given approval of the Assembly later on. Indeed, none of the universities qualify for the standard that has been set by the Higher Education Commission (HEC). Some of them are operating in bungalows and some have their campus in apartments. The Higher Education Commission standard for private sector universities is to have 60 acres of land, or RS.2 billion in cash, but these universities do not fulfill this requirement and they are approved. The seminaries also demanded that the criteria for giving the charter of a university may be relaxed for religious seminaries, keeping in view their limited resources. So, in our country, these discretionary

powers are only for the people who are not liked by the higher authorities. The examining University, which does all the affiliations, selects the syllabus for all levels. Arranging examinations and awarding certificates and degrees does not come under this category.

The government's desire is for all religious seminaries to add English, Mathematics, General Science, Computers, Pakistan Studies, etc. We, according to our needs and without any pressure, have added these subjects into our syllabus at the Matric level. However, due to certain steps from the government, we have not received due appreciation. Today we are going through a stage where the government is trying to gain confidence of its eternal enemy – India - through composite dialogue and confidence-building measures. So, we also have the right to explain our point of view and the government should also try to create confidence between us. We have some problems against the government. Among them, the basic demand is the legalization of our degrees at all five levels and what legal steps can be taken in this regard.

The government argues about the job market of Madrassah graduates. As a degree issued by any university is no guarantee to win a job, so is the situation of Madrassah graduates. Everyone has to prove himself through competition in the open market. The government may establish a Pakistan Madrassah Education Board, which will have the same function as an examining University.

When the government literally agrees to our demands, we will prepare a model draft/ordinance within one week. It will be given to all the functionaries, members, boards of studies, examination system, financial management, and all the matters will be clear and to the point.

During the process of approval of all demands, the Higher Education Commission should issue an order, or notification, that the degree of Shahadat-ul-Alimia-fil-uloom-ul-Arabia Wal-Islamia will be considered equal to the degrees of M.A., Islamic studies and Arabic, and that these degrees will be considered for jobs.

In the same way, the Inter Boards Chairman Committee should be given instructions that in a formal meeting in which our members will also be there, our Sanwia Aamna (Matric) and Sanwia – Khasa (Matric) and Sanwia-Khasa (Intermediate) certificates should be accepted and notified.

The government, in an official guzzet, should announce that no religious seminaries will be taken into government custody and there will be no interference from them in matters of the Madrassahs. If the government has any doubt about the activities of any member of any such organization, an investigation should be held under Islamic, National and International legal standards; and in the absence of proof, the charge should be taken back. The religious community feels that the government is defaming the Madrassah system collectively. If defamation is crime for a common citizen, then government should also respect it in case of the Madrassah system. An individual and an institution (Madrassah/Darul-Ulum/Jamia) are different and as the punishment of one person cannot be given to another, the whole Madrassah system cannot be punished.

The government of Pakistan has accepted at prudential level, time and again, the positive role of the religious seminaries (feeding one million people and providing education to them to contribute to literacy rate), but nationalization of some of the Madrassahs (e.g. Ghans-ul-Qayum-Jamia-Rahimia in Lahore, Jamia –Tajweed-ul-Quran in Karachi) creates misunderstanding between government and religious seminaries. In Pakistan, there are problems with a small group of people in almost every walk of life and they are dealt individually. If government feels that some people in religious seminaries are creating problem, then they may be brought to justice through courts; but the public statements that some seminaries are involved in terrorism creates ambiguity and generalization.

CONCLUSION

The government is trying to streamline Islamic schools in Pakistan. The efforts are fruitful as there is lack of research on the Madrassah system. The high-ups in the government do not have knowledge of ground realities. Moreover, there is confidence of crisis between Madrassah management and the government, which is a result of corruption in government-run institutions and lack of consistency in government policies. The government has the

history of changing their decisions on external pressures. The Madrassah Management wants to maintain its autonomy, which they fear may be compromised after accepting the reform package that the government is trying to implement. The government should engage the Madrassah management for confidence building. It is high time that government and Islamic seminaries create a mutual strategy to cope with this situation, and there should be a close liaison between them.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Hafiz M Inamullah (Ph.D from Arid University, Rawalpindi) is an assistant professor of education at the Institute of Education and Research, Kohat University (KUST) having rich experience in teaching and research.

Hifazatullah, (Ph.D from Peshawar University) is an assistant professor of Islamic Studies at Kohat University (KUST).

Muhammad Sarwar, (Ph.D from Arid University, Rawalpindi) is an assistant professor at University of Sarghoda. Currently, he is doing his post doc at University of Worester, UK.

Naeemullah Khan, (Ph.D from Arid University, Rawalpindi) is working as Principal of higher secondary school, Education Department Punjab, Pakistan.

Khalid Sultan, (Ph.D from Punjab University) is an assistant professor of journalism, Kohat University (KUST).

REFERENCES

1. Govt of Pakistan(2001). Education Sector Reforms.
2. Govt of Pakistan(2001). Model Deeni Madrassah Ordinance, August.
3. Govt of Pakistan(2002). Madrassah Regularity Ordinance, August.
4. Hussain.K(2005).Reforming the Madrassah system, *Daily Dawn*, Karachi, July 31.
5. Mushraf,P(2005).Speech on Pakistan Tele Vision(PTV), July 25.
6. Mushraf,P(2002).Speech on Pakistan Tele Vision(PTV), January.
7. www.hec.gov.pk.