

The Contributions and Perils of Madrassa Education System in Pakistan—A Peace Education Perspective

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Abstract

Peace education is an emerging discipline around the world. The focus of this discipline is to educate for peaceful co-existence in a diverse global community. Peace education is an educational response to the problems violence. It is an approach to enhance tolerance and strengthen conflict resolution skills. As per the directives of the UN, especially the decade from 2001 to 2010, which was declared as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and non-violence, different nation-states are expected to foster peace related content, skills, and attitudes among the learners. Pakistan, a country at the front line in the war against terrorism on the one hand, needs to address this declaration in academic circles as well. Besides the state-run institutions, Madrassa education system occupies an important place in the education system of Pakistan. The importance of Madrassas come from the fact that they play a significant role in the overall literacy rate in the country and provides free of cost education and in many cases boarding, lodging and food to students coming from the poorest sections of the society. However, there is also a significant level of concern regarding the role of these Madrassas. This concern mainly comes from the alleged involvement of many of these Madrassas in spreading sectarianism and narrow-mindedness in the society. Thus, it is argued, instead of unifying the society, these institutions contribute to the disintegration of Pakistani society where the learners will have to follow a particular sectarian group and will have to underrate the other schools of thoughts. The findings revealed that while Madrassas enhance literacy, sectarian biases persist due to outdated curricula coupled with a one-sided approach in the interpretation of the Holy Text. This Article highlights the positive aspects as well as the perils of Madrassa education system in Pakistan and suggests some corrective measures such as to include Peace Education as a subject in these institutions with ample teacher training initiatives.

Keywords: peace education, terrorism, *madrassa* reforms, peaceful co-existence, Security

Introduction

Madrasas in Pakistan have been the focus of much academic discussion both at national and international levels for a long time now. Many of the modern educated people in Pakistan, having regionalist, linguistic, or nationalistic orientations and many people in the Western

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world consider these institutions useless, outmoded and a problem for the society. There is a wide-spread perception that these institutions are responsible for terrorism, opposed to modernity and development and modern western civilization. There is, therefore, a call for radical reforms to be brought about in the structure, curriculum, and aims of *Madrassa* education in Pakistan.

Madrassas have also come under criticism on the state level in many Muslim countries including Pakistan. Apart from the academic researchers such as: Azeem (2015), Ghamidi (2010), Niazi (2002), Hoodbhoy (1998), and Rehman (1978), even the political figures also held these institutions responsible for terrorist activities. A former president of Pakistan accused *Madrasas* for spreading religious hatred and sectarianism among the Pakistani masses (Musharraf, 2003). One main concern is that many of these *Madrassas* are not registered, hence not properly controlled and monitored by the government. The Ex-US foreign minister Collin Powell in his address to the Congress said:

...in Pakistan and some other countries *Madrassas* are the places where terrorists and radical elements are flourishing and the US is having suspicions over these places...funds have been provided to these institutions. The education of *Madrassas* should be organized in order to provide productive education and to bring reforms in these *Madrassas*. The US leadership is conjointly working with president Musharraf in Pakistan and in certain other countries (The Daily Auwsaaf, Peshawar Pakistan, 2004).

Besides, such political figures some academic researchers have also levelled allegations against *Madrassa* institutions such as: Azeem (2015), Ghamidi (2010), Niazi (2002), Hoodbhoy (1998), and Rehman (1978), who think of *Madrassas* as places of strengthening a culture of militarism. The question is, whether these *Madrassas* are really responsible for anti-peace activities solely or certain other factors can also be counted as significant elements for deteriorating regional and global peace? More importantly, whether these institutions contribute to promote or hinder peace promoting overtures? Apart from the critiques from various circles, few studies analyze *Madrassas'* dual role in education and sectarianism from a peace education perspective. For abridging this gap, this study is conducted to carry out an analysis of the possible role of *Madrassas* in the promotion of either peace or conflict in the Pakistani society.

Statement of the problem

In view of the above glimpses of the related discussion about *Madrassa* education system, the researchers deem it fit to carry out an impartial analysis of the positive (such as: enhancing literacy rate, self-support initiatives for spreading knowledge, and welfare services) as well as the negative sides (such as: the Sunni-Shia violence in KP and the Punjab) of these institutions and to suggest some remedial measures (if any) for the betterment of these institutions. The problem under investigation was, “The contributions and perils of *Madrassa* education system in Pakistan—a peace education perspective”. The study examines how sectarian biases prevalent in *Madrassas* undermine peace education goals.

Objectives

The objectives of the study:

- i. To highlight the positive aspects of *Madrassas* with reference to their contribution to enhancing literacy rate and fostering peaceful attitudes in Pakistan.
- ii. To point out the negative aspects of *Madrassas* regarding their role in spreading unrest and sectarianism in the Pakistani society.
- iii. To suggest possible corrective measures such as the introduction of explicit peace-promoting content in the curricula for *Madrassa* education in Pakistan.

Significance of the study

In religion driven, traditional societies, religious leaders are needed for the social and moral guidance of the people. In Pakistan such religious leaders are prepared in *madrassas*. Despite an appreciable role played by *Madrassas* in enhancing literacy rate in Pakistan; these institutions have not been able to achieve, at least, universal approval in the society due to their inherent weakness. One role for instance that *Madrassas* are expected to play is the development of peace and unity among the people. Ironically due to the sectarian bent of many of these *Madrassas* where the learners are necessarily to follow on sect and in most cases contradict with the other sects which often lead to overt conflicts. Thus, in spite of unifying the society on the cherished Islamic ideal of brotherhood, these institutions are playing the other way round. This can be seen in the phenomenon of spreading sectarianism, extremism, and narrow-mindedness as every such institution stands for the protection of their respective sect or bent of mind. This state of affairs needs to be

explored in an impartial manner. This study, therefore, brings to the focus the positive role as well as the perils of *Madrassa* education system in Pakistan. The study is different from other critical evaluation in the sense that it uniquely applies peace education theory to Madrassa reforms for a better tomorrow.

Limitations of the study

Research in social sciences is subservient to certain inherent limitations ranging from discrepancies related to the reliability and validity of the research tool, to the implicit and/ or explicit biasness of the researchers, the respondents, sample representativeness etc. Principally this research work is no exception to this rule especially when certain aspects are beyond the control of the researchers. In this study some respondents were even reluctant to provide information pretending that the same are either sensitive or that they are not allowed to share. In view of the nature of data, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all *Madrassa* institutions as some *Madrassas* in rural areas may have somewhat different nature.

Research methodology

In this article the researchers have tried to explore and bring to the surface the factual position of *Madrassas*. In this attempt the researchers have carried out a situational analysis of the prevailing learning environment of the selected *Madrassas*. A representative sample of *Madrassa* institutions was selected where each sectarian school of thought was represented together with a representation from those institutions that do not promote any sectarian orientation. The prominent schools of thoughts including *Deobandi*, *Baralvi*, *Ahl-e-Hadith*, and *Shia*, together with a representation from the non-sectarian school of thought such as institutions run by *Jamaat-e-Islami* were selected. In the process of sample selection, two institutions from each of the five main sectarian schools of thought (total 10) were selected, where ten respondents (05 each from teachers and students) were selected. The rationale for selecting the sample institutions is that the selected institutions had a relatively centralized positions in the respective regions. A structured interview protocol was applied for data collection. The researchers analyzed the syllabi of the respective sample *Madrassas*; sought the opinions of teachers and students together with observing the institutional environment. In order to get more and more acquaintance, informative materials were collected from many sources such as learned persons, books, print and electronic media. Certain fundamental questions related to education were asked covering the: aims,

curriculum, methodology, and institutional environment, respect for others' opinion etc. Except for Maulana Abdul Bar and Maulana Abdul Mustaan the rest of respondents (in the process of interviewing) requested that their names should not be referred to in any discussion, hence, the researchers have kept them in unanimity. In most cases, the respondents were reluctant to respond to certain questions like: do you understand the prime aim of education as per Islamic teachings?; what type of curriculum you would like to suggest for Madrassa in face of the modern challenges?; is there a permissive atmosphere in the institution related asking question in the teaching-learning process?; do you equally respect the other schools of thoughts?; what would you like to say about *Taqleed-e-Jamid* (blind adherence to authority)?; However, the approach of the researchers in this article is more of analysis-based argumentation in response to the authors who somewhat either underrated or over-estimated the role of *Madrassa* institutions.

Review of the related literature

Madrassa education has been a focus of much academic and political debate for a long time. Scholars have extensively deliberated on the contributions and perils of *Madrassa* education in Pakistan. According to Rehman (1978) *Madrassas* are outmoded and not relevant to the needs of the modern Muslim societies.

In a book 'Educational system of religious *Madrassas*, (2002) published by Institute of Policy Studies Islamabad, it has been highlighted that the current system of *Madrassa* education does not meet the emerging socio-economic issues of the country, hence, the system needs to be updated. Apart from the above-mentioned books, there are so many documents such as National Educational Policies and even individual researchers' contribution like "State and Education" by Hoodbhoy (1998) who declares *Madrassas* as outmoded and places of strengthening a culture of militarism. Niazi (2002) also criticizes *Madrassas* for sectarian violence and militarism. However, their assertions seem to be one-sided and a comparative analysis (pertaining to merits and demerits) of the role of these intuitions would suffice to determine their position. Rehman's stance seems to be that of reforming the *Madrassa* institutions rather than that of completely abolishing the system while Hoodbhoy and Niazi seems to have held *Madrassa* responsible for all the ills (in terms of extremism and sectarianism) of society altogether. The mentioned critics have aptly highlighted some weaknesses of *Madrassa* institutions, however, there are certain contributions of these institutions to the mainstream education system despite their financial constraints.

The etymology

The term '*Madrassa*' is an Arabic word which means a place of learning or teaching. The word *Madrassa* is singular and its plural is *Madrassas* (Firozud Din). The literal meaning of *Madrassa/Maktab* is, 'The place for writing'. But commonly the word *Madrassa* means the place where children are taught (Raghib, n.d). The word Maktab and *Madrassa* are almost synonymous words. The term Maktab can be used for all educational institutions such as school, college and even university (Niazi, 2002). But now-a-days in South Asia the word *Madrassa* is specifically used for Islamic educational institutions (Hoodbhoy, 1998).

A brief history

The first *Madrassa* namely *Suffa* was established in Madina in 622 A.D and its first chancellor was the Holy Prophet SAW (Inayat Ullah, 1992). The above-mentioned *Madrassa* produced a large pool of reformers, jurists, politicians and military officers. Furthermore, it had reformed many evildoers like dacoits, liars, thieves and murderers (Ibn-e-Hasham, 1980). Later on, many *Madrassas* were established as the Islamic civilization expanded. Some *Madrassas* were established by Nizamul Mulk Tusi in 1067 A.D, who was prime minister during the rule of Saljuq dynasty (Miller, 1941). With passage of time, in some other parts of the world *Madrassas* were established (Dacron, 1984). In India the foundation of *Madrassas* was laid by Muhammad Ghauri in 1200 A.D (Ashraf, 1941). During British era *Darul Ulom Deoband* was established in 1867 A.D and *Nadwatul Ulema* was established in 1894 A.D in India (Hood Bhoy, 1998). *Madrassas* have played not only the role to reform the Muslim society, but they also have endowed Muslims with attitudes of critical and independent thinking in the past. During the war of Independence in India in 1857 A.D more than seven thousand Muslim scholars were martyred as a repercussion of their stance for independence (Haider, 1907). However, the journey of *Madrassa* education continued in the face of such hindrances.

Objectives and goals of *Madrassa* education

The general aim is to reform humanity by teaching the injunctions of Quran and Sunnah for the happiness of Allah (Rabitatul Madarisul Islamia). The objectives of *Madrassas* are: to get factual knowledge of Quran and *Sunnah*; to protect and preach the religion of Islam; to reform students socially, morally, and psychologically and to prepare them for practical life; preparing students in order to reform the behavior of the people, *Ummah*, as well as human civilization on the whole; to get the willingness of Allah and to escape the consequential punishment in the

Hereafter; to produce such scholars that may work for the guidance and welfare of the people; to prepare scholars that have complete knowledge of religious education (Sajjad, & Mansoor, 993).

Merits of *Madrassa* education

Madrassas are contributing in a number of ways in the process of education in Pakistan. Although it has an impact on the general literacy rate of a country where the status of literacy is dismal, *madrassa* education has been more successful in terms of the specific aim of preserving and propagating the teachings of Islam as a religion of the majority of the Pakistani people. The following discussion highlights the various ways in which *Madrassas* are making a positive contribution to the society.

Survival of Islam

In spite of countless internal and external hurdles such as lack of financial support from public sector, coupled with managerial discrepancies, *Madrassas* are providing religious education which has a substantial demand in the society. These institutions produce *Ulema* (religious scholars) and people qualified in theology and religious metaphysics. In nearly all villages or *mohallas* of the Muslim community, there is a Mosque where the need of a leader (*Imam*) is indispensable. Thus, a heavy number of such scholars is needed which is addressed only by *Madrassas*. Paracha believes that only *Madrassas* keep the religion Islam survived as scholars well versed in theological matters are produced by these institutions especially ‘*Huffaz-e-kiram*’ (those who learn by heart the Holy Text) of the Holy Quran. *Madrassas* produce *Ulema* and thereby, preach and in a sense, defend Islam (Paracha, 1986).

Role in behavior shaping

Madrassas are the places where behaviors are shaped. Such types of people are prepared who are supposed to obey the commandments of Allah. They also understand the difference between the concepts of right and wrong as elaborated by the injunctions of Islam. Therefore, their behavior influences the society positively. Such people are relatively more productive for the nation and society as they are considered trustworthy, punctual, hardworking and patriotic. Today, corruption and certain other crimes are very common in Pakistani society. The wrongdoers can be relatively better rectified by *Ulema* of *Madrassas*. Furthermore, like other qualified persons such as professors, social workers and other civil society

members, together with religious intellectuals come forward and to correct the situation, their contributions would be more fruitful (Gillani, 1986).

Leadership

A nation cannot progress unless her leadership is sincere and educated. In this perspective religious *Madrassas* have provided leadership at provincial, national and international levels. Instances of such leadership can be seen in various Parliaments of Pakistan where a number of religious scholars contributed to the well-being of the state and the people of Pakistan. Moreover, they also provide leadership at many other departments and institutions like schools, colleges and universities in the form of teachers and administrators. Apart from that, these institutions have efficiently defended the country in the wars against the aggression from a neighboring country in 1947, 1948, 1965 and 1971. Similarly for the eradication of many evils in society, restoration of democracy and restoration of constitution, contributions of the scholars of *Madrassas* are praiseworthy (The Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, 1949). Thus, their contribution is manifold, however, certain elements have totally an opposite opinion about these institutions. Such elements are criticized by Mohammad who go on to the extent of saying that all those who are antagonistic towards Islam and Pakistan extremely strive to oppose religion, *Madrassas* and *Ulema* (Muhammad, 1986).

Education and research

Besides other sciences *Ulema* are performing the function to teach and do research along with teaching and in the areas of the Quran, *Hadith*, *Fiqh*, Astrology and Philosophy (Rahi, 1978). In the field of education and research *Madrassas* have been very successful. Apart from preparing courses in the subject of Islamiyat for students of schools, colleges and universities, they also prepare Islamiyat courses for competitive examinations like: C.S.S, P.M.S and P.C.S usually held in Pakistan. They provide education to deprived, orphans, handicapped and the needy people. Besides, *Madrassas* address some social issues as well. *Madrassas* have established their own libraries for education and research.

Management of *Masajids*

Keeping in view the apex of Islamic civilization, *Masjid* is the most prominent institution of learning and education in a Muslim society. *Masajids* (plural of *Masjid*) are the places where the individual; society, and humanity are chastised as well as organized. *Masajids* are managed

and supervised directly or indirectly by *Madrassas* or those who have been educated at *Madrassas*. *Madrassas* address social conflicts of the people as well. Instances of this, can be seen in the rural areas of Pakistan where both the conflicting parties get tired of the long and delayed verdicts of the Courts, and are agreed to settle the conflicts, especially in cases of landed properties, in the presence of religious scholar(s). Gulab is right when he asserts that those conflicts that were not solved in fifty years were easily resolved by Imams of *Masajids* or those who are educated at *Madrassas*. Apart from that *Madrassas* provide education to children as well as grown up people (Gulab, 2006). In this manner *Madrassas* are contributing in the area of adult education as well.

General welfare in the society

Ulema (religious scholars) reform behavior of the people and consequently numerous conflicts among the people are resolved without any cost. Sometimes, *Ulema* and *Madrassas* voluntarily play the role of a court or administration (Mustaan, 2011). During earthquake in 2005, military operation in 2009, and flood in 2011, *Madrassas* have conjointly contributed with other welfare organizations (Khalil, 2011). During military operation against terrorism, the government consistently seeks the assistance of the *Ulema*. In 2007 when tribal people opposed polio vaccination under unfounded religious dogmas, the government was trying to control the issue with the help of *Ulema* and thereby resolved the problem (Inayat Ullah, 2007). *Madrassas* have formally opened certain welfare organizations like *Darul Uloom Hussainia* situated in interior Sindh Shahdad Pur which has established a medical dispensary and Eye hospital (Rehman, 2005). *Jamia Taleemul Islam Madani* Charsadda has established an organization for the exploration and carriage of pure water (Tayyeb, 2011). *Jamiatul Uloom Sharia* Rawalpindi has established a hospital where four specialist doctors provide services to public. *Jamia al-Muntazir* Lahore has established a medical dispensary and ambulance service. Similarly, contributions of *Jamia Sindh Mansoor* are also praiseworthy (Rehman, 2005). No doubt, such are the enormous humanitarian contributions of *madrassas* in Pakistan.

The Demerits/Weaknesses

Despite some very outstanding contributions of *Madrassa*, there are certain weak sides of these institutions, about which a brief discussion is presented below.

Pedantic approach towards Quran and *Sunnah*

Quran and *Sunnah* are the fundamental sources of guidance in Islam. No doubt, the injunctions of Quran and *Sunnah* have been survived through *Ulema*. The objective of *Madrassas* was to inculcate Quran and *Sunnah*, but unfortunately, they cannot properly pay attention to the said matter. At the most, literal translation and grammar are taught at these *Madrassas*. To find out solution of different emerging issues and problems in a variety of situations and the implementation of Quranic teachings are not properly taught in these *Madrassas*. According to the Islamic belief the Quran is the source of almost all kinds of knowledge, science and laws. But there is little accumulation of Quranic teachings for issues and challenges peculiar to the modern era. Interpretation of the Quran is taught within a specific and limited period of time. Ghamidi asserts that a relatively short time is specified for the Quran as compared to the time specified for *Fiqh*, Grammar and Philosophy (Ghamdi, 2010). Similarly, there is no proper syllabus of *Hadith*. In fact, *Hadith* is taught within the period of two months. Moreover, these institutions have specific sectarian orientations, hence, *Hadith* is interpreted according to one's own sub-sect (Niazi, 2002). This is the most unfortunate state of affairs with *Madrassas* that in spite of interpreting the true spirit of Islam, these institutions are more concerned with the promotion of their respective sects.

***Taqleed-e-jamid* (blind adherence to authority) and sectarianism**

It is the second demerit attributed to *Madrassas*. They are established on the basis of *Taqleed-e-jamid*. Each *Madrassa* represents a specific sect such as *Deobandi*, *Barailvi*, *Ahl-Hadith*, and above all, Shia and Sunni. Teachers are selected among the concerned sect and even students are also taught according to that sect. It is declared from the very beginning that *Hanafi* would have to remain *Hanafi* or would follow Imam Abu Hanifa. *Ahli Hadith* would have to be *Ahli Hadith* at any cost. And consequently, *Disbandi* would be *Deobandi*, *Barailvi* would be *Barailvi*. This often led to violent conflicts among various sects. Among all these schools of thoughts, the institutions run under Jamat-e-Islami seems to have attained the largest level of abolishing all sectarian orientations.

Instead of getting a direct benefit from the text of the Holy Quran and *Sunnah*, the same are taught according to the parameters of the specific sect. The followers of each sect are struggling to promote and prefer their own sect. Contrary to this, there are some *Madrassas* that try to bring harmony among various schools of thoughts, though their number is very limited. In such very rare institutions, the menace of sectarianism has been eradicated to a great extent. Contrary to these specific institutions,

generally, the traditional madrassas follow the same outmoded syllabus. Consequently, they could not play their due role in the field of research. There is no systematic initiative to address the problems appearing in the modern age. Furthermore, the real message of Islam—which stands for peace and justice—is not properly conveyed to the people. Consequently, apart from non-Muslims, Muslims themselves are confused on certain Islamic issues. Thirdly, sectarianism is the main factor responsible for the disintegration of Muslim *Ummah* (Maudodi, 2004). In religious *Madrassas* students are taught against their opposite sects thereby, they are kept in ignorance (Hoodbhoy, 1995). Instances of sectarian violence are countless, however, the relatively recent devastating attack on Shia-Mosque that took place in Peshawar is an ample example in which more than 60 people were killed on 4 March 2022, (International Crisis Group, 2025).

In recent years the state of Pakistan has initiated some new strategies to curb the menace of sectarianism. Various state-run bodies are primarily established to counter terrorism such as The National Counter Terrorism Authority or NACTA.

In this respect the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA, 2021) in Pakistan has revised its counter-terrorism policy Revised National Action Plan, 2021 where item no. 03 categorically speaks about religious and sectarian terrorism. The item goes thus, “Taking effective measures against religious / sectarian persecution & terrorism”. However, the utility of such measures is yet to be seen in time to come when such strategies are implemented in letter and spirit.

Outdated Curriculum

Another demerit of these institutions is that, they are old fashioned. Majority of leadership at *Madrassas* is unaware of what are the immediate problems of concern for the general masses. In *Madrassas*, the syllabus is outdated which does not fulfill the educational and religious needs of the Pakistani society. This system is as old as was prevalent under the supervision of Prime Minister Nizamul Mulk Tusi in 1067 A.D, in Baghdad (Miller, 1941). The course, ‘*Dars-e-Nizami*’ is a living example in this respect. But with the passage of time, it was not updated. The Quran and *Ahadith* were taught as a necessity of the ‘*Ummah*’. Ancient books of Philosophy that are taught in *Madrassas*, were not updated according to the needs and advancement of society. Latest subjects of modern age like Psychology, Statistics, Astronomy, Physics and Political Science are not included in the syllabus. Even there is no book about Pakistan or Muslim *Ummah* in the syllabus, and the system is totally old-fashioned (Abdul Bar,

2011). Consequently, the product of *Madrassa* cannot meet the challenges of the fast-changing globalized arena of intellectual pursuit. This is due to the fact that nearly 80% of curriculum lacks modern subjects.

Rote memorization and lack of academic freedom/ physical punishment

A glimpse of the situational analysis at *Madrassa* institutions reveal such weaknesses: besides rote memorization and absence of academic freedom, physical punishment is rampant where students are being tortured emotionally and physically in the name of education; and unfortunately, the teachers consider their harshness as their right. They get the students memorize the books instead of understanding them. Language of the teachers and books is very tough and difficult as it is rooted in the text style of the classical writers. Due to which it is very difficult for students to learn properly. There is no specific gradation or duration of syllabus. A student can study any book which he/she wants to study especially in un-registered institutions. Arabic language is not taught directly. Instead of generating and understanding the underlined rules of grammar, these are memorized to the learners. Generally, the writing skill is extremely weak as majority of the students cannot write correctly in either Urdu, Arabic, or any other language. Modern techniques of teaching—such as discussion method, problem solving, project method etc. are not followed. There is no formal mechanism for the appointment of teachers. And there is no proper academic environment for teaching or for developing the study habits of students. Harmony of thought and common cause amongst the diversified *Madrassas* do not exist because there is extensive politics of vested interests and sectarianism. Also, there is no proper arrangement for specialization in various aspects of Islamic education like: *Tafseer*, *Fiqha*, *Ilm-ul-Kalam* etc. and no specific management for women education (Hoodbhoy, 1995). Apart from *Madrassas*, government and society are also responsible for these shortfalls of *Madrassa* education. Because *Madrassas* are facing scarcity of resources and despite all this, they are performing their duty. On the other hand, influential groups or the government do not pay attention towards these institutions, despite the apparent role of these institutions in at least enhancing the literacy rate in Pakistan. Therefore, in spite of having such weaknesses *Madrassas* have also countless merits especially in raising the literacy rate in Pakistan.

The Unfounded Allegations

There is a widespread concern that the number of *Madrasa* students is increasing in due course of time and that the number of these institutions are expanding. Such allegations are mis-manipulated by certain individuals. There is even no proper database pertaining to the enrollment in these institutions. Fair (2012) is right when she says that there is no centralized database of *Madrasas* in Pakistan. She further says that the three venues of schooling are: public schools, the private schools, and the *Madrasas* where in the market share of these sectors between 1991 and 2005, the share of *Madrasa* enrollment was stable for the whole period and was not increasing. Fair (2012) concludes by saying that evidences based on empirical research thwart the allegations that *Madrasas* are expanding by leaps and bounds in Pakistan. A 2005 study by Andrabi who focused on data related to 1991 to 2001 found that *Madrasa* enrollment is less than 01% for the total enrolled children (Andrabi cited by Fair, 2012). Babakheil (2015) has highlighted the stunning truth about *Madrasas* where the same have also suffered because of terrorism giving the evidences that some religious scholars from *Madrasas* also became victims of terrorism such the assassination of Maulana Sarfaraz Naeemi and Maulana Hassan Jan—to name a few.

Foreign Students

Another slashing allegation levelled at *Madrasa* institutions is that there is an increasing trend in terms of enrollment in these institutions which again seems far from reality as Fair, (2012) believes that, due to a number of factors such as new regulation from the state side, coupled with obsolete curriculum—to name a few; the enrollment of students has considerably reduced where the enrollment figure of foreign students came down from 10117 to 2673 for 45 countries to 37 countries respectively. Thus, the issue of foreign students has been raised by certain academic persons where the reality is the other way round.

The Peace Education Perspective on Madrasa Institutions

Peace Education: peace education is ‘the process of teaching people about the threats of violence and strategies for peace’ as stated by Harris (2002). Srinivasan (2009) believes that peace education is, ‘a process whereby people learn about the dangers of violence, develop their capacities to counter violence and build sustainable peace in their communities’. Such are the primary goals of peace education. While Laing (1978) opines, ‘Peace education is an attempt to respond to problems of conflict and violence on scales ranging from the global and national to the

local and personal. It is about exploring ways of creating more just and sustainable futures', (UNESCO Publication at <http://www.ncte-in.org/pub.htm>).

As an essential message of Islam, ideally, peace should be the utmost concern of *Madrassa* education. However, the nature and structure of *Madrassa* education, as already discussed, is not in line with the cherished ideals of Islam. Leave the rest, even the product of these institutions does not possess the potential to have respect for diversity. Consequently, sectarianism is rampant in most of the institutions as such institutions have either, *Shia*, *Sunni*, *Deobandi*, *Baralvi*, or *Ahl-hadith* or any other orientations. In this context Abdullah (2015) opines that *Madrassas* are often blamed for at least, indirectly supporting violent activities. While Azeem (2015) thinks that some *Madrassas* have close links with the terrorists and that these institutions are providing safe havens for the terrorists. Furthermore, there is no explicit curriculum on peace or peace education although some administrative leaders from *Madrassas* have even promised to include peace education in the content subject to some conditions that were in debate with the current government under the famous *Madrassa* Registration Bill, under the Societies Registration Act, 2024 signed by the President of Pakistan on 29 Dec, 2024. In this context Rathore (2017) asserts the *Madrassa* leadership have agreed even to compile a book on peace education as a uniform course to be taught in these institutions subject to the conditions that the government should grant madrassa boards the status as granted to other English education boards.

Comparative analysis of sectarian and the non-sectarian *Madrassas*

Apparently there is no clear difference in the curricula taught in the various schools of thoughts, however, the way the learners are indoctrinated through relative interpretation of the text as per their specific sect breeds hatred for other sects. In this respect Rathore (2017) believes that, "even though the interpretations offered are sectarian, the curriculum per se doesn't directly indicate violence" (p.38). It was found in this study that the institutions run under Jamat-e-Islami had somewhat a different learning environment as the teachers and students were relatively more open to discuss academic queries. Besides having a relatively more permissive learning atmosphere, these the scholars in these institutions do not believe in sectarian orientation, rather they think of sectarianism as detrimental to the unity of the *Ummah*. The anti-sectarian stance of such institutions well-known in the Pakistani society as the religious scholars of Jamat-e-Islami have strongly conveyed their message that they do not believe in sectarianism. This is even evident from the very manifesto of

Jamat-e-Islami. Qaisar Sharif, the then deputy secretary information, JI, thinks that about the ideas of Imam Maudoodi—the founder of JI—once Imam Khomeini openly confessed that one of the outstanding traits of Imam Maudoodi is that the later wanted to conjointly abolish of Sunni-Shia controversies and that to prepare a collective framework for the struggle of Islamic Renaissance (The Daily Jang, 2015). No doubt, this line of thinking is appreciable as it is in a sense peace-promoting because it underpins respect for diversity, tolerance, and equality at least within the academic confinements.

Conclusion

Almost ninety seven percent population of Pakistan consists of Muslims. For their religious needs, rights and religious education they require guidance. And such guidance, in most cases, is provided by *Madrassas*. Ideally it is the duty of *Madrassas* to find out solutions of newly arisen problems (such as economic, social, and political concerns in the globalized context) to provide people with religious guidance, to preach Islam and to arrange research on different social, cultural, economic, and political issues from an Islamic perspective. However, in this context the creative role of these *Madrassas* has been diminished to the level of a standstill. On the other hand, *Madrassas* perform certain welfare functions as well, such as contributing to enhance literacy rate in Pakistan and to help the needy and to resolve conflicts among the general masses—though to a very limited extent.

Besides having positive contributions *Madrassa* have some inherent weaknesses such as: sectarianism, intolerance, outdated syllabus with absence of modern disciplines, pedantic approach to addressing socio-cultural, economic, and political issues, and lack of research and creativity—at least within their own mandated theological confinements. Furthermore, Quran and *Sunnah* have not properly been included in the syllabus. However, despite limited resources *Madrassas* are voluntarily helping the people. They have some positive functions and contributions. With the passage of time the government, the society and the madrassas' managers may prepare a proper mechanism for the desired and smooth running of these institutions. The often-debated *Madaris* Bill would be a welcoming addition if properly devised and implemented. Streamlining the madrassa education will positively contribute to creating a culture of peace and co-existence. In this respect, teaching as well as practicing peace is the only way. Peace education is an emerging discipline around the world. The focus of this discipline is to educate for peaceful co-existence in a diverse global community. In this connection, under the prerogative of the UN, states of the world are to foster peace related content, skills,

and attitudes among the learners. Pakistan being at the front line in the war against terrorism, need to address this in academic circles on priority basis. *Madrassa* education, no doubt, an important segment in the dissemination of knowledge and literacy, needs to be concentrated on besides the mainstream education system for fostering a culture of peace in the country. In this respect the contributions of the non-sectarian *Madrassas* that have abolished sectarian orientations in their academic circles such as that of JI, are praiseworthy. The non-sectarian stance of these institutions can be instrumental for creating a culture of peace, tolerance, and respect for diversity even, in the civil society in the long-run.

Recommendations

On the basis of findings, the following recommendation are presented to make *Madrassa* institutions more peace-promoting:

- i. *Madrassa* institutions may be brought under the mainstream education system with a thorough overhauling pertaining to aims, curricula, methodology, and general institutional environment.
- ii. The government may provide financial support for development of physical infrastructure and related facilities ranging from buildings, academic facilities, teacher appointment etc.
- iii. That the teachers of these institutions are in dire need of teacher-training. The researchers have personally observed that physical punishment is still rampant in these institutions, hence; the need of changing the peculiar mindset. Such trainings may be made mandatory for all the teachers to avail where anti-sectarian and peace-promoting attitudes are to be developed.
- iv. Last, but not the least, peace education may be incorporated in the curricula of *Madrassa* institutions.

For further research:

- i. Research may be conducted on large scale level where each geographical region of the country may be represented.
- ii. Both qualitative and quantitative research approaches may be adopted so as to gain more insight into the matters related to *Madrassa* institutions in Pakistan.

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