MUSLIM EDUCATION

A Study of Madrasas

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to better understand the status of Muslim education in the country. Any discourse on Muslim education is incomplete without a critique of the traditional madrasa system of education which is one of the key aspects of this paper.

With the implementation of the Right to Education Act, it is the duty of the State to ensure each child is enrolled in school and getting a proper education. Thus, it is necessary to understand the motivations behind a madrasa education and the options available with a failing public schooling system. The National Institute of Open Schooling and the National commission for Minority Education Institutions are analyzed in this regard. The *Sachar* Committee Report provides much insight into the plight of the Muslim community and its information is decoded in relevance to this paper.

Finally, some policy recommendations for a better and brighter future for the educational backward Muslim population is considered.

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Introduction

Muslims form the largest minority community in India. This places them in a complex position when seen in light of the tumultuous history of sectarian tendencies in the sub continent. Their current population stands at a total of 150 million across the country accounting for 13.4% of the total population.

According to First Report on Religion, Censes of India 2001, Lakshwadeep recorded the highest proportion of Muslims: a staggering 95% followed by Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka and Delhi making it to the list of top ten.

The socio-economic status of Muslims in India, as the *Sachar Committee* Report of November 2006 states, is worse than that of certain Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The *Sachar Committee* reveals startling loopholes in the last 60 years of democratic governance which have left a sizeable chunk of the population in the clutches of poverty and deprived them of equitable growth.

11.7% of Delhi's population is Muslim wherein the literacy rate is 66.6%. The female literacy rate was not too far behind the average literacy rate at 59.1% clearing indicating that Muslim women had access to education. However, the work participation rate of Muslims in Delhi was an abysmal 30.1%. This is a stark departure from a commonly held belief that not too many Muslims are literate. These statistics are a clear indication of the fact that despite an average level of literacy within the community, employability is still a major obstacle (First Report on Religion, Census 2001)

The large scale backwardness of Muslims can be largely attributed to poor education which breeds an endless cycle of low income based sustenance making future development a distant dream.

Whenever any debate or discourse on the subject of Muslim Education is initiated, religious education imparted at madrasas always comes forward as an issue of concern and controversy. The opinion of madrasas post 11 September 2001 has always been discolored based on speculation rather than facts and probable beliefs than actual ground realities. (Arshad Alam, 12 October 2006) This notion is heightened, more conclusions drawn and applied as a generalization to the whole community. In the Indian context, the media - both Muslim and non-Muslim present two very different versions of the same stories to a civil society who is divided along linguistic lines when it comes to readership, neither with any credible accuracy. Media aside, the regional and communal nature of politics in the country make any government initiative a largely politicized issue and often lead to accusations toward the Muslim community as being 'appeased' and at the same time, anti-nationalist.

Both counts threaten the integrity of the community and constantly puts them at loggerheads with modernity, which is a clear disconnect from religious bonds. In the attempt to become modern, Muslims, especially the Ulema fear that they will make untenable compromises with their faith. They fear that modernity challenges religion. Religion is an inextinguishable part of their personal identity, constantly under question in a fast-paced material world. What happens then is a natural reaction to threat. Suspicion and wariness

build up and block the rationale dictated by current circumstances forcing a person to rely on reaction rather than well thought out action. This holds true even for the Muslim Community who have since the age of the British, stuck to old and outdated curriculum just because they think it is in line with the preservation of their religious heritage and tradition. In light of madrasas, the curriculum taught is a classic example of the above phenomenon. Traditional religious education aside, the options available to a Muslim child seeking quality education are limited. Government schools face the regular problems of invisible discrimination, teacher absenteeism, bad teaching methodology, corporal punishments, and lack of teaching in the vernacular. Minority Education Institutions on paper seem like the solution to all the above problems except, when the Constitution laid out this provision in Article 30 of the Constitution, it did not mean for it to become the only option. That aside, the modalities to set up a minority education institution are enough to keep many keen Muslim educationists at bay. The Wakf Boards are exceptionally rich but completely untapped gold mines. However, State Wakf Boards and the Central Wakf Council are not empowered enough to make the required changes in the conditions of the Muslims.

There are three main *masliks* or schools of thought that prevail throughout India. The *Deobandis*, the *Barelwis* and the *Al-Hadiths* (*Asghar* Ali Engineer, 3 February 2009). Put together, the three schools of thought are said to be representative of major Muslim sects within the country. Ideological differences aside, regional differences also cause much havoc in the generalization of how madrasas function on pan India level with the north-

south divide being a prominent phrase. It is said that the most eminent of differences between the madrasas of the north and the madrasas of the south is the sort of flexibility they approach their religion with. It is said, that down south, Muslims are less conservative and more open to change while the north remain suspicious of the government and wary of "threats to Islam" This however, could also be ascribed to the fact that in places like Kerala, the local bodies have always had very active Muslim leaders who paved the way for such thought and had ten years of consolidated power to help them gain the trust of the community even from behind the mask of the government.

Constitutional Rights and Provisions of Minorities pertaining to Education

The Constitution provides many safeguards for the rights of minority communities in India. The most elaborate provisions are as follows:

Article / Schedule	
13	Laws inconsistent with or in derogation of the Fundamental Rights.
15	Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
21A	Right to Education [Inserted by the 86th Amendment in December, 2002 and passed by the Parliament in July, 2009. The provisions of the Act came into force from 1st April, 2010]
28	Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions.
30	Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.

Madrasa Education in India

The term madrasa derives itself from the Arabic root *darasa* which means 'to study'. Traditionally, madrasas operate on the *zakt* (alms or donations) collected from the community and do not charge any fees from the students they take in. Muslim scholar Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, terms this spurt in the opening of madrasas the "Movement of *DiniMadaris*" [Deen-o-Shari'at: Deen-e-Islam ka ekFikiMotala, Goodwords, New Delhi, 2002] around the mid 19th century marked by the arrival of Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay in India as Viceroy of the British India Company. Macaulay is most quoted for saying:

"We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." (G.M. Young, 1957)

The implications of this statement were far reaching, going beyond just clerical curriculum in formal school during colonial rule. To the Ulema, this was seen as a move to reduce greatly the cultural and religious heritage of the Muslims and in an attempt to neutralize this threat, the Ulema's orthodoxy took radical shades. Madrasa in the early 20th Century were diverse in the subjects they offered and some even secular, allowing Hindu's to attend their classes. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dr.Rajendra Prasad and Dr.Sachdanand Sinha were all imparted elementary education at madrasas. But soon, the Ulema came to equate natural and social sciences with the same British Raj that wanted to destroy their religion. They became rigid and vehemently followed the *Dars-e-*

Nizami (curriculum). Mullah Nizam al-Din Muhammad Sihalwi (1677-1748), being the founder of this course, primarily aimed this course to comprise the study of religious sciences from step one to the highest levels of intellectual spheres. As part of the study of classical doctrine in Islamic theology, Hadith, Qura'n and their Principles, Jurisprudence and its principles, the students of this discipline pursued the liberal arts which offered a canonical method of depicting the realms of higher education. (Ateeq, Munawar. 08 September 2004. An Introduction to the renowned Dars-e-Nizami course. Accessed on 21May, 2010 at http://scholarspen.blogspot.com/2004/09/introduction-to-renowned-dars-e-nizami.html)

However, the varying *masliks* (schools of thought) compete with each other for prominence and this intra community divide makes it difficult to find uniformity in curriculum. For example, the *Barelwis* give larger importance to Arabic Literature while the *Deobandis* focus on jurisprudence and logic. This lack of uniformity is also evident in the many courses that madrasas provide with different parts of the country using different durations for the same course. Furthermore, the north south divide creates much disparity in evaluation of government and political institutions with the north being opposed to this and the south flourishing because of the same.

The *Sachar* Committee report declared that only about 4% of Muslim children attend full-time madrasas. Many take this figure as absolute but Saral Jhingrin an emerging scholar on the subject of madrasa reforms claims to find different figures. She says, "The feed back that I have got from my frequent talks with

the madrasa pass outs, now studying in JNU, or those who have roots in villages, puts the number of madrasa going children much higher ...Generally they estimate that at least in villages about 15 to 30 % Muslim children go first to maktabs than to madrasas, if only for a few years."

A madrasa is usually set up alongside a mosque with not too much area to its credit. Madrasas charge no fees whatsoever and where most provide full boarding and lodging skills while teaching students the fundamentals of their faith as their basic objective. Infrastructure is of little importance when looked at in context to the aim with which this instruction is imparted – to create more clergy for the growth of Islam. This sort of education does not seek to impart knowledge of the sciences and arts.

Following is the modus operandi of Madrasa BhuriBhatiyari in New Delhi. The information that follows has been collected over the course of two months via field visits to Madrasa Bhuri Bhatiyari, personal interviews with the founder, teachers and most importantly, the students.

Objective

The objective of Madrasa education is simple – to teach the fundamentals of the Islamic faith. In keeping with this objective, the teachings of the Prophet, recitation and rote learning of the Qur'an are the focal points. Any attempt to modernize madrasa as has been the recent debate, must allow madrasas to retain this essentially religious component but at the same time include in their daily workings, the teaching of secular subjects such as Math, English, History and so on. Bhuri Bhatiyari is a madrasa which is trying to seek such a balance between *deen* (religion) and *duniya* (world) so they have incorporated the teaching of English, Hindi and Math. Initially a part of a jail, back in the time of Shah Zafar, Bhuri Bhatiyari madrasa has been in existence for over ten years now.

Resources

Madrasa Bhuri Bhatiyari is located opposite the Time of India Building on Bahadur Shah ZafarMarg in New Delhi. Upon entering the building one sees open urinals and a few toilets to the right and a crevice with water taps where children wash their clothes alongside the same structure. Right in front is a raised platform with pillars where the children take their afternoon naps. Maulana Nayim, the man in charge at madrasa Bhuri Bhatiyari says that in the locality, this is one of the better madrasas. This is a bit shocking as Bhuri Bhatiyari itself is begging for attention with regard to its infrastructure. It's a bit cramped for space in light of the 85 children who are lodged there. Maulana Nayim explains that like all madrasas, Bhuri Bhatiyari runs on

donations from the rich and well to do Muslims in the areas nearby. He says the madrasa runs on a full time staff of 5 teachers, a cook and himself. Maulana Nayim has also hired a part time teacher for English, Hindi and Math.

But for a madrasa with such small means, they've managed to get 4 computers and recognition from Sheila Dikshit, the Chief Minister of Delhi for their attempts at modernization – no mean achievement.

Amoung the many individual donors, Maulana Nayim's madrasa has also received aid from non-Muslim charitable organizations and they maintain meticulous records of all transactions and expenditure in respect of the money they receive.

Routine and Curriculum

The Dars-e-Nizami as explained before is a course that was composed long ago and the aim at the point of its inception was to fill the deficit of clergymen in the madrasas that had suddenly started appearing. Thus, the focus of the curriculum was on producing men of faith who had little or no experience in worldly matters. In its time, the Dars-e-Nizami was a revolution in itself since before that formal teaching of the Prophet's traditions was meant only for the elite. However, a similar revolution in light of modern day circumstances is required as the scope of employment even as an *imam* or *maulvi* is fast shrinking. Bhuri Bhatiyari students follow the Dars-e-nizami but acknowledging the need to find employment after a madrasa education, its founders have introduced English, Hindi and Math into its curriculum for its students. The routine that the boys follow is quite hectic starting with a three and a half hour

class of learning the Qur'an from 6 to 9.30 in the morning. Till about 3 in the afternoon, there is no scheduled activity but the boys freshen up, wash clothes and take an afternoon nap in this time. From 3 to 5 pm on alternative days, a part time teacher takes classes for Hindi, English and Maths. In the evening from 5 to 7 pm is recreation time –the only time in the day that the boys are allowed outside the madrasa. They don't venture too far from the madrasa even though they can. And finally, from 7.30 till 9 is another class of Qur'anic learning.

As one realizes, there is plenty of time that can be put to better use. Maulana Nayim claims to have tried to send some of the children to formal school but he faced many problems. Firstly, the children were mostly completely illiterate. Despite being 12 to 16 years in age, most of them did not know how to read and write even in Urdu let alone in Hindi or English. Thus, they were unable to cope and felt out of place in formal school. Secondly, Maulana Nayim and like him many *maulvis* and *maulanas* across madrasas in India believe that formal schooling and madrasa schooling are not compatible. This belief may not be based on sound reasoning but it is deeply entrenched in the minds of most Ulema; their main worry being that the children will excel in neither and be average in both. Finally, a lack of very basic necessities such as bathing water, soap, resources to clean nails et all also hindered the participation of children from poorer familes in formal schools. Maulana Nayim claimed that this was the main reason most of them could not attend schools in their home towns and thus, opted for a madrasa education.

The other confusion is with regard to curriculum. Although Bhuri Bhatiyari claims to follow the Dars-e-nizami, this does not seem the case as currently; all the children at Bhuri Bhatiyari are training to become hafiz (someone who can recite the Qur'an) irrespective of their age and current level of literacy. Hafiz is not the only course that the Dars-e-Nizami offers. Although it is widely known that there is a lack of uniformity in madrasa curriculum, the above incident throws light on the magnitude of flexibility that madrasas get in terms of what they teach despite all claiming to teach the same course. On the same lines, an exploration of madrasa curriculum shows the great diversity not only in courses taught but time taken for the same courses. *Masliks* and regional factors are great influences on the intricate details of smaller madrasas in the same area. For example, the Bihar State Madrasa Board teaches the Dars-e-Alia – a completely new course that includes intensive subject training in the natural sciences and also covers practical examinations. The Bihar State Madrasa Board may leave a lot to be desired but its attempt to study, classify, aid and better the madrasas in Bihar is commendable.

A similar deviation from tradition are the Madrasas of Kerala where the Jamaat-e-Islami runs an set up for small part time and full time madrasas and full time Arabic colleges benefitting some 40,000 students. They charge small and affordable fees but make sure that secular as well as religious education is imparted to their children making it easier to fit into a world that relies heavily on formal schooling. (Sikand, Yoginder. 2 March 2009)

This initiative is successful for three main reasons – Firstly, it is an initiative from within the community. Secondly, Kerala is the only state to offer Arabic as a subject in government schools. This has two implications – this creates more jobs for graduates who take up Arabic and also reduces at a very subtle level, stigmatization of Arabic and associated learning. Thirdly, the Kerala model works best when applied to areas where the polity is not always looked upon with suspicion. The political history of Kerala's bureaucracy tells us that a large chunk of the government machinery has either been from a Muslim background or the politicians have been dedicated to the betterment of this community. And finally, that the Ulema as well as the community at large have been open and accepting to change.

Faculty & Methodology

The teachers at BhuriBhatiyari are all graduates from bigger madrasas of Deoband. The part time teacher, Mr Abid Ali is a lower division clerk with the Delhi Wakf Board who volunteers some of his time to the madrasa. Mr Ali is currently pursuing his Masters degree in Hindi from Delhi University. Though BhuriBhatiyari may not face a severe faculty crunch because of its small intake, most madrasas don't have an adequate number of teachers. Even then, the qualifications of the teachers hired aren't usually up to mark. This is largely due to the paltry salary they are paid. Mr Ali claims that the full time teachers are paid between Rs2,000 to Rs3,000 per month. This sum will not attract well qualified teachers and because madrasas run on donation money they cannot afford to raise this salary. This is an area in which the

government's offering of aid can help as teachers can be provided honorarium and higher salaries thus attracting high quality applications for the job. This will also give incentive to madrasa graduates who take to other professions as the teaching profession does not seem a good economic choice for their time.

Students and their Background

The children from Madrasa Bhuri Bhatiyari are all originally from backward areas in Bihar. They are in Delhi as their parents are either unable to support them or have shifted to Delhi in the search for fruitful economic activity.

The smallest child at Bhuri Bhatiyari is 10 years old and the oldest is 19. Maulana Nayim claims that all the children are nearly completely illiterate and Mr Ali corroborates this. He is currently teaching them the alphabet and small words in English. In Hindi, he has made a little more progress and has reached a level where they can read sentences on their own. On meeting a few children between 10 and 13, their poor backgrounds were confirmed. Most came from families with an average size of 6 children and it was not uncommon to hear of only one living parent. Their parents were primarily engaged in small daily wage activities like construction workers, lift operators, kadhai (embroidery work), painters, mehndi artists, or tailors.

Usually, the other members of the family were either working full time or working and studying in government schools. When asked why they were in the madrasa some said that it was because their parents wanted an *imam* (preist) in the family but it was mostly to ease the economic burden on the family. Clearly, a madrasa education was an economic choice for most.

On asking if they had ever been to school, many answered in the affirmative but this seemed contrary to their current level of learning as proclaimed by their teachers and Maulana Nayim. It was later understood that most had been in school for a short spans of time; sometimes a month or two or if nothing else came up, even a year. Rizwan, a 14 year old from Sultanpur was the most 'learned' of the lot. He'd studied till class 5 with many gaps in his education. When asked why he'd not been to school regularly, Rizwan stated that he'd been to Kashmir to visit a relative, sometimes taken time off from school to be with his mother and so on. It is a general belief that now, the poor know the importance of an education and while that may be true, they're oblivious to the sort of commitment and effort that is required to sustain that education.

Rizwan's is only one of the many similar stories that live on in the children of BhuriBhatiyari.

Factors that push children to a madrasa education

After an in depth analysis of the workings of a madrasa, the students and their ambitions, the following factors emerge as key reasons to pick a madrasa education:

1. Lack of stable employment of parents.
2. Madrasas charge no fee for educating, housing and feeding the students.
3. Failing public school set up.
4. Lack of basic amenities to sustain school going children.
5. Lack of Urdu medium schools or primary schooling in the vernacular

6. Lack of drive to attend rigorous school hours.
7. Perception of government school textbooks as anti Islamic.
8. Hinduistic ethos of government schools.

It is clear from the above that madrasas, their reformation and modernization cannot be the focus of public policy initiative when it is claimed that only 4% of Muslim children receive education from these institutions. The key initiatives in uplifting the Muslim poor must be in the form of public sector initiatives targeting Muslim dominated areas. That said, the role that madrasas play in the larger picture of Muslim education cannot be denied, nor can the scope for their improvement or modernization.

Government Initiatives

The government's role in the betterment of the Muslim community leaves a lot to be desired. The foremost in the list of government related issues is the notion with which this segment of social development is approached.

The Sachar Committee Report

Very little government time and money is spent in research related to the troubles of the Muslim poor and thus, no real and reliable data is available to draw conclusions from and base sound policy decisions on. This may be a sensitive issue but shying away from dealing with it will only worsen the conditions of the poor and further fuel anti-government notions. The *Sachar Committee* report was long overdue and is coming too late into the development process to placate angry Muslims. Even if timely policy action is taken, the implementation process at the hands of the bureaucracy is rather crude. Bureaucrats posted in Muslim dominated areas are not sensitive to the issues they are dealing with and worsen conditions and perceptions. However, the past few years, the Government has become slightly more active in the area of Muslim education reforms.

It passed and notified the National Commission for Minority Education Institutions in 2004. Along with this, the government mandated the National Institute of Open Learning to open a minority cell to aid minority communities to gain access to open schooling methods and resources. These are but a few of the schemes, policies and acts that were ratified. The Central Madrasa Bill is still pending in parliament – it seeks to centralize and give homogeneity and

uniformity to madrasas throughout the country via state madrasa boards and a central board for overall administration. Also, the Ministry of Human Resource Development under the leadership of Mr. Kapil Sibal launched a campaign to give madrasas a certificate, which would be considered the equivalent of a CBSE examination, though surprisingly, this campaign was not greeted with much enthusiasm. The Prime Minister's 15 points for Minorities also mention madrasa reforms.

Central assistance is being provided to State Governments for the appointment of Urdu language teachers in Block/Districts where there is a concentration of educationally backward minorities. The Scheme of Assistance for Infrastructure and Modernisation of Madrasas provides assistance for meeting the salary requirements @ Rs. 3000 each per month for two teachers in each madrasa to impart education in non traditional subjects of Mathematics, Science, English etc. and one time assistance of Rs. 7000 to each madrasa for subject kits and teaching aids as well as another one time assistance of Rs. 7000 for establishing book banks in each madrasa.

Apart from this, the infrastructure component of the scheme called the Scheme for Infrastructural Development of Private aided/unaided Minortity Institutions (IDMI) (elementary and senior secondary schools) allows construction of physical facilities such as additional rooms. The entire budgetary provision under the scheme has been fully utilized each year (last year an amount of Rs. 29 crore was disbursed to madrasas through State Governments), because of the demand for infrastructure.

Under the scheme, the State Governments have an important role to play forwarding cases of NGOs and Wakf Boards managing madrasas. States have been requested to popularize the scheme by giving it wide publicity and expeditious documentation and processing. There is no explicit data to account for terms like 'wide publicity' with respect to implementation.

One of the commitments under the NCMP is the protection of the Fundamental Rights of Minorities under Article 30(1) of the Constitution. In keeping with the promise made under the NCMP, a National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI) has been established through an Act of Parliament. It provides inter alia, for the right of minority educational institutions to seek affiliation to any university of their choice, provided the relevant law under which such universities are created allow such affiliation. It also seeks to overcome problems faced by minorities in seeking no objection certificates for establishing educational institution of their choice. Disputes relating to the minority status of educational institutions are also to be resolved by the commission. Thus, for the first time, Article 30(1) of the Constitution, which gives minorities the right to establish and administer educational institution of their choice, would be effectively implemented through the NCMEI Act. As many as 244 Special Focus districts have been identified for attention in education. One of the criteria used for the selection of these districts is the concentration of minority population. Polytechnic level institutions in 185 of these special focus districts are beings upgraded during the 10th and 11th Plans, of which 84 districts have a concentration of minority

population. New Polytechnics are also being established in 65 districts across the two plan periods, twelve of these have minority concentration.

Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrasas

IDMI and the Area Intensive Scheme for Modernization of Madrasas have been merged to form the Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrasas (SPQEM) with a budget of Rs 325 crores. This scheme despite covering the main deficits that small madrasas like BhuriBhatiyari have is facing much resistance from within the Muslim community as many government criterions pose as barriers to its actualization. The Ulema feel that the government is offering these schemes as a guise for an ulterior motive that is, the destruction of the Islamic cultural identity in India and to gain control over the running of these madrasas. This notion is a deep-rooted one and comes from the fact that this scheme was initially launched under the NDA government who were strongly Hindutva in their approach to national policies at the time. The new UPA government will need to build and fill the trust deficit so as to ensure that their policies are not greeted with the same suspicion. As for the SPQEM itself, the eligibility criterion do not make the situation any better for it is mandated that a madrasa have been in operation for 3 years minimum. The criterion itself serves no purpose and moreover limits the entry of the majority of small madrasas who really need the infrastructural aid. The picture starts to become grim as one realizes that another minimum eligibility criterion is affiliation to either a State Madrasa Board or the National Institute of Open Learning (NIOS). While the next section will pay closer attention to the distant dream of

NIOS affiliation, only 6 states have State Madrasa Boards thus denying to an exceptionally large number of madrasas in the country, the chance to take up the many offerings of the government. As one progresses, the inspection clauses of the SPQEM are worded such that they not only mandate inspection of facilities to ensure quality but also random financial checks, financial scrutiny – all in all a loss of autonomy for the madrasas. This is a significant disincentive for most madrasas who even if they qualify minimum eligibility norms, do not take part in the scheme for there far larger loss in terms of autonomy, which they believe, could result in a loss of identity. Maulana Nayim of Madrasa BhuriBhatiyari did not even know of the SPQEM neither did the Maulanas' at Madrasa Imtiaz-ul-Uloom. This is rather surprising as within the SPQEM itself, a reoccurring grant of Rs 50 lakh is allocated for publicity, monitoring & evaluation of the scheme at the level of Government of India. However, the scheme itself is receiving very little publicity and there is an urgent need to build awareness. (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2009)

Minority Education Institutions

The government also recognized the need for minority communities to set up institutions specifically for particular communities within a particular area and with this in mind, set up The National Commission for Minority Education Institutions in 2004 as an act of Parliament under Section 30 of the Constitution. (National Commission for Minoirty Education Institutions, 2004)

The procedure is simple on paper – a society must be constituted and registered under the Societies Act. Following which, a memorandum of aims

and objectives must be constituted. After which, the society and its members are required to maintain accounts and records of activities, additional members and other such details. After a respectable period, one may apply for minority status at two places – either with the department of education of the state government or with the NCMEI. While the State Government charges an inspection fee of Rs10,000 and a registration fee of Rs5,000 (both one time payments) its status needs renewal every year and there is a renewal fees as well. The procedure with the NCMEI is simpler as the status given by the council is of a permanent nature and it charges no fee.

This body was constituted to deal solely with education institutions that applied for minority status and accordingly has powers much like that of a court. A visit to the NCMEI's office in Jeevan Tara Bulding, Patel Chowk revealed that this body did not keep an account of the number and details of the institutions it had granted minority status to.

National Institute of Open Schooling

The National Institute of Open Schooling is yet another avenue that members of the Muslim community can explore as an alternative to formal schooling and the complexities of madrasa education. This may seem like an obvious and common option but in application, it is a longer and more tedious route with no flexibility what so ever to accommodate the varied cases it may have to address when it comes to madrasas or even community study centers. NIOS is mandated by Government of India to provide educational access to all those who are outside the formal school system - to "reach the unreached"

This was further elucidated when the government set up the Minority Cell of the NIOS in 2006 to spread awareness in minority concentrated districts under the direct supervision of the Secretary of the NIOS. No information was available on the performance of this cell in particular.

If a madrasa does not wish to affiliate itself with the State Madrasa Board, or does not have a State Madrasa Board then it may become an accredited NIOS study centre. Study Centers can play a major role in capacity building for they involve the consent and active participation of the local community members themselves thus ruling out any scope for misguided notions or ill treatment etc. This is not only an option for madrasas around the country but also any member of any community who would like to contribute. The NIOS curriculum is diverse and includes many variations that are restricted by the time and resource constraints of formal schooling. NIOS also has a separate curriculum for basic literacy levels called the Open Basic Education, which is divided, into three levels based on basic knowledge. This sort of affiliation is particularly beneficial in madrasas or smaller maktabs who deal with children who are either completely new to learning or are too old to be taught in schools the very basics of language and so forth. Further, in addition to the elementary, secondary and senior secondary curriculum (with Urdu and Arabic as an option) NIOS also offers accreditation of study centers for teaching vocational training. These small courses are valid diplomas that help enhance employability and reduce the gap between madrasa graduates and the job market.

Recommendations

In the last section, recommendations to better the situation of Muslim education shall be discussed.

Policy Recommendations:

1. The National Commission for Minority Education Institutions requires reforms for processes and organisation structure.
   The process to get a minority education institution status needs to be expedited and made easier, more accessible and less time consuming.
2. National Institute for Open Schooling provides the option for a madrasa to become a study centre. However, this option exists only in paper as the requirements of NIOS are many ranging from library book banks, to laboratories to specific sized classrooms. These requirements are almost as detailed and large as that of MCD requirements to start a formal school. Thus, the NIOS study centre requirements need immediate attention
3. The government has identified Minority Concentrated Districts and Educational backward Districts and mandated the building of schools in these areas – however, the need of the hour is vocational education where sustainability and employable skills are taught so as to ensure long term self sufficiency to the poor. Thus, centres for vocational education must be built on a priority basis.

4. It is noted with urgency that madrasa education needs to be recognized formally within the larger education system of the country. This may be done at two levels:
   a) By giving madrasa education a certificate of equivalence thus making it at par with CBSE
   b) By making a mechanism via which, universities in India may be able to admit madrasa graduates into their student population.
5. The need for a Central Madrasa Board is evident now more than ever. It is a bill that must be supported whole-heartedly for in it lies the future of madrasa modernization.
6. The Government needs to carry out intensive research and analysis on madrasas in India – state wise mapping and organisation of madrasas needs to be studied to make policies that are more effected and less prone to criticism
7. A huge trust deficit has been created within the Muslim community and well as the government with each suspicious of the others motives and intentions. This creates many road blocks in the process of development The government as well as the Muslim community must take efforts to rebuild this relationship between state and community.

Conclusion

Madrasas are an essential and intimate part of the Muslim culture and the education they impart is undeniably, unique. Much can be said about the inclusion of non-secular subjects and the implied deviation from religious instruction but not too much can be done without involving the *Ulema* and the Muslim Community. The Central Government has taken numerous initiatives to aid the madrasas to modernize but because of the large trust deficit between the Government and this particular community, these measures have been received with suspicion and no enthusiasm. This trust deficit needs immediate to be addressed immediately as neither can work in vacuum. The role of the media is a crucial one in this regard they are the primary medium via which a majority of opinions are formed on the same.

Madrasa Bhuri Bhatiyari is but one of the thousands in the country, each with a different set of stories. These stories clearly demonstrate the fact that access to formal government school education is not enough because the costs of sustaining the school going effort are much more and not restricted to uniform, fees and stationary. The government must take upon itself the onus of paying for *any* such sundry costs and also must focus on building the accessibility to such resources not only in educational backward districts but also Muslim dominated areas.

Questions regarding modernization and non secular subjects aside, another major issue noticed is the lack of opportunity both for higher studies as well as sustainable employability. Madrasa graduates unless from the bigger *jamias*

are rendered jobless for there is no uniformity in what they study and a visible lack of skill set development for long term sustainable income generation. Madrasas must take upon themselves the responsibility of ensuring that their graduates been given vocation education so as to increases their chances in the job market. However, this is only one side of the coin. The larger issue is that Madrasa graduates don not have an official process via which their academic excellence within the madrasa can be appreciated or used as a basis for higher education. A system for giving recognition to madrasa education by universities is essential for madrasa graduates to continue their studying at higher levels. This must be brought to the notice of the UGC immediately.

The National Institution of Open Learning and its resources must be made more accessible to the smaller madrasas if they wish to become study centres.

Urdu as a medium of educational instruction must be promoted in Muslim dominated areas as the community struggles with learning Hindi and or English when their vernacular is Urdu. The government must set up more ways to encourage the Urdu language.

In conclusion, the issues of madrasa modernization are complex but if the will to compromise and move forward exists, it is not an issue that cannot be solved permanently. The cooperation of both stakeholders – the government and the Muslim community is required as in trust between the two.

Madrasas add to the cultural heterogeneity of the country and form an integral part of our diverse socio-ethnic traditions and these problems cannot be ignored.

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