

Development of Madrasa Education in India: A Historical Overview

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Abstract

In India, madrasas have an ancient history. Madrasas have always contributed welfare to the society. From the very beginning it is meant to serve the educational and religious needs of the people. Through various periods, it always reveals how madrasas and its system shaped the religious and educational platform of India. UNESCO reports that from Medina mosque (7th century) to 10th century (Ghazni period) and till 17th century, the role of madrasa education in imparting education was firstly in teachings of the Qur'an, theology, law, history, the Arabic language and literature and later became centers for religious and secular learning. According to the recent data madrasa education system educate over 1.5 million students per year and it has been significantly contributing to universalization of education after SSA (Sarva Siksha Abhiyan) and plays an important role in socio-cultural and economic advancement of the Muslim community to prepare an increasing number of students for higher education. To know the concept and history of madrasa education in India and its contribution of providing quality education, this paper unveils the madrasas from the age of Ghazni to independent India and the formation of madrasa boards. This study also clearly focuses on the traditional growth and timely changes of madrasa education system.

Keywords: Madrasa, Education, Traditional Growth, Development, India.

Introduction

Madrasas and maktabas are considered as the focus for Islamic learning. Maktabas which refer to elementary schools are those places where children learn to recite the *Qur'an* and basic tenets of Islam. Those who aspire to get higher degrees and specialization in Islamic theology and jurisprudence, go to madrasas. It is important to note that some have no other alternative than to go for madrasa because they cannot afford mainstream education. In India, madrasas have a long but tumbled foundation. The foundation of the madrasa education was laid by the Arab traders initially in the form of maktab in south India. During the Arab rule in Sind (8-10th century), madrasa education took a formal shape and became centers of Islamic culture and civilization. At the beginning of 13th century, after the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, several madrasas were established in different parts of the country and it further expanded during the Mughal rule (1526- 1857). Before 1857, madrasas increased in large number (Islam, 2010). The revolt of 1857 made the conditions of the Indian Muslims deplorable and gave rise to misinformation about their religious and social life. In the post-1857 period, the madrasas were revived and were further strengthened as the Muslim *ulama* (Learned scholar in Islam) feared that the Islamic way of life got diluted due to western education introduced by the British and following which

an immediate need was felt to preserve their culture and identity through madrasa education. As a result, madrasas like, Darul Uloom in Deoband, Nadwatul Ulama in Lucknow were established and Calcutta Madrasa too became an important centre for Islamic learning. Later, in post-independence period, a large number of madrasas flourished all over the country and to run these institutions systematically, madrasa boards came up with their own curriculum and syllabus (Husain, 2005).

For centuries, madrasas have served as the centre of Islamic education in India. They have played a key role in the development of Islamic thought and in the formation and progress of Muslim communities. The main aim of madrasa education was to inculcate the belief and practice of Islam among its followers and guide them to follow the *Qur'an* and the practices of Prophet (pbuh). In medieval Islamic times, madrasas were the main centers of religious education and at the same time madrasas served as a refuge for poor and wandering students who received bed and board in the duration of their studies (Wani, 2012; Quasmi, 2015). Still, madrasas are making a significant contribution to provide incentives and retention as part of the Government of India's program of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Universal Elementary Education (UEE). Madrasas are necessary for Muslims, as apart from providing basic education, they also serve as an important instrument of identity maintenance for the community. Sachar Committee Report (2006) says, 'many a time madrasas are the only educational option available to Muslim children, specially in areas where no schools have reached the Muslim masses. Very often children go to the madrasas not out of the choice but due to non-availability and inaccessibility of other schools' (17). Most of the madrasas provide free education to the poor Muslims and madrasas educated over 1.5 million students per year (Fahimuddin, 2004).

Though madrasa education system from the age of Ghazni to independent India and the madrasa boards are taking part in providing both secular and religious education, in keeping with the needs of time, the madrasas and the syllabus of madrasas underwent a continuous change.

Age of Ghazni and Madrasas

A number of madrasas were established in this age (977-1186) and every ruler of this period paid attention towards education and providing facilities to students. Mahmud Ghazni raided India again and again but he did not have any desire to rule over India. Therefore he had no interest in promotion of education in India. But he used to donate a huge sum of money for education (M. S. Qasmi, 2005). According to a chronicle, 'he founded a madrasa at Ghazni and supplied it with a vast collection of curious books in various languages...for the maintenance of this establishment, he appropriated a large sum of money besides a sufficient fund for students and learned men to instruct youths in the arts and sciences' (Eliot & Dowson, 1977 cited in Kaur, 1990: 18). His son and his successor, Sultan Masud, by following the tradition of his father built maktabas and madrasas for the promotion of learning. In his time, the Arabic and Persian literature became richer along with the subjects, Sanskrit and Greek literature. Other subjects like, Mathematics, Astrology, Philosophy, Medicine and Pharmacology were added in the curriculum and translation of Indian works into Arabic and Persian showed their keen interest in learning (Kaur, 1990).

Ghori Dynasty and Madrasas

In the later period, Ghazivids moved their capital from Ghazni to Lahore and it became an important centre of Muslim Education in twelfth century. After the foundation of Turkish rule in India by Muhammad Ghori (1186-1206) the capital was shifted from Lahore to Delhi. Delhi became an important

centre of Muslim learning in India. Muhammad Ghori built many madrasas in Ajmer. But history says he was unable to plan the policies systematically for spreading Muslim education, although the study of *Fiqh* was developed in this period (Siddiqui, 2004; Kaur, 1990).

The Liberite and Madrasas

After Ghori, Qutubuddin Aibak (1206-1290) who was the first Liberite sultan of Delhi established many of mosques in various parts of his dominions. He helped promote both religious and secular learning in these mosques. The successor of Qutubuddin Aibak, named Iltutmish, was the first person who established a madrasa in Delhi, called Madrasa-i-Muizzi and another one with the same name established in Badaun, which became an important centre of Muslim learning in Northern India. Iltutmish paid attention to girl's education also (Kaur, 1990).

The next two sultans, Bairam and Masud were unimportant in promoting education but sultan Nasir-ud-din Masud found several opportunities to spread and promote education. In the period of Prince Muhammad, a number of literary societies were established to standardize the education and in promoting literature, music and art. During the Libarites rule several madrasas were established in Delhi like, Firuziya, Nasiriya, Muizziya etc. and the curriculum of madrasas in this age consisted of *Hadith*, Arabic literature, grammar, Islamic law, Islamic theology, logic, mysticism, astronomy and Greek philosophy. Arabic was the medium of instruction in these madrasas (Kaur, 1990).

Khilji Dynasty and Madrasas

After Liberites, in the time of Khilji dynasty (1290-1320) no large education centers could grow well. But the first ruler of Khilji dynasty, Jalal-ud-din used to invite many scholars and listened to them with interest and spent a huge amount in building *khanqah*. His successor Ala-ud-din was very curious in advancing education although he was himself uneducated. During his reign madrasas were having forty-five scholars of arts and science who had come from different parts of his sultanate. Among these scholars the name, Amir Khausrau is inscribed in history, who wrote 99 books on various subjects. History depicts the Sultan as 'the strengthener of the pulpits of learning and religion, and the strengthener of the rulers of madrasas and places of worship'. After sultan Ala-ud-din, Mubarak Shah Khalji had come and he remunerated some madrasas (Kaur, 1990: 20).

Tughlaq and Madrasas

During the reign of Muhammad Tughlaq (1320-1419), there were so many madrasas. As M. S. Qasmi writes, 'there were as many as one thousand madrasas in Delhi alone in the period of Sultan Mahmood Tughlaque' (2005: 24). He established *Nai- Ka Qila* which was considered as a madrasa at that time. In Khurramabad he also established a madrasa and in these madrasas not only religious education was taught but science and mathematics were also taught and the teachers' salary was paid by the government. Another Tughlaq ruler Firoz Shah Tughlaq had shown interest in promotion of education and he rebuilt the old madrasas and renewed the academic system. The famous madrasas in his period were Qadam Sharif and Firoz Shahi Madrasa in Firozabad. Theology, *Fiqh*, commentaries on *Qur'an* were taught in these madrasas but *Fiqh*, *Hadith* and *Tafseer* got more emphasis in this period (Kaur, 1990).

The Lodis and Madrasas

After Tughlaq, Lodi dynasty (1414-1526) succeeded Sultan Bahlul Lodi who was the founder of Agra city and built so many madrasas there. During the period of his successor Sikander Lodi, Agra city became a centre of learning and international attention (Siddiqui, 2004). As he was fond of seeking knowledge and promoting education he kept seventeen scholars in his apartment. During this time, the education for girls was also encouraged and several madrasas were built only for girl's education. The curriculum in this period comprised 'Holy *Qur'an*: namely *Tafseer* literature, Prophetic Traditions: namely *Hadith* literature with *Usul-ul-Hadith*; each of four schools of Islamic law- Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki and Hanbali: namely *Fiqh* literature and *Usul-ul-Fiqh*' (Kaur, 1990: 24).

Regional Kingdoms and Madrasas

The local and regional kingdoms in southern India also spread out the madrasa education. In southern India in 1378, Mahmud Shah established a madrasa in Daccan and he founded a number of madrasas in other places also like Gulbarga, Bidar, Qandhar, Ellichpur, Daulatabad and he used to spend money for the maintenance of these madrasas. His successor, Ahmad Shah Bahmani founded a madrasa in Gulbarga and after him a famous madrasa named, *Madrasa-i-Mahmud Gawan* was built at Bidar by Mahmud Gawan. Both religious and secular education were taught in these madrasas. In the period of Adil Shah, Islamic learning and Islamic Sciences were taught in a mosque at Bijapur named, Asar Sharif. Muhammad Quli Qutub was the reputed one among the regional kingdoms of southern India. He encouraged his subjects for education and established several madrasas in Golconda. The travelogues of Ibn-e-Batuta refer to the kingdom of sultan Jalaluddin Ahsan Shah who built twenty three madrasas for boys and thirteen for girls in Madura (Kaur, 1990).

In central and western India, among the provincial kingdoms, Malwa had highest reputation in establishing a large number of madrasas. Sultan Mahmud Khalji established a madrasa in Sarangpur where 'women were taught dancing, music, sewing, weaving, velvet making, shoe making, carpenter's craft, goldsmith craft, quiver making, wrestling and military arts and they had these for acquiring proficiency in learning and craft' (Kaur, 1990: 26). Mahmud Shah, a famous name in history who built many madrasas in Ahmadabad city such as Madrasa-i-Saif, Madrasa-i-Hidayat Baksh established in 1662 and 1697 respectively. Arabic and Persian scholars taught in these madrasas and *Hadith* and *Tajweed* were also included in the syllabus (Siddiqui, 2004).

In northern India, Lucknow, Sind, Jaunpur, Kashmir were the famous names of areas where learning centers were built. In Kashmir and Srinagar Sultan Husain Khan Chack established a number of madrasas and speeded up the promotion of education. In Ibrahim Lodi's time, Jaunpur got the highest popularity and in Humayun's period it maintained its reputation as the centre of learning. Similarly, in Sind a number of madrasas were established whereas during Nasiruddin Qubacha period Firangi Mahal in Lucknow became famous for the madrasa. During the reign of Aurangzeb, Alexander Hamilton visited India and said, 'only in Thatta, there were four hundred schools for different subjects for art and craft. This was truth of every city, every region and every period of Muslim history' (Ahmad cited in Kaur, 1990: 29).

Eastern India too became remarkable for building madrasas and advancing education. Ikhtiyar Bin Bakhtyar Khalji built makhtabs and madrasas in Rangpur and it became a learning centre in Eastern India. His successor, Ghiyas-ud-din II established a famous madrasa named *Dars Bari* and a huge number of madrasas were built in Gour, Azimpur, Burdwan, Murshidabad, Mangalkot. Ghiyas-ud-din founded a

college named Madrasa Badi Husain Shah and Nusrat Shah and he provided scholarship to students (M. S. Qasmi, 2005).

The Mughals and Madrasas

In the pages of Indian history, Mughal period (1526-1857) is one of the most developed periods. Most of the rulers were fond of learning and a large number of makhtabs and madrasas were built in different parts of Mughal Sultanate. The founder of Mughal Empire, Zahiruddin Muhammad Babar was himself a poet and writer. During his time, madrasas were established in Jaunpur and Gwalior. After Babar, during the reign of Humayun, new madrasas were built in Delhi and Agra (Siddiqui, 2004). One of the well known madrasas which was built in Agra city was Madrasat-uz-Zainiyya and another famous one was Humayun's Tomb of New Delhi. This was used as a centre of education during his time (Kaur, 1990).

After Humayun, Sur Dynasty came into power and Sher Shah did a lot for advancing and promoting education. With the passage of time, Mughal power throned once again and a huge number of makhtabs and madrasas were built in Mughal Sultanate. In these institutions learners memorized *Qur'an* and they were also taught *Kalima* and *three R's* (reading, writing and arithmetic) (Kaur, 1990).

The Mughal emperor Akbar showed a notable interest in promoting education and learning. In his long years of Kingship, Akbar introduced new methods of teaching language for acquiring language skills and updated the curriculum of madrasa education by adding teaching of accent on rational and liberal sciences. Akbar introduced some reforms in madrasa curriculum and his principle was 'every boy ought to read books on morals, arithmetic, agriculture, geometry, astronomy, physiognomy, rules of government, medicine, logic, Tabi-i (physical science), *Riyazi*, science and history; all of which may be gradually acquired and these regulations shed a new light on makhtabs'. (Allami translated by Blochmann, 1965 cited in Siddiqui, 2004: 185). During his time several madrasas were built in his Sultanate like, Madrasa-i-Abul Fazl by Abul Fazl at Fatehpur, Madrasa Khair-ul-Manzil by Maham Anaga, Khwaja Muin and Madrasa-i-Khas by Ala-ud-din ul Lari at Akbarabad, Madrasa-i- Mir Jumla by Mir Jumla in Delhi. Agra was also marked as a centre of education. The subjects like arts, science, paintings, music etc. were in demand from that time (Kaur, 1990). The curriculum in these madrasas comprised *Mantique*, Philosophy, History, Mathematics, Art of Agriculture, *Akhlaqiyyat* (ethics), Economics, Astronomy, Geography and books related to religion (M. S. Qasmi, 2005).

Then Jahangir succeeded Akbar and he renewed many madrasas and built so many. In his time Agra earned the reputation of centre of education. In the reign of Shah Jahan, education did not get more emphasis but had established a madrasa near Jama Masjid in Delhi which was a mark of promoting education. He also renovated and established several madrasas. In Fatehpur Sikri, Madrasa Banat was established only for girls (Siddiqui, 2004).

Aurangzeb, the last Mughal emperor, had keen interest in spreading education. A huge number of madrasas were built by Aurangzeb and one of those was Madrasa at Lucknow, which is known as Firangi Mahal. Sialkot was the reputed place for learning in Aurangzeb time. The curriculum of the madrasas was patterned by Aurangzeb and it included History, Geography, the language of other nations, forms of government, manners and customs in the curricula of madrasa education. Kaur (1990) mentions that Aurangzeb was the first ruler who proposed vocational education for the scholars. In his ruling time, Mulla Nizamuddin prepared a systematic syllabus for madrasas and this was called *Dars-e-Nizami*. This newly formed syllabus importantly focused on rational sciences. This also included *Fiqh*,

Mantique, Arabic and Persian grammar as Persian was the court language at that time. Because the idea was to devise a syllabus which would prepare the students for government jobs (Jhingran, 2010). During the time of Aurangzeb and his forefathers, Delhi was centre of learning and several madrasas were built over there. After Aurangzeb reign, power was on decline and it also affected the education system. After the decline of Mughal Empire, madrasas were established in Delhi and introduced secular subjects. Both religious and secular subjects were also taught in Muslim institutions in Punjab. But when madrasa-i-Aliya came under the East India Company, these institutions became the centre for promoting secular education and English learning (Siddiqui, 2004).

A Chronological List of Subjects Taught in Madrasas: From Ghazni to Mughal Era

Dynasty	Year	Subjects studying	Subject(s) added
Ghazni	977-1186	Arabic, Sanskrit, Greek Literature, Mathematics, Astrology, Philosophy, Medicine, Pharmacology.	
Ghori	1186-1206	Arabic, Sanskrit, Greek Literature, Mathematics, Astrology, Philosophy, Medicine, Pharmacology.	<i>Fiqh</i> .
Liberite	1206-1290	Arabic, Sanskrit, Greek Literature, Mathematics, Astrology, Philosophy, Medicine, Pharmacology, <i>Fiqh</i>	<i>Hadith</i> , Arabic grammar, Islamic law, Islamic theology, Logic, mysticism, astronomy.
Khilji	1290-1320	Arabic, Sanskrit, Greek Literature, Mathematics, Astrology, Philosophy, Medicine, Pharmacology, <i>Fiqh</i> , <i>Hadith</i> , Arabic grammar, Islamic law, Islamic theology, Logic, mysticism, astronomy.	Status quo.
Tughlaq	1320-1414	Arabic, Sanskrit, Greek Literature, Mathematics, Astrology, Philosophy, Medicine, Pharmacology, <i>Fiqh</i> , <i>Hadith</i> , Arabic grammar, Islamic law, Islamic theology, Logic, mysticism, astronomy.	Commentaries on <i>Qur'an</i> and <i>Tafseer</i> .
Lodi	1414-1526	Arabic, Sanskrit, Greek Literature, Mathematics, Astrology, Philosophy, Medicine, Pharmacology, <i>Fiqh</i> , <i>Hadith</i> , Arabic grammar, Islamic law, Islamic theology, Logic, mysticism, astronomy, Commentaries on <i>Qur'an</i> and <i>Tafseer</i> .	<i>Usul-ul-Hadith</i> and <i>Usul-ul-Fiqh</i> .
Mughals	1526-1857	Arabic, Sanskrit, Greek Literature, Mathematics, Astrology, Philosophy, Medicine, Pharmacology, <i>Fiqh</i> , <i>Hadith</i> , Arabic grammar, Islamic law, Islamic theology, Logic, mysticism, astronomy, Commentaries on <i>Qur'an</i> , <i>Tafseer</i> , <i>Usul-ul-Hadith</i> and <i>Usul-ul-Fiqh</i> .	<i>Kalima</i> and <i>three R's</i> (reading, writing and arithmetic), morals, agriculture, geometry, physiognomy, rules of government, <i>Tabi-i</i> (physical science), <i>Riyazi</i> , history, arts, paintings, music, <i>Mantique</i> ,

			Art of Agriculture, <i>Akhlaqiyyat</i> (ethics), Economics, Geography, Persian grammar.
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British in India and Madrasa System

With the fall of Muslim rule, the arrival of the British in 1757 brought drastic changes in Indian history which jerked the entire social, economical, religious and educational pattern. Influence of British administration gradually declined the system of madrasa education and numbers of madrasas. The British started secular and English education (M. K. Qasmi, 2005). Moreover, ‘education became an object of mental and moral cultivation; as a means for achieving purely worldly ambitions. Traditional education was also undermined and establishment of modern schools also continued to the decline of many of the maktabas and madrasas’ (Kaur, 1990: 177).

The purpose of introducing English was to make some English speaking Indians so that the East India Company can comfortably stabilize itself to rule over India. At the same time, Warren Hastings founded Madrasa-i-Aliya in 1781 in Calcutta and the objective was to produce trained scholars who would be proficient in Arabic and Persian and capable for public service so that they could help the government. From the very outset, East India Company was in support of spreading English education. And in 1837, they replaced Persian by English as the language of official correspondence and ‘knowledge of English became an essential requirement for government jobs (Jhingran, 2010).

English education replaced the madrasa system and it became a passport to government services and other avenues in public life. In order to get a job for a Muslim in the post-revolt period, the situation as described by W. W. Hunter was that ‘there is now scarcely a government office in which a Muslim can hope for any post above the rank of porter, messenger, filler of ink-pots etc’ (Kaur, 1990: 180). In these changed circumstances of administration and education the knowledge of English (language of the Ruler) was a demandable issue. Some intellectual movements had begun in this nineteenth century which resulted in a form of establishments such as Dar-ul-Uloom at Deoband in 1865, Madrasa Mazahirul Uloom at Saharanpur in 1866, Muhammadan Anglo Oriental College at Aligarh in 1875, Nadwatul Ulama at Lucknow in 1898, Madrasat-al-Islah, Jamiat-ul-Falah at Azamgarh in 1909. Besides, Calcutta Madrasa reformed and it regained its glowing reputation as the centre of Islamic learning. And it is notable that educational progress during the time of 1922-1927 was at its peak (Jhingran, 2010 & Kaur, 1990).

Independent India and Madrasas

Post-independence and after partition, in India, a number of madrasas were gradually increasing to maintain their identity. A huge number of madrasas and maktabas were established in the last fifty years specially in those places where the large number of Muslim population resided. Beside this, the large, traditional and old madrasas like Dar-ul-Uloom of Deoband, Nadwatul Ulama of Lucknow, Muzahir-ul-Uloom, Madrasa-i-Aliya etc. were already functioning. According to 1950’s census, there were 88 Arabic madrasas in traditional style, which focused mainly on Islamic learning i.e. *Qur’an* and *Hadith* and by the time this number increased to thousands and lakhs (Kaur, 1990; Sikand, 2005). In 1950, when Indian Constitution came into force, it became more easy to build their institutions as the Article 29(1), 30(1) and 30(2) of Indian Constitution states ‘Muslims have a right to work for the defense of their

religion and open makhtabs and madrasas' and also 'the Uttar Pradesh Education Act No. 7 of 1919 and 1926 provided sanction for the Muslims to impart religious education to their own children; so it is clear from these Articles that the government would not interfere with opening of religious makhtabs and madrasas' (Abbassi, 1961 cited in Kaur, 1990: 205).

For the advancement of education Uttar Pradesh State Government established Deeni Talimi Council in 1959 and makhtabs and madrasas under this council used to teach Islamic studies and *Qur'an*, knowledge of modern languages, arithmetic and other modern subjects. As Siddiqui has said, 'on the one hand, the number of madrasas and makhtabs now stands increased considerably and on the other, some new experiments in their curriculum and mode of instruction have been initiated' (2004: 195). Although the number of madrasas were increasing after independence but the conditions of madrasas were so poor. So, some madrasas were recognized by their own state board.

Madrasa Boards

After independence, as per the changing market-scenario, madrasas also needed a change within. They think they should have their individual certification from a recognized body of their own state so that their students will be able to get opportunity in further education and employment. Then, some madrasa boards were established and these boards were recognized and financed by their own state government. Madrasa Aliya was first madrasa of this kind and yet it is one of the famous affiliating bodies and an institution in itself. Like Aliya, Bihar state government has also a well developed and better organized affiliating body run by Shamsul Huda Madrasa Board and the students of madrasas under this Board take 17 years to complete Fazil degree which is equivalent to M. A. (M. K. Qasmi, 2005). Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Assam also have Madrasa Education Boards. Siddiqui stated, 'in Bihar, about 1600 madrasas are affiliated to Bihar Madrasa Education Board, in Orissa 79 madrasas are affiliated to Orissa Madrasa Board, in UP 375 madrasas are affiliated to UP Madrasa Education, and in West Bengal more than 400 madrasas are affiliated'(1998: 78).

In Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Assam and Madhya Pradesh and all other states the Madrasa Board is carrying their own curriculum and these boards modify their syllabus with the balance of both traditional and modern subjects. Thus, these boards are balancing both *Deen* and *Duniya* in their curriculum (Jhingran, 2010).

Conclusion

In India, from the very beginning Islamic education has started and spread throughout various dynasties and till now it is playing an important role in a balanced way (both secularly & religiously). The establishment of madrasa education system started by the Muslim rulers and it has its own significance as Mughals has accelerate in pre-colonial era and the madrasa education system is revamped by some other religious leaders during British period. Madrasa education system has gone through many challenges and changes from the establishment of makhtabs, madrasa, Arabic colleges, madrasa boards and Islamic universities; but it has been trying to maintain and contribute its legacy again and again in different era even when the democratic values and challenges are brewing up, madrasa education system should carry its existence, growth, traditional concepts and its welfare towards the society.

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