

MADRASAH EDUCATION

AN OBSERVATION

Muzib Mehdy

Editor
Rokeya Kabir



Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha

Madrash Education: An Observation

First Published

September 2003

Publisher

Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS)

House 255, Road 10A (old 19)

Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka 1209

Phone 8111323, 8124899

Email: bnps@bangla.net.

Copyright

BNPS

Cover design

Haradhan Chakraborty

Print

The Laminators

95/6 Distillery Road

Gandaria, Dhaka-1204

Phone # 741 0838, 7410765

Price

Tk. 80 only

Madrasah Education: An Observation written by Muzib Mehdy, translated from Bangla by Nadia Sabnam and Published by Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS), House: 255, Road: 10/A, Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka 1209, Price 80 Taka.

Dedicated to
those, who became the victims of social conservativeness,
religious fundamentalism and communalism
and
who are combating these evil forces

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

- Background
- Aims And Objectives
- Organization Of The Study
- Limitations Of The Study
- Methodology

The Background Of Islamic Education And The Introduction Of Madrasah Education In The Subcontinent

Education Policy Through Time And The Position Of Madrasah Education In The National Education Policy Of Bangladesh

Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board And Administration Of The Board

Types, Locations And Statistics Of Madrasahs In Bangladesh

- Ebtedayee Madrasahs
- Dakhil And Alim Madrasahs
- Fazil And Kamil Madrasah
- Khariji Or Qawmi Madrasah
- Maktab Or Forqania Madrasah
- Hifzul Quran Madrasah
- Cadet Madrasah
- Islamic University

Social And Political Standpoint Of Madrasah Students, Teachers And Patrons.. 43

Curriculum And Teaching Methods Of Madrasahs

Education Financing: A Comparison

Possible Fields Of Work For Madrasah Students And Their Contribution To The National Economy

Madrasah Education And Women

Madrasah Education And Values

The Civil Society On Madrasah Education

- Madrasah Education Versus The Reality Of The 21st Century
- Ethical Development And Madrasah Education
- The Influence Of Madrasah Education On The Women's Movement
- Similar Education For All Versus Madrasah Education
- The Role Of Madrasah Education On The Progressive Movement
- The Mutuality Of Madrasah Education And Communal Politics

Conclusions

Introduction

Background

In 1994 Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) conducted an exploratory study entitled “Woman and Education” in an attempt to identify the sources of the silent movement against women’s empowerment in the context of the rise of the religious fundamentalist powers. The experiences and insights gained in conducting this study resulted in the compilation of a research paper entitled “Madrasah Education in Bangladesh: Background, Present Status and the Position of Women” in 1997.

The fundamentalist forces, currently active, have emerged as a strong barrier to all progressive movements including the women’s movement. In this context, it seemed necessary to renew, review and reevaluate the data collected in the past study as well as to reexamine the whole issue.

Aims and Objectives

This study has been conducted with several objectives. These are to preserve and advance the ideals of the liberation war and to develop gender equality through transformation of the existing educational system into a modern scientific mode of education. As background conceptualization, it has been kept in mind that madrasah education has played a key role in the gradual rise of fundamentalism.

Organization of the Study

The first section of the report discusses the initiation of Islamic education and the introduction of Madrasah education in the subcontinent. The arrival of Islam in the subcontinent and the origination and spread of Islam based education has been presented in this section. Section two analyses the position of Madrasah education in the national education policy of Bangladesh and the relevant political context. The third section discusses the existence and administration of the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board as a separate board. The characteristics and educational activities of the different types of Madrasahs, the location and present status and relevant statistics are provided in section four. The next section examines the social and political views of Madrasah students, teachers and patrons. Assessment and evaluation of the quality of Madrasah education has been conducted in section six on the basis of the teaching methods of Madrasahs and other relevant academic

information. Section seven presents a comparative picture of allocation in the education sector, which clearly denotes the existing discrimination in state allocations made through the years. The eighth section deals with the issue of potential job opportunities and fields of work for Madrasah-educated individuals and their contributions to the nation. Section nine discusses Madrasah education's relationship with the women's movement on the basis of collected and secondary information. Section ten explores the role of the Madrasahs in the context of the moral void existing in Bangladeshi society. The final section presents and examines the views of the civil society regarding Madrasah education.

Limitations of the Study

The study could have been strengthened by overcoming a few limitations. For instance, it was not possible to obtain a detailed picture of the activities of the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board as an independent/individual board of education. Details regarding its administrative and management processes, the activities of the internal departments of the Board were also not available. It was not possible to obtain information regarding the curriculum development processes of the Board, or even to obtain a copy of the curriculum. In addition, the texts published by the Board were not easily available and it was not possible to observe enough Madrasahs – information which could have further strengthened the study.

Methodology

The various methodologies used in the data collection process involved interviews through questionnaires and observation of teaching techniques at Madrasahs and examination of the social life Madrasah related personnel. These were the methods used to collect primary data. Secondary sources include various publications related to the Madrasah education system as well as the overall educational system of Bangladesh, the Madrasah syllabus and textbooks developed by the Curriculum and Textbook Wing, and various relevant journals and periodicals. Newspaper content for the 1999-2000 period was reviewed. News items, reports, editorials, sub editorials, and essays were also focused on. Examination and analysis of journal articles, poster, graffiti and slogans of various (Islamic) political parties and student organizations as well as speeches made at waaz mehfil and (Islamic socio-political parties) political meetings were conducted.

Respondents for the interviews include Madrasah students, teachers and patrons and other Madrasah related personnel and civil society members from various areas in Bangladesh. Locations selected for the purposes of this investigation include Dhaka, Jessore, Khulna, Netrokona, Mymensingh, Chittagong and Sandwip through purposive random sampling. It should be mentioned that BNPS selected areas where the organization had existing programs. This mode of sampling has added richness and variety to the study locations making it representative as well as adding a new dimension to the study. The collected data has been analyzed and presented as findings/recommendations.

The Background of Islamic Education and the Introduction of Madrasah Education in the Subcontinent

Following the birth of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) himself actively undertook the promotion of education. In Darul Arkam, at the base of the Saafa Mountain, the Prophet himself established and taught in the first Madrasah. The first students of the very first educational institute established under Islam were Abu Bakr (RA), Omar (RA) and the other Sahabis¹. Later the Prophet handed over the responsibility of teaching to Hazrat Ibn Umme Maktum and Mas Aab Bin Umayr and migrated to Madinah to spread the word of Islam. As part of the Muslim initiatives to expand education, he brought over 60-70 prisoners of war from the battle of Badr and in exchange for Fediya², entrusted them with the responsibility of teaching 10 children each.

When he arrived in Madinah, the Prophet established an educational institute in a place near the Nabubi mosque. This was named the Madrasah-E-Soffa. The institution included living quarters for poor students and students from out of town. Sahabis such as Hazrat Abu Horayra, Hazrat Muyaz Ibn Jabal, Hazrat Abuzar Giffari were students there. Gradually this Madrasah evolved into the central learning institution of Madinah.

Prior to the spread of Islam, the education system of Madinah was under control of the Jews. The educated and cultured Jews played a defining role in Madinah's system. After the spread of Islam, converted Jewish scholars played a knowledgeable and effective role in the growth of education. Tribes from different areas would send their representatives to Madrasah-E-Soffa. The representative would return to his people after completion of his own studies and educate his community. Individuals who did not represent another tribe but who were studying under direct supervision of the authority simply out of the desire to learn were required to travel to other tribes to teach. In this process numerous small education institutes were born throughout Madinah. In addition to these, Madrasahs were established adjacent to the mosque in many localities. The Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) himself patronized and looked after these Madrasahs. There was no lack of educated people in Madinah at that time. It was possible for almost everyone to conduct business in writing as is called for in the Quran. Some educated people did not limit their knowledge of languages to Arabic and became proficient in foreign languages³. Jayed Ibn

Sait (RA) of the Prophet Muhammad's (Pbuh) court known as the Mir Munshi was one such individual.

Following the death of the Prophet, during the time of the Kholafaye Rashedin, education expanded further. All new Muslims embarked on spreading the words of the Prophet. Paying for teaching was not customary at that time. The motivation evoked by the Prophets words, "Deliver to them at least one verse in my name", encouraged the new converts. As teachers in that period did not accept payment for their services, similarly students were not required to pay for their tuition. In addition to all education related expenditures, scholarships were arranged for the personal expenses of meritorious students⁴. All these expenditures were made out of the money collected through Zakat.

The second phase of the Islamic education began with the reign of Hazrat Umar Bin Abdul Aziz the eighth Khalifa of the Umaiyah lineage. During this time, state proclamations were made throughout the country and wages and allowances for teachers and scholarships for students were arranged⁵. Separate learning rooms for students and teachers were established in the mosques during this period as well. The whole of Arabia and Iran was transformed into Muslim centers of learning, knowledge and research. The arrival of the Arabs through Bin Qasim's conquest of the Indus had a similar influence on the Indian localities as well. However, the Muslim conquest of India did not succeed in presenting a superior educational system to the Indian subcontinent. Instead, following the traditional Indian educational institutions teaching religion and Sanskrit, they established makhtabs and Madrasahs⁶.

The exodus of the Arabs to the Indian subcontinent began in the sixth century in Western India and the twelfth-thirteenth century in Eastern India⁷. Initiatives undertaken by the recently arrived Muslims, alongside the increase in the Muslim population resulted in the growth and expansion of the Madrasah education system in the major cities like Delhi, Lucknow, Rampur, Agra, Madras, Dhaka and other major cities of the Western region of India.

According to the 'Tarikh-E-Fereshta', the first Madrasah was established in the Multan province of western India. It was probably in the sixth century⁸ that Nasiruddin Kabacha built the Madrasah Firuzi building for Maulana Kutubuddin Kasani. It is believed that this was the first formally approved Madrasah in the subcontinent⁹. According to another source, Muslim religious education in India – the establishment of makhtabs and Madrasahs – occurred in

the twelfth century. Shahabuddin Muhammad Ghuri established a number of Madrasahs in Ajmir, where slaves he had brought to India with him and the local converted Muslims received education¹⁰.

It was in 1203, following the establishment of Muslim rule with Ikhtiaruddin Muhammad Bin Bakhtiar Khilji's conquest of Bengal and Bihar, that Islamic education spread widely throughout this land. A number of mosques, madrasahs and khankas were established. However, trade relations existed between Arabia and India long before the establishment of Muslim rule here and a large number of holy men, and teachers arrived with the tradesmen. These holy men established mosques, madrasahs, khankas and chillakhanas here and remained. Muslim rule continued in India right up to the establishment of British colonial rule after the fiasco in the fields of Palashi. Abul Hasnat Nadabi compiled a listing of Islamic centers of learning established during the long Muslim rule from historical relics and artifacts; it mentions Madrasahs established in Multan, Ucha, Ajmir, Delhi, Punjab, Agra, Ayodh, Bihar, The Daccan, Malab, Kashmir, Gujrat, Surat and Bengal. In the Bengal section it reports that ancient Madrasahs were found in Rangpur, Dhaka, Murshidabad, Laxmanabati, Gour, Asthipur, Ghorasheed mahalla, Shilapur among other towns¹¹

Although maktabas and Madrasahs did exist during the reign of the Emperor Akbar, state control over them had lessened. Abul Fazal writes in *Ain-i-Akbari* that during Akbar's rule, merely learning the Arabic language or the Quran was not considered to be higher or even complete education. The education policy of his day was completely secular and the education was relevant to the practicality of daily living. All students had to study ethics, mathematics, the times tables, agriculture, weighing and measurements, calendar and time measurement, household science, state policy, medicine, logic, theology, the natural sciences and history¹². Students learning Sanskrit had to study Grammar, Logic, Vedanta and Patangali philosophy.

Following the British colonization of India, there was a gradual decline in the maktabas of Bengal¹³. On the other hand, for completely political reasons, in accordance with the *Oriental School of Educational Policy*, the British themselves patronized this religion-based mode of education in the then India. In 1782, the establishment of a Madrasah in Kolkata by Warren Hastings was merely a reflection of this policy. The objective of Hastings' establishing a Madrasah becomes clear from the following: in a report he prepared prior to leaving India, Hastings wrote that the Muslims needed to be engaged by the

criminal courts, the police and other departments. With the fall of the Muslim rule, their situation had become almost that of beggars. They were so badly off that they could not afford to send their children to schools to obtain an education that would get them government jobs. This is the context in which the Madrasahs were created so that Muslim students can get an education and qualify for government jobs¹⁴. This interest in establishing Madrasahs did not stem from any love for Islam or from any idea that this was a superior mode of education. It was simply a political decision, the long-term goals of which were by necessity limited to ensure peaceful governing.

From the very dawn of the nineteenth century, there arose a heated debate regarding the aims, methods and medium of education in India. However, this debate was primarily limited to the British and the upper class Hindus. The Muslims were more or less silent on this matter. Apart from a few exceptions, for the most part they were in favor of the conservative tradition. Instead of modern education, they were satisfied with learning Arabic/Persian languages and makhtabs and madrasshas. Still, after many debates, it was decided to introduce English classes in the Kolkata Madrassha in 1824 and in the Kolkata Sanskrit College in 1827¹⁵.

The 1813 Charter, which was based on the 1792 document by Charles Grant, *Observation of the State of Society Among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain*, and later on the famous 1835 Education Policy developed by Lord Macauley gradually heightened the importance of an English education and a Western knowledge base. Macauley recommended closure of the Kolkata Madrasah and the Sanskrit College and discontinuing financial support to publications in Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. Although his first recommendation was not accepted, his second recommendation was¹⁶.

It was in this continuity that in 1907-8, the famed Earl Committee under the leadership of the then Director of Mass Education Archdale Earl and the Nathan Committee formed in 1914 made recommendations for massive reformation of the Madrasah education system. The New-Scheme system for Madrasahs was initiated from April 1, 1915. The major characteristic of this scheme was to discard Persian and make English compulsory. During this time Bangla, mathematics, geography, history, English drawing, handicrafts and drills were included in the syllabus¹⁷.

A large number of students enrolled within the first three days when the General Committee for Education established the Mohsin College in Hoogli

with funding from the Mohsin Fund in 1836. However, surprisingly, among 1,200 students enrolled in English and 300 in the Oriental Studies department there were only 31 and 81 Muslim students respectively. Grabbing the opportunity provided by the low numbers of Muslims, the alleged friend of Muslims, Mr. Hunter proposed that instead of spending the available resources on the Mohsin College, the money should be spent in establishing Madrasahs in Hoogli, Dhaka and Chittagong. It should be noted that nowhere in the will of Haji Muhammad Mohsin was mentioned that his bequest should be spent on the Muslims only.

The public sector support that the Madrasahs receive in today's Bangladesh is a much-transformed form of the Madrasahs established by Hastings in the British period. Its closest relative is continuing its operations in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan as the Qawmi or the Khariji Madrasah, without governmental endorsement and with funds arriving from abroad and local community donations.

With the partition in 1947, the Kolkata Aaliyah Madrasah was transferred to Dhaka. Since then until 1971, although the active endorsement of the Pakistani government increased the number of Madrasahs in existence, they did not reach such high numbers as they had in Bangladesh. The Madrasahs and the maktabs were run under the private sector even in the Pakistani period. In fact, it was not unheard of for Madrasah students to collect donations for running the Madrasah with collection pot in hand like mendicants in trains or buses¹⁸.

Although Bangladesh took its first steps as an independant country and as a secular nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman did not close any Madrasahs. With the changes in political reality in 1975, up to the rule of Khaleda Zia was the period most favorable to the Madrasah education system¹⁹. The government in power today that claims to be secular is also trying to present itself as a friend of Madrasah education – an attempt reflected in various acts of the government.

-
1. Abdus Sattar, The History of the Aaliyah Madrasah, Islamic Foundation, Dhaka. Pg. 17
 2. Fediya means ransom. These prisoners of war were too poor to obtain their freedom by paying the ransom. As they were educated people and could read and write Arabic, they were made the offer that they would gain their freedom if they educated ten children each.
 3. Possibly apart from Arabic the languages they then knew about included Persian, Habshi, Hebrew and Roman.
 4. Abdul Huq Faridi, Madrasah Education: Bangladesh, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, Pg. 12

-
5. Ibid, Abdul Huq Faridi, Pg. 21
 6. Modern Education in Bangladesh: Historical Background, Shahidul Islam, Education in Bangladesh: The Past, the Present, the Future, Bangladesh Lekhak Shibir, Pg. 12
 7. Madrasah Education in Bangladesh (Background, Present Status and the Position of Women), Abul Momen, Bangladesh Nari Pragati Sangha, Dhaka. Pg. 8
 8. Hazrat Sheikh Bahauddin Zakaria learnt Multani at this organization. He was born in 578 Hijri.
 9. Madrasah Education in Bangladesh (Background, Present Status and the Position of Women), Abul Momen, Bangladesh Nari Pragati Sangha, Dhaka. Pg. 9
 10. Badruddin Umar, The Education Commission Report and Regarding Madrasah and Religious Education, 25th Sangskriti, Anniversary Issue, Pg. 19
 11. Abdul Huq Faridi, Madrasah Education: Bangladesh, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, Pg. 23-27
 12. Badruddin Umar, ibid, Pg. 21
 13. Abdus Sattar, The History of the Aaliyah Madrasah, Islamic Foundation, Dhaka. Pg. 25
 14. Badruddin Umar, The Education Commission Report and Regarding Madrasah and Religious Education, Pg. 21
 15. Education in Bangladesh: The Past, the Present, the Future, Bangladesh Lekhak Shibir, Pg. 33
 16. Madrasah Education in Bangladesh (Background, Present Status and the Position of Women), Abul Momen, Bangladesh Nari Pragati Sangha, Dhaka. Pg. 11
 17. Ibid, Pg. 10
 18. Badruddin Umar, Ibid, Pg. 23
 19. The Daily Inqilab, July 15, 1999

Education Policy through Time and the Position of Madrasah Education in the National Education Policy of Bangladesh

No direct documentation exists regarding the education policy under the primitive egalitarian social structure. It can be assumed that in the absence of personal wealth and the oppression resulting thereof, social collaboration was essential for survival in that period implying that the education policy by necessity must have been universal¹. As the very concept of wealth was absent in primitive society, it is improbable that the tendency to hoard education as personal wealth would exist there. However, a vast change occurred with the introduction of slavery. Under the feudal system, the common human being became subject and slave, with the feudal lords determining values and social mores for them. The limited opportunity for formal education for the common masses that existed were mainly centralized in religious events and similar aspects; aspects that worked in favor of the ruling classes. In the Indian subcontinent, through the caste system, study of the Vedas and philosophy was prohibited for the lower castes and restricted to the upper class Brahmins.

The end of the Sen Period witnessed a rise of the conservatives and society was enchained by the strict bonds of custom and discipline. Apart from occasional and limited glimpses of the practice of knowledge and research, throughout the middle ages until the rule of the East India Company, there is not much evidence of scientific thought throughout India. During this long period, learning mostly consisted of rote memorization of religious lessons and practices in the respective religious educational institutes for Hindus and Muslims². This lack of knowledge related to science and technology was one of the key reasons that sustained two hundred years of British colonialism in the subcontinent.

Following their colonization of the subcontinent, the steps taken by the British in the education sector were motivated by political imperatives. At that time, they needed dedicated supporters to make their ascension to power smooth and untroubled. They attempted to create a class of supporters in keeping with the existing systems of the society without creating too many ripples in the status quo. The education policy they propagated simultaneously promoted and endorsed the traditional Oriental religious education and the Western secular mode of education.

The education related steps taken by the British include the 1792 Charles Grant Recommendations related to education, the Education Survey of William Adams of 1835, the Education Dispatch of Charles Wood of 1857, the first Indian Education Commission of 1882 led by William Hunter, the Indian University Law promulgated in 1904 and the 1914 Nathan Report. Although the British never accepted universal education as policy, it was through these steps and the following reforms and modifications that the education system in this country evolved into what it is today.

Even after the formation of Pakistan, the education system of this country remained within the hands of the opportunist class. The first education convention in Pakistan was held in 1947. The policy approved in the convention was one that facilitated the creation of an elite class. Although on the face of it, this education policy developed a number of education institutions in East Pakistan, in reality the restrictive policy of the past remained in practice. The second Pakistan education convention held in 1951 also decided in favor of retaining the old policy. Led by Maulana Akram Khan, the reformed education committee of 1952 identified Bangla as the language of the Hindus and agreed that it should be reformed into a Muslim language³. In 1957, an education committee was formed under the leadership of Ataur Rahman, the then Central Minister. According to Abdul Hakim, the member-secretary and DPI of the committee, the committee succeeded in presenting a unanimous set of recommendations within a short time. However, as three members recorded their individual opinions in the annexure, three different opinions were also present⁴. In addition to this, political changes at that time precluded implementation of the recommendations. Both the S. M. Sharif Commission in 1962 and the Justice Hamudur Rahman Commission in 1964 were rejected in the face of student protests. The 1969 Nur Khan Commission report was discarded because of political changes⁵. Although the Pakistani government put up a show of rejecting them in the face of rising student protests and changes in the political reality, the government secretly began implementation of these reports. As a result, although there were independent Madrasahs in existence, separatist religious instruction based on rote memorization techniques were implemented even at school level. Without taking into consideration any thought of science-based education, Arabic was to be taught from Class I. Increasing the number of Madrasahs as well as per capita expenditure for Madrasah students in comparison to school students is an indirect execution of the same policy.

Attempts have been made to reform Islamic education at various times. The Muslim Education Convention in 1906 and the 1909 Madrasah Education Reform Committee proposed the secularization of Madrasah education. Although the 1914 government approved the proposal, it was never realized. In 1931-34, in the Momen Committee Report, Dr. Mahmud Hassan, a member of the Muslim Education Advisory Committee wrote that to retain Madrasahs in lieu of primary schools was to take backward steps in terms of education. Syed Amir Ali made similar comments about the Madrasah system. According to Maulana Mozammel Huq, a member of the Madrasah Education Committee led by Mowla Baksh, which was formed in 1938 and published its report in 1941, in the past one hundred years all attempts of reformation of the madrasaah system have been thwarted effectively retaining the curriculum of the times of Emperor Alamgir. His opinion was that secular education and Madrasah education should move side by side. The 1947 Madrasah Syllabus Committee led by Syed Moazzem Hossain also faced severe dissension in its proposal to include secular subjects in the Madrasah curriculum.⁶ Throughout history all attempts at reformation have been doomed to failure through the efforts of the conservatives.

Although Bangladesh was born as a secular and non-communal nation, the report submitted in 1974 by the Education Committee formed under Dr. Kudrat E Khuda, approved retention of the Madrasah system albeit with massive reformation. The Khuda Commission Report proposed many progressive steps to be taken in reforming the Madrasahs. The report proposed restructuring and many basic reformations to the Madrasah system to bring it in line with the times. Notable conclusions included in the report were the following⁷:

- Introducing the syllabus followed by the other education institutions of the country to the Madrasah.
- Usage of Bangla as the medium of education at all levels.
- Inclusion of religious education as a compulsory subject from Class VI to Class VIII.
- Introduction of religious education as vocational training in secondary school.
- After completion of eight years of primary schooling, three years of religious education as vocational training for Madrasah students.

- Inclusion of Bangla, mathematics, general science, and English as compulsory subjects in Classes IX and X in Madrasahs.

However, with the bloody handover of power in 1975 and with the establishment of military rule, this report was abandoned⁸. Hence, the recommendations made in the report were never implemented. Since then, any attempts to realize the commission report have been frustrated.

Following the introduction of military rule, in 1977 an Education Commission was formed under the leadership of the then Education Minister and Advisor Kazi Zaffar. A national convention was organized in Dhaka under the Chairmanship of Kazi Zaffar and after many debates and discussions a *National Education Committee* was formed. In addition, an *Interim Draft Education Policy* was developed⁹. However, this report was never officially accepted due to Kazi Zaffar's sudden expulsion by President Ziaur Rahman from the Ministry. However, a reflection of Pakistani policies became pronounced in the governance approaches of the military rulers, which were also applied to the education policies.

What had not occurred in the Pakistan period came to fruition in liberated Bangladesh. In 1978, the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board was established. In 1983, under the rule of the army, Dr. Abdul Majid Khan, Advisor to the Martial Law Administrator and President, prepared a report entitled *Education Policy and Management*; which proposed making Arabic and English compulsory at primary level and substantial expansion of Madrasah education. Making religious education a compulsory course with full 100 marks at Secondary level in 1991 and reinstating Arabic and English from Class I is realization of some of the recommendations made in that report¹⁰.

The Education Commission formed in 1987 under the leadership of Professor Mafizuddin Ahmed prepared a report after assessing popular opinion, appraising systems in Thailand, China, the Philippines and Japan, reviewing papers presented by educationists, specialists, and relevant essays and critical articles and discussions published in newspapers, magazines and journals as well as recommendations presented by previous committees and commissions¹¹. For obvious reasons, the report submitted by this commission should have been more informed and advanced than the reports by the previous commissions. Unfortunately, akin to its previous counterparts, it was not possible for this commission to work independently, free of state influence. The commission's recommendations are in favor of the outmoded Madrasah education system,

although it does make a number of suggestions for reform. This report proposes utilizing mosques and the Imams to promote literacy and primary education as well as including religious education in the mainstream education of schools and colleges – recommendations that seem to move towards transforming the schools into Madrasahs instead of the opposite. However, the fall of the Ershad government occurred in 1990 before this report was officially accepted. In the later years, during the Khaleda Zia regime in 1991 to 1996, no Education Commission was formed.

The recommendations of the Bangladesh Teachers Association (1997) aimed at developing the education system as a tool for poverty alleviation and realization of the ideals of the Liberation War. The report submitted by the 56 member *National Education Policy Development Committee*¹² formed in January 14, 1997 under the leadership of Professor M. Shamsul Huq speaks of implementing the recommendations of the Khuda Commission Report. However, it has been alleged that this report distorted the modern secular nature of the Khuda Commission report¹³. In their recommendations, this commission says that the aims and objectives of Madrasah education are to achieve overall development and enhancement of a student's physical, mental, social, spiritual, ethical and humanistic aspects¹⁴. In reality, under the existing Madrasah system it is not possible to accomplish any of these. The internal environs of a Madrasah preclude development of any modernistic, scientific or freethinking approach to life. Students receive endorsement in standing against any modern or progressive action or thought. The kind of aggressive so-called “Jihadi” mindset that is inculcated in students encourages them to confrontations with the so-called Kaffirs and Murtads rather than develop any spiritual or progressive values.

The finalization of the report submitted in 1997 by the Shamsul Haq Commission, which was formed by the incumbent government to develop a complete and comprehensive education policy, was uncertain even then. After the report was presented twice at the Ministerial Committee meeting, it was opined that, the government might encounter an embarrassing situation in the face of massive student protests if the government attempted to implement the finalized report. Hence, it was proposed that the draft report would be edited and added to. Following the necessary corrections and additions, on October 2, 2000, the report was submitted for the third time to the Ministerial Committee by order of the Prime Minister and was accepted¹⁵. On February 28, 2001, it was presented to and accepted by the National Parliament, which was then sitting without the presence of the opposition party. It should be mentioned that this is

the only education policy that – from among the 22 education commissions and committees established during the past 50 years – has been accepted by any government for implementation. The major text has been edited and/or corrected prior to its acceptance by the government. The editorial of the Daily Prothom Aalo of February 17, 2001, indicates the resentment felt by the Chairperson of the Education Policy Committee Professor Shamsul Haq. He claims that the Education Policy 2000, which was accepted by the National Parliament, does not directly reflect the text submitted by the committee. The Policy accepted by the Parliament includes recommendations such as: developing identical syllabus and curriculum for the general schools, Madrasahs, kindergartens and English schools, forming a separate Teacher Selection Committee, English, Vocation Education and Religion should be made compulsory from Class three of the Primary level. It is expected that this Education Policy will be implemented through the next ten years¹⁶.

This Education Policy recommends that as the Ebtedayee level of the Madrasah system, which is considered to be the primary level of the system, should also be for an 8-year period in accordance with the combined curriculum. Accordingly, it also recommends removing the Dakhil level and making the Alim level four years, the Fazil 3 or 4 years and the Kamil 1 or 2 years in duration. Following completion of the Ebtedayee level, students could enter Class IX. Similarly completion of the Alim level would allow entry to the Degree level. The Madrasah education system would include technical and vocational education. In addition to religious instruction, it would include instruction in ethics¹⁷.

It goes without saying that this Education Policy, accepted by the Awami League Ministerial Committee, fails to retain a secular nature. The Policy indicates that this government as well remains oblivious to the deficiencies and backward looking characteristics of Madrasah education. The Policy, prepared by the expert committee proclaims, “currently, Madrasah education is established as an integral part of the national education system”¹⁸. In the name of religious instruction, this committee asserts the necessity for instruction on the after life, the grave, doomsday, heaven, hell, etc. in different classes. The Education Policy that pushes towards this type of learning has no relationship with secular thought or mode of life or scientific reasoning¹⁹. The individuals who were deeply involved in developing this policy appear to have failed to consider scientific learning, the type of education that is appropriate for our people, and what should be done in reality to implement that type of education in carrying out their responsibilities²⁰.

In a Parliamentary response made by the Information Minister of the current government we hear that “no Madrasah has been closed down in this country, to the contrary, 200 more Madrasahs have been established during the last financial year”²¹. It is gradually becoming clear that the overall behaviour of the current government in conjunction with the new education policy will strengthen the ground that Madrasah education stands on.

-
1. Education Policy Until the Present and Alternative Structures, Abdul Motin Khan. Education in Bangladesh: the Past, the Present, the Future, Pg. 118
 2. Ibid, Pg. 119-120
 3. Ibid, Pg. 122
 4. The Education Thinking of Kudrat E Khuda, Shahidul Islam, The Prothom Aalo Supplement, December 8, 2000
 5. The Daily Janakantha, October 9, 2000, Pg. 9
 6. Madrasah Education in Bangladesh (Background, Current Status and the Position of Women), Abul Momen, Pg. 13
 7. The Kudrat E Khuda Education Commission Report, Bangladesh School and College Teachers Association, Pg. 57
 8. Shahidul Islam, The Daily Bhorer Kagoj, February 1, 1999
 9. The History of Education, Dhaka Ahsania Mission, 1996, Pg. 160
 10. Education in Bangladesh: the Past, the Present, the Future, Pg. 131
 11. Ibid, Pg. 126
 12. This committee submitted their report in 1997. Later, a five member committee was formed to implement the report which in turn submitted their report to the Prime Minister in 1998. The Daily Janakantha, October 9, 2000. Pg. 9
 13. Editorial, Shikkha Barta, Vol. 9, 1998
 14. Report, National Education Policy Committee, 1997, Pg. 78
 15. The Daily Prothom Aalo, October 3, 2000, Pg. 1
 16. The Daily Prothom Aalo, October 3, 2000, Pg. 1
 17. The Daily Prothom Aalo, October 3, 2000, Pg. 1 and The Daily Janakantha, October 9, 2000, Pg. 9
 18. Report of the National Education Policy Committee 1997, Pg. 78
 19. Badruddin Umar, On the Education Commission Report and Madrasah and Religious Education, Sangskriti, 25th Anniversary Issue, Pg. 29
 20. Badruddin Umar, Ibid, Pg. 17
 21. The Daily Prothom Aalo, July 7, 1999. According to the Daily Inquilab (July 15, 2000), there were 213 recognized Madrasahs in the financial year 1998-99.

Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board and Administration of the Board

A Madrasah education board had been in operation in conjunction with the Kolkata Aaliyah Madrasah for quite some time. In 1928, the Board was reconstructed. After the Aaliyah Madrasah was transferred to Dhaka, a similar Board continued its activities in Dhaka. Later President Ziaur Rahman promulgated Ordinance 9 on February 27, 1978. According to Section 3 of the promulgated ordinance, the “Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board” was established and it initiated its activities on June 4, 1979 as an autonomous body, independent of the Aaliyah Madrasah. Mr. Baqui Billah Khan was engaged to serve as the first Chairman of the Board¹. In this stage of the attempt to institutionalize Madrasah education in liberated Bangladesh, on January 1, 1980 the incumbent government announced grants to be provided to non-government schools, colleges and Madrasahs. At first this grant was fixed at 50 percent of the salary scale, which was later upgraded to 80 percent². This regulation is valid till date.

Established in 1978, this Board is responsible for the grants for classes/courses, examination administration and certification of the Ebtedayee, Dakhil, Alim, Fazil and Kamil of the state controlled Aliyaah Nisab. In fact, there is no separate Board to determine the curriculum and syllabus for the Madrasahs; this too the Madrasah Board is responsible for. Prior to the establishment of the Board, the “Special Education” section of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education was in charge of overall management and administration of Madrasah education. Later these responsibilities were taken over by the Madrasah Board. With the broad and numerous responsibilities resting on this single entity, it has always been easy for the Board to take half measures on various issues. Lacking even basic concepts of modern management and administration methods, a number of officials in this Board retain high positions simply because they have completed the Kamil courses. What role this untrained labor force with outmoded mindsets can play in the modern education system needs to be considered. These officials have become used to carrying out their responsibilities in any which way. If progressive reform measures are not undertaken soon, it can be expected that this Board will continue providing the same quality of work.

There are only a few officials employed to develop the syllabus and curriculum for the Madrasah Board. There are no specialists among them and

none of them are trained in the art of textbook development. Under this Board, textbooks are selected very easily without any screening or reviewing depending on the individual choices of members or officials. In the Ebtedayee level, there are even 7/8 textbooks for a single course in selected classes.

With this background, it is hardly surprising if corruption is bigger news in this department than is achieving quality education. According to information received, a number of Board officials are no strangers to corruption. Akin to a few selected public agencies, the Madrasah Board has gained renown as a hotbed of corruption. Following the seizure of an individual³ with machines to produce forged registration forms, admission forms, and official seals on the eve of the Dakhil exams, investigations by the Board authorities have opened a can of worms. Over 23 thousand Dakhil examinees participated in the exams with forged registrations through the machinations of a faction of Board officials and Madrasah teachers. The Board has formed a high level committee to investigate and identify this faction and has taken steps against 2,881 Madrasahs.

The majority of these Madrasahs with forged registrations were female Madrasahs and in some of the Madrasahs all the examinees had false registration⁴. The Madrasah Board investigation report identifies one individual for the crime of forging registrations. It was later heard that this individual had been punished. The news item reported that Mr. Moazzem Hossain, a bookbinder of the Madrasah Board and a leader of the Madrasah Board Employees Union had been temporarily suspended for providing 76 students with forged registration for Taka 40 thousand⁵.

A bookbinder is a lower class employee compared to the various levels of officials that are involved in the Madrasah Board. He is not responsible for the registration process. Penalizing Moazzem Hossain for 76 forged registrations was simply a way of glossing over the key problem. The senior officials who are involved in this racket need to be punished as well. However, there is no evidence that this has indeed occurred. Who is responsible for the remaining 2,805 forged registrations? Who is responsible for the crushed hopes and futures of the thousands of students that resulted from the authorities' weakness and misgovernance? Disclosure of forged registration for 23 thousand students is merely proof that this kind of corruption is rife within the Board and that there exists a large network comprising Board officials, Madrasah teachers and leaders.

Not only forging registrations, other modes of corruption have become entrenched in this organization. One report states that a loss of over Taka 8 crore has occurred due to financial irregularities of the Madrasah Board. The report goes on to mention that this loss occurred because of a number of corruptions including embezzlement of funds⁶.

There exists without compare irregularities in the administration of the Board. Evidence of these were presented in the investigation committee report formed during the rule of Khaleda Zia. Numerous Madrasahs throughout the country were operating through linkages with this corruption. What created an obstruction to the smooth running of these was the strict pronouncement by the Sheikh Hasina government to defer the decision of inclusion in the MPO (Monthly Pay Order) roster. In 1995, an investigation committee was formed by direction of the then minister of education Barrister Jamiruddin Sarker. That investigation report recommends revoking approval and MPO inclusion for a number of Madrasahs⁷. Although the government completed the investigation, in the end the government did not take any steps against these organizations. As a result of this report, the government formed a three-member committee, which consisted of the Thana Nirbahi Officer (TNO) as the Convener and the Thana Engineer (Facilities) and Thana Education Officer (TEO) as members. This committee was responsible for surveying and visiting all government approved Madrasahs⁸. The survey revealed the appalling picture of about three and a half thousand from among the 6,847 government approved Madrasahs (from which 6,132 have MPO inclusion) across Bangladesh⁹. Approval and MPO inclusion were revoked for only 251 Madrasahs against which complaints had been made even in the 1995 report and against which serious complaints were registered in the recent report. However, through appeals and through using personal or political influence, the majority of these Madrasahs have already been able to rescind the MPO inclusion revoke order issued against them. As the Madrasahs are able to be reinstate MPO inclusion if they can win their appeal against the allegations, it can be assumed that the other Madrasahs will manage to have the revoke orders rescinded – whether through legal or illegal means.

Evidence of mismanagement in over three and a half thousand Madrasahs is an indicator of the appalling situation of the Madrasah Board. Although MPO inclusion has been revoked for 251 Madrasahs, no steps have been taken to improve the management and administration processes of the Board. There is no evidence that the activities of the Board inspection teams have increased. However, selected changes have been made in the highest levels of the Board.

In 2000, Dr. Md. Abu Bakr Siddiq has received responsibility of the new Chairman of the Board on deputation by order of the President. He has not developed any new policy measures to combat the corruption. However in an interview given to the Daily Prothom Aalo, published in March 4, 2001, he did remark that someone should be awarded the responsibility of ensuring that the old policy was adequately and properly implemented. He also said that several steps were being taken. Notable among these are notices warning officials that legal recourse will be sought against convicted officials, regular monitoring of all sections, etc. Considering the seriousness of the crimes, these steps seem inadequate.

-
1. Madrasah Education: Bangladesh Abdul Huq Faridi, Pg. 69
 2. The Daily Inquilab, July 15, 1999
 3. The Daily Prothom Aalo, May 6, 2000, Pg. 1
 4. The Daily Sangbad, June 28, 2000, Pg. 4
 5. The Daily Prothom Aalo, July 24, 2000, Pg. 1
 6. Politics with Madrasah Education, Muniruzzaman, The Daily Sangbad, July 12, 1999
 7. The Daily Sangbad, July 12, 1999
 8. The Daily Prothom Aalo, July 5, 1999
 9. The Daily Sangbad, July 8, 1999, Pg. 1. The Minister of Education provided these statistics in response to a relevant question raised in the Parliament.

Types, Locations and Statistics of Madrasahs in Bangladesh

There are primarily two types of Madrasahs in operation in Bangladesh. The Aaliyah Nissab Madrasahs (commonly known as Sunni Madrasahs) are operated with state support under state control, while the Qawmi Nissab Madrasahs (commonly known as Wahabi Madrasahs) are operated beyond state control or support with voluntary labor and both foreign and local funding. The Madrasah system which is operated under state control is the one which is considered to be the mainstream of the Madrasah education system. In addition to these, maktabas or Forqania Madrasahs exist to teach the Qaeda (the Arabic alphabet), Aampara, and the Quran and the Hifzul Quran Madrasahs which train Quran Hafezes (students who completely memorize the Quran). There are also some government and non-government project based short-term teaching centers.

The Aaliyah Nissab Madrasah system has five levels of education. Beginning with the primary level it takes a total of 16 years to complete. The different levels of education are the Ebtedayee (primary level: 5 years), Dakhil (secondary level: 5 years), Alim (higher secondary level: 2 years), Fazil (graduate level: Pass Course 2 years, Honors Course 3 years), and Kamil or Title (Post graduate level: 2 years for the Fazil Pass Course completers and 1 year for the Fazil Honors Course completers)¹. Although in 1982 the military government of Ershad declared the levels of Dakhil and Alim as equivalent to secondary and higher secondary degrees respectively in accordance with the new staffing patterns, Fazil and Kamil were not acknowledged as graduate and post graduate equivalents.

Ebtedayee Madrasahs

After 1915, the primary level maktabas operated as feeders to the New-Scheme Madrasahs. Later, following the recommendations of an Education Commission, the maktabas were transformed into Ebtedayee Madrasahs as feeder institutions. The Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board provided approval to these Ebtedayee Madrasahs. There are 18 requirements that the Ebtedayee Madrasahs have to fulfill for approval. The Board investigates whether the community agrees that there is a need for a Madrasah in the locality, that the proposed Madrasah has enough land registered for it, waqf land, the required furniture as required by construction regulations, approval

from the Madrasah committee and relevant bodies, a selection committee which includes a government representative formed through appropriate advertisement in public publications, teachers and administrative staff, money in the bank in general fund and reserve fund as per regulations, enough books in the library, enough students and reasonable distance from other Madrasahs before giving approval². However, in most cases, Ebtedayee Madrasahs have mushroomed all over the country without fulfilling all or even the most basic of these requirements.

These government approved Madrasahs are operated through donations from the local community, government grants, and sometimes grants from the local government. Among these, all sources of income, including government grants are more or less irregular.

Reliable information regarding the number of Ebtedayee Madrasahs is unavailable. In addition to all Madrasahs having an Ebtedayee section (primary section), there are a number of separate Ebtedayee Madrasahs. According to BANBEIS³, there are 1,363,572 students in the Ebtedayee sections adjacent to the Dakhil, Alim, Fazil and Kamil Madrasahs. A report in the Daily Janakantha states that there are 10,000 Ebtedayee Madrasahs in the country⁴. Another source determines the number at 9,561⁵.

Dakhil and Alim Madrasahs

The Dakhil and Alim levels are equivalent to secondary and higher secondary school respectively. Dakhil is for 5 years and Alim for 2 years duration. Currently there are four sections in the Dakhil level: Dakhil General Section, Dakhil Science Section, Dakhil Mujabbid Section and Dakhil Hifzul Quran Section. Under the New Scheme policy, both the Dakhil and Alim levels place emphasis on science. However, in reality, the majority of the Dakhil and Alim Madrasahs do not even have a basic laboratory. In fact, in a number of Madrasahs, the position of science teacher often remains vacant⁶.

In Bangladesh, currently there are 4,865 Dakhil and 1,090 Alim Madrasahs that are government approved⁷. Akin to the Ebtedayee Madrasahs, Madrasahs at these levels have to fulfill 18 conditions before applying to the Board for government approval.

These Madrasahs are also operated through government grants, donations from the local community, student fees, local government grants and fees and

payments from religious occasions. Almost all sources of income are more or less irregular.

The Madrasah Education Board or the Directorate of Higher and Secondary Education do not have any regular monitoring or inspection activities for Dakhil and Alim level Madrasahs. A kind of monitoring does take place however for auditing and for allocation of grants. However, several of these types of Madrasahs are included among the 251 Madrasahs that lost government approval and MPO because of charges of corruption and mismanagement.

Fazil and Kamil Madrasah

Fazil and Kamil are the last two levels of the government approved Madrasah system. The Fazil level includes both Honors and Pass Courses. The duration of Honors Course is 3 years and Pass Course duration is 2 years. The Kamil level is 2 years for the Fazil Pass Course completers and 1 year for the Fazil Honors Course completers. There are 1,000 Fazil Madrasahs and 141 Kamil Madrasahs (among which there are 3 completely state owned Kamil Madrasahs) in Bangladesh⁸.

The Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board undertakes the final exams at Fazil and Kamil level as well as presenting the certificates. Even after the establishment of Islamic University, the Board's authority in this was not curbed by granting this particular responsibility to the University. As a result, it is not possible for the Board to maintain even quality from primary level to Masters level. It should be noted that the Bangladesh Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Boards have access to more resources and staff compared to the Madrasah Board. Yet the Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Boards do not have the responsibilities of awarding graduate level certificates or of controlling graduate level exams. These responsibilities are taken care of by the relevant universities. But the Madrasah Board, despite its limitations in terms of resources and staff is responsible for all these things⁹.

Both Fazil and Kamil place high emphasis on the learning of Arabic. Completers of these degrees have almost no knowledge of the social sciences or of the fundamentals of science. Hence, it has not been possible to combine these levels with mainstream general education.

In addition to these government approved Madrasahs, there are a few different types of Madrasahs in operation in Bangladesh located across the country.

However, precise numbers regarding these types of Madrasahs are not retained in government offices. Following is a brief profile of these Madrasahs:

Khariji or Qawmi Madrasah

The word ‘Khariji’ means rejected or external. These are called Khariji as these are operated beyond state control. These institutions are generally run on foreign funding or local donations and voluntary services. They do not accept government funding. Accepting government funding will entail a certain amount of government control, which the authorities of these Madrasahs do not want. One hundred years after the establishment of the British supported Aaliyah Nisaab Madrasah in Kolkata, the Khariji Nisaab Madrasah was initiated in Deoband, India. As the word Khariji carries a connotation of something discarded, some identify these Madrasahs as Qawmi (National)¹⁰.

Failing direct confrontations with the British, these Madrasahs were initially established by conservative Alims as indirect strategy in the spheres of education and culture.¹¹ The key founder of the Deoband ideology was Shah Aliullah Muhaddis Dehlovi (RA). The Deoband Madrasah was established by his followers to promote the Dehlovi ideology. They are followers of Sunnat and Jamaat. According to these conservative beliefs, where there is no Sunnat, there is Bid’aat, and where there is no Jamat, there lies “Khondrayi” and there roams unrestrained thought and ideas. And both of these are “Gomrahi”.¹²

Akin to the Aaliyah Nisaab Madrasah, this type also has five levels. Ibtidayyah, Mutawassitah, Sanabia Uloiya, Fazilat and Taqmil. According to the claims made by the authorities of the Qawmi Madrasah, education equivalent to the primary, secondary, higher secondary, graduate and post graduate levels is provided at these Madrasah levels. In addition to these levels, each Qawmi Madrasah has Ilmul Quran Wat Tazbid and Hifzul Quran sections. As the government has no control over these Madrasahs, the government does not possess any qualitative or quantitative information on these. It is estimated that there are around 5,000 of these types of Madrasahs across the country¹³. According to some sources there are about 500 of these Madrasahs in Dhaka. About 400 Madrasahs are operated under the Faridabade Befaqul Madrasah located at Gendaria in Dhaka city. Around 70 Madrasahs are under the Lalbagh Madrasah, there are several more located at Jatrabari and Madaninagar. These controlling Madrasahs each operate like separate boards. Similarly, there are 300 Madrasahs under the Ittehadul Madrasah located at Potia in the Chittagong district, at least 90 Madrasahs are run under the Dwini Education Board and the Azad Dwini Education Board in Sylhet.

There are 50 Madrasahs under the Sawtul Hera Madrasah in the greater Mymensingh district, more are controlled by the Tanjimul Madrasah of Kishjoregamj and the Pathalia Madrasah of Jamalpur. However, the largest concentration of Qawmi Madrasahs exist in Brahmanbaria. According to the chairperson of the Madrasah Education Board, Qawmi Madrasahs number around 2,000 in Bangladesh¹⁴.

For a long time, the Qawmi Madrasahs took exams and gave certificates from their respective organizations. Recently the Bangladesh Qawmi Madrasah Education Board was established to ensure an equivalent exam for these institutions. According to reports published in the Daily Inquilaab on January 4, 2001, in the 23rd central exams held in 2000 under the Bangladesh Qawmi Madrasah Education Board, 11,084 examinees (2,588 of them female) sat for them and 7,138 (1,882 female) passed. Rate of success was 64.39 percent.

The Qawmi Madrasahs follow the methods and the syllabus of Darse Nizami¹⁵. Hence, they are highly conservative and abhor any kind of modernity. Apart from Arabic, they may encourage Urdu or Farsi, but they show no interest in providing instruction on the mother tongue. It is considered that as the Quran, the Hadiths, the Tafsirs, Aqaid and Fikh volumes are written mainly in Arabic, Farsi or Urdu, it is enough to study these languages. However, there exists a massive dearth of truly qualified tutors in these disciplines in Bangladesh. As a result, Qawmi students are faced with severe problems in obtaining proper and higher learning in these disciplines¹⁶. The Qawmi syllabus aggressively promotes Sunnat, circumcision, milaads, waaz nasihat, fatwa etc.

In the majority of Qawmi Madrasahs, young boys are trained with arms to become “Jihadis”. In some Madrasahs, arms instructors are hired from Pakistan and other Islamic countries. It is compulsory for the students to participate in the arms training and to take part in various fundamentalist terrorist activities. According to newspapers, students undergo horrific abuse in the Qawmi Madrasahs. According to a report published in the Daily Sangbad (February 8, 2001), in the Al Jamiyatul Islamia Darul Ulum Qawmi Madrasah of Old Babupara in the Syedpur municipality, students who were uninterested in arms training were chained, hung from chains, caned, starved, locked up and were not allowed to see their parents. Although the management of the school does not believe this abuse to be abuse. According to them, students are merely punished according to the Shariah for various infractions.

There are a number of famous Khariji Madrasahs in Bangladesh. The Madrasahs in Hathajari and Potia of Chittagong, Lalbagh and Malibagh of Dhaka, the Balia Madrasah of Mymensingh and Jamiya Imdadia of Kishoreganj are well known.¹⁷ Ancient Madrasahs of this type include the famous Madrasahs of Deoband and Lucknow in India. Khariji educated students from Bangladesh are often interested to go to Deoband and Lucknow for higher study.

Maktab or Forqania Madrasah

These types of educational institutes are in operation everywhere in the rural areas of Bangladesh. Almost every mosque has a Maktab or Forqania Madrasah adjacent to it. The Forqania Madrasah teaches Qaeda (the Arabic alphabet), Aampara (the last Paraa of the Quran) and reciting the Quran. These types of institutions usually conduct their operations an hour or slightly longer in the morning. In the case of mosques, the Imam of the mosque and for the separate forqania madrassahs a Quari or a Moulvi employed by the local community acts as the teacher. The Forqania Madrasah adjacent to mosques are usually run by the mosque committee, and the committee makes an additional payment to the Imam. Alternatively, the Imam may be engaged under the condition that in addition to being the Imam he must also teach at the Forqania Madrasah. For the Forqania Madrasahs that operate independently of mosques at village level, the local community pays the Quari or the Moulvi a nominal monthly fee. In some cases, the salary is paid by collecting a fistful of rice from each household of the community. A more or less unemployed person is engaged to visit the households every week or fortnight to collect the rice. This rice is conserved by the women of the household in the kitchen. They measure the rice required at each meal and separate one or two fistfuls each time. This rice is then given over to the collector when he comes round at the end of the week. The rice thus collected is then sold off to pay the teacher's salary. In addition, the Quari or the Moulvi occasionally receive gifts of clothing or religious artifacts as tokens of appreciation when the students graduate from Qaeda to Aampara to reciting the Quran.

Apart from learning to read Arabic and basic concepts of namaz and roza (praying and fasting), students do not learn much else at these Madrasahs. Many students discontinue after completing Forqania, however, many also move on to Ebtedayee Madrasahs.

If, after completing the Forqania and learning to read Arabic, a student wants to properly perform Qirat (formal recitation of the quran) or become a Qari (formal reciter), then he has to receive separate and additional training from a qualified Qari.¹⁸ In the majority of cases, a qualified Qari is engaged as private tutor at the student's household. There are also Qariana teaching institutes in some areas. This skill is known as Ilm Qirat and the skilled individual is designated as Qari.

There are no reliable estimates as to how many Forqania nad Qariana institutes exist in Bangladesh. However, there are 2,929 Forqania Madrasahs according to a 1965-66 report published by the Education Division, and 6,601 Forqania and Hafezia Madrasahs according to a 1972-73 report.¹⁹ According to a survey conducted by BANBEIS in 1993, there are 130,000 mosque adjacent Madrasahs and 60 thousand Maktabas.²⁰

Hifzul Quran Madrasah

Even during the times of the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh), prior to the invention of the printing press, it was customary to memorize all thirty sections of the Quran to preserve it without any distortion. This course is given to students who have not exceeded the age of 8 or 9, who have good memories and who have completed reading of the Quran successfully. The majority of the larger Madrasahs in the country have a department for Quran Hifz. In addition to these, there are a number of independent Hafezi Madrasahs in the country that focus on only Quran Hifz.

As, according to religious dictum, the Quran should not be touched in a Napak (unclean) state, the Hifzul Quran students practice and study wearing clean clothes and after proper ablutions. It takes three to four years to complete the course. Memorizing the Quran does not signal the end of his studies, this must be replicated throughout his lifetime. There are no reliable statistics as to the number of these Madrasahs. According to estimates of the Education Division in 1965-66, there were 188 Hafezia Madrasahs in the country. According to the figures for 1972-73, the combined total for Forqania and Hafezia Madrasahs were 6,601²¹.

It has been reported at various times that children are abused mercilessly in these Madrasahs as well. More than once, the national dailies have reported that children were literally chained up in these institutions in the name of religious education. In a news item in the Daily Janakantha published on June 18, 2000 reported that children were being chained up like animals to have

them memorize the Holy Quran and become Hafezes. In 1992, Maulana Habibur Rahman was given the management of the Jamanul Quran Hefzkhana and Nurani Madrasah established in 1985 on land owned by the Railway Division at Double Mooring thana in Chittagong. This Maulana commenced this system of instructing children in the Quran by chaining and shackling them. Then the dailies published reports of another similar child concentration camp also located in Chittagong. The same Habibur Rahman had been a teacher at that Madrasah. It is possible that Hafezi Madrasahs following similar inhuman methods may exist in other parts of the country including the capital.

Cadet Madrasah

Recently a few Cadet Madrasahs have been established with the aim of elevating Madrasah education to the level of general education. However, establishing cadet type institutions here and there instead of developing a generally acceptable universal educational system is only reinforcing the existing inequalities.

It is said that these establishments aim to ensure blossoming of a student's potential in the light of the Quran and the Hadith, by providing a good environment, scientific teaching methods, and a pragmatic curriculum that is in keeping with governmental policy. These Madrasahs follow the semester system and in addition to providing instruction on the Quran and the Hadith, students are taught using computer and internet related audio visual aids. Each class also has computers.²² These educational facilities are not for the poor. Education costs at these institutions are relatively more expensive and within the reach of the middle and upper middle classes. A large part of resources needed to run the Cadet Madrasahs come from student fees. Some of these institutions have classes from Playgroup to Class IX, some have Hifzul Quran sections. The exact number of these institutions, which also provide boarding facilities for students, could not be determined. Relevant sources estimate that there are no more than 10 Cadet Madrasahs.

Islamic University

The major advocate of Pan Islamism, Maulana Muniruzzaman Islamabadi, undertook many plans to regenerate and revitalize the Muslims of the subcontinent. He was the first to feel the need to establish a National Arabic University in Chittagong. From 1915 he began writing to magazines and

newspapers including 'The Mohammadi' in support of this proposal. He also published a detailed pamphlet in Urdu in favor of this proposal.

He selected and managed to obtain 500 Kani of land from Zamindar Anwar Ali Khan Chowdhury for the proposed university at Deyang Mountain in Potia thana on the Bay of Bengal and Karnaphuli river, seven miles to the south of Chittagong city. In addition, about 600 bighas of land was also obtained from the then government. A conference was arranged at Chittagong of the All India Anjumane Ulama to obtain the support of the Ulamas throughout the subcontinent. His proposal was accepted at this conference²³. However, before this proposal was implemented, India underwent the Partition. The 1949 Akram Khan Committee also strongly supported the previously proposed establishment of the Islamic University. But no progress was made. With the death of Maulana Islamabadi in 1950, local initiative to establish the university died down. The 1958 Pakistan National Education Commission remained silent on the issue of establishing an Islamic University in Bangladesh. The Islamic Arabic University Commission was established in 1963-64 under the leadership of Dr. Syed Moazzem Hossain, the Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University. The report of this Commission was not implemented either²⁴.

A proposal to establish an Islamic University in Bangladesh emerged from the OIC conference of heads of state of Muslim countries held in Saudi Arabia on March 31-April 8, 1977. In 1979, an office was opened in Dhaka, with Dr. A. N. M. Momtaz Uddin serving as Project Director for the Islamic University project. Prior to that, a seven-member committee presented recommendations regarding establishment of the Islamic University. On November 22, 1979, the then President Ziaur Rahman laid the cornerstone of the Islamic University at Shantidanga-Dalalpur of Kushtia district. The Islamic University law was passed in the National Parliament on December 27, 1980. On January 31, 1981, Dr. Momtaz Uddin was appointed the first Vice Chancellor. When President General Ershad came to power later that year, it was declared that the Islamic University campus would be relocated to Boardbazar of the Gazipur district. However, in the face of strong protests and violence, Gen. Ershad was forced to again relocate the campus to Shantidanga. The present campus was inaugurated in Shantidanga of Kushtia on November 1, 1992²⁵. The Islamic University is located there till date. The concerned factions are not satisfied with the establishment of the Islamic University, in addition to this facility, they want the Dhaka Aaliyah Madrasah upgraded to become the Arabic University²⁶.

Table 1: The Number and Increase of Madrasahs in the Years 1983, 1993 and 1999

Type of Madrasah	Number of Madrasahs			Rate of Increase (%)					
	1983	1993	1999	1983-1993		1993-1999		1983-1999	
				in 10 years	Per year	in 6 years	Per year	in 16 years	Per year
Dakhil	1,645	3,825	4,865	132	8.8	27	4.1	196	7.0
Alim	508	807	1,090	59	4.7	35	5.1	115	4.8
Fazil	591	831	1,000	41	3.5	20	3.1	69	3.3
Kamil	61 (2)	100 (3)	141 (3)	64	5.1	41	5.9	131	5.4
Total	2,805 (2)	5,563 (3)	7,096 (3)	98	7.1	28	4.1	153	6.0

Note: the figures in parentheses indicate the number of public sector institutions.

Source: Preliminary Report of the National Education Survey (Post Primary) 1999, BANBEIS

Table 2: Number of Students in Madrasahs and Rate of Increase 1999

Type of Madrasah	Number of Madrasahs		Number of Students		Avg. Students Per Madrasah		Rate of Increase (%)	
	1993	1999	1993	1999	1993	1999	in 6 years	Per Year
Dakhil	3,825	4,865	458,093	855,488	120	176	47	6.6
Alim	807	1,090	124,533	286,491	154	263	71	9.3
Fazil	831	1,000	172,995	347,483	208	347	67	8.9
Kamil	100	141	37,920	82,314	379	584	54	7.5

Source: Preliminary Report of the National Education Survey (Post Primary) 1999, BANBEIS

Table 3: Number of Madrasahs by Division

Type of Madrasah	Rajshahi	Dhaka	Chittagong	Barisal	Khulna	Sylhet	Bangladesh
Dakhil	1,666	1,060	657	661	671	150	4,865
Alim	279	256	242	138	134	41	1,090
Fazil	287	230	252	113	92	26	1,000
Kamil	28 *1	32 *1	43	11	20	7 *1	141 *3
Total	2,260 *1	1,578 *1	1,194	923	917	224 *1	7,096 *3

Note: the figures denoted with asterisks indicate the number of public sector institutions.

Source: Preliminary Report of the National Education Survey (Post Primary) 1999, BANBEIS

There existed 2,805 and 5,563 Madrasahs in Bangladesh in 1983 and 1993 respectively (Table 1). By 1999 these numbers had increased to 7,096. There

was a 98% increase in the number of Madrasahs during the 10 years from 1983 to 1999 with an annual increase of 7.1%. In the 6 years of 1993-1999, the increase was by 28% translating to an annual increase rate of 4.1%. Overall, in the 16 years (1983-1999), there has been a growth of 153% (an annual growth rate of 6.0%). Dakhil Madrasahs have increased at the highest rate during the 1983-1993 period (8.8% per year), while Kamil Madrasahs during the 1993-99 period (5.9% per year). During 1983-1999, the growth rate of different types of Madrasahs are as follows: Dakhil 196% (7.6% per year), Kamil 131% (5.4% per year), Alim 115% (4.8% per year), and Fazil 69% (3.3% per year). Of the three public sector Kamil Madrasahs, one was nationalized in the 1983-1999 period (the other two were nationalized before that).

The number of students studying at Dakhil Madrasahs is 855,488, a number that was 458,093 six years ago (Table 2). The growth rate in those six years was 47% (6.6% per year). Average number of students per Madrasah is 176, which was 120 six years ago. The number of students studying at Alim Madrasahs is 286,491, a number that was 124,533 six years ago. Growth rate for these Madrasahs is 71% (9.3% per year). Average number of students per Madrasah is 263, which was 154 six years ago. Rate of growth for Fazil level Madrasahs during the 1993-1999 period was 67% (8.9% per year). Average number of students was 347, which was 208 six years ago. Rate of growth for Kamil level Madrasahs during the 1993-1999 period was 54% (7.5% per year). Average number of students was 584, which was 379 six years ago.

There are 7,096 Madrasahs in Bangladesh (Table 3). These Madrasahs follow the curriculum of the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board and provide different levels of education. There are 4,865 Dakhil, 1,090 Alim, 1,000 Fazil and 141 Kamil Madrasahs. 3 of the Kamil Madrasahs are state owned. None of the Madrasahs of the other levels are under state management. The divisional distribution shows that Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet have 1,578, 2,260, 1,194, 917, 923 and 224 Madrasahs respectively. Rajshahi has the highest number of Madrasahs and Sylhet has the lowest.

According to a recently published report, there are on an average around 1 school for every 8,603 pupils, 1 college for 59,861 pupils and 1 Madrasah for every 18,542 pupils. Barisal division has 1 Madrasah per 9,585 pupils, Dhaka division has 1 Madrasah per 25,172 pupils, Rajshahi division has 1 Madrasah per 14,606 pupils, Chittagong division has 1 Madrasah per 22,543 pupils,

Khulna division has 1 Madrasah per 16,292 pupils, and Sylhet division has 1 Madrasah per 36,329 pupils.²⁷

1. Bangladesh National Education Commission Report, February 1988, Pg. 94
2. The Daily Inquilab, July 13, 1999, Pg. 1
3. Preliminary Report of the National Education Survey (Post Primary) 1999, BANBEIS
4. The Daily Janakantha, July 9, 1999, Pg. 1
5. The History of the Fatwa in Bangladesh, Dr. Muhammad Hannan, Bangladesh Nari Pragati Sangha, 1999. Pg. 336
6. Bangladesh National Education Commission Report, February 1988, Pg. 96
7. Bangladesh Education Statistics 2000, BANBEIS
8. Ibid.
9. Bangladesh National Education Commission Report, February 1988, Pg. 98
10. Madrasah Education: Bangladesh, Abdul Huq Faridi, Pg. 77
11. The Educational Vision of the Prophet (Pbuh) and the Future of Madrasah Education in Bangladesh, Paper presented in seminar, Abdul Waheed
12. The Educational Ideology of Darul Ulum Deoband, Compiled by Sheikh Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Jahanabadi, Pg. 4-5
13. The Daily Janakantha, July 19, 1999, Page 1
14. The Daily Prothom Aalo, March 4, 2001
15. Mullah Nizamuddin Sahaluvi, son of Mullah Qutubuddin of Sahali in Lucknow, was the proponent of this method. He was a well known educationist and writer.
16. Madrasah Education in Bangladesh (Background, Present Status and the Position of Women), Abul Momen, Pg. 26
17. Madrasah Education: Bangladesh, Abdul Huq Faridi, Pg. 77
18. Ibid, Pg. 78
19. Ibid, Pg. 79
20. Madrasah Education in Bangladesh (Background, Present Status and the Position of Women), Abul Momen, Pg. 19
21. Madrasah Education: Bangladesh, Abdul Huq Faridi, Pg. 79
22. THE Daily Inquilab, July 17, 2000, Pg. 11
23. The Daily Inquilab, October 27, 2000, Pg. 10
24. Madrasah Education: Bangladesh, Ibid Pg. 81-82
25. The Daily Janakantha, November 7, 2000, Page 1
26. The Educational Philosophy of the Prophet (Pbuh) and the Future of Madrasah Education in Bangladesh, Ibid
27. The Daily Sangbad, August 2, 2000, Pg. 1

Social and Political Standpoint of Madrasah Students, Teachers and Patrons

In terms of economic activities and political objectives, roughly three political streams can be identified in Bangladesh – (a) Rightwing capitalist politics, (b) Leftwing socialist politics and (c) Religion based backward looking politics. The two mainstream types of politics are primarily controlled by people educated in the mainstream educational system, while the third stream of politics, the religion based reactionary politics, relies on Madrasah educated individuals for its existence. These people are the policy makers, leaders and workers in this type of politics.

Religion based politics gained a foothold in this land mainly during the Partition of India. It was during the Pakistani rule that this stream of politics was further strengthened. With the inclusion of Secularism in the constitution of the newly formed Bangladesh following the 1971 Liberation War, the prospects for development of religion based politics was almost non-existent. Through the Liberation War, the Bengali nation had moved towards a secular, non-communal and non-discriminatory mode of life. It was one of the outcomes of the War that the Constitution of 1972 renounced discrimination based on religion, caste, gender as well as avowing equal rights to men and women in all walks of life. However, the practice and spread of this idealism was halted with the change in the political scenario in 1975, with the rise of the reactionary forces. This change facilitated the reawakening of religion based politics.

With the assassination of President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family in 1975, the rule of democratic government in Bangladesh came to an end. During this period, under the control of Khondokar Mushtaq, it was even attempted to change the constitutional title of Bangladesh from the People's Republic to Islamic Republic. Through the Political Parties Act promulgated in August 1976, the religion based political parties, which had been proscribed in 1972, reemerged as political players. It should be mentioned that the changes made to the foreign policy of Bangladesh in 1973-74 indicated a shift towards state support of Islamic activities. This period was a critical time for the national economy. To survive beyond the crisis as well as to move towards development, it had become necessary for the Mujib government to improve relationships with Islamic nations hoping for aid in the form of the Middle East petrodollar. In addition to the fact that it was important for a newly

formed nation to obtain as many friendly nations as it could, it was also important to counter the one sided propaganda that Pakistan had been purveying in the community of Islamic nations. A number of decisions made during that period, including Sheikh Mujib's participation in the OIC Conference in Lahore, Pakistan, the reestablishment of the Islamic Foundation in 1975 (it had been banned in 1972) was prompted by the realities of the world economy as well as by strength of the petrodollar at that time¹.

The stream of petrodollars arriving from the Middle East gradually increased with the rule of each successive government and is being utilized in patronizing religious politics, Islamic education, Madrasah education, religious fundamentalism, extremist religious groups. These are all interconnected. The spread of Madrasah education results in creating leaders and workers for the religious political parties as well as the practice of religious fundamentalism in society. It is to retain this religious fundamentalism that the "religion peddlers" need to resort to violence as well as other destructive measures.

The strength gathered by the religious political faction in the post-1982 period is much more than any other time in recent history². Today, the leaders and workers of those parties speak loudly of establishing an Islamic "Hukumat" (rule). With the political changes of 1975, to silence the democratic spirit and to facilitate military rule, a large segment of the population was pushed towards a system of education that was moribund and that blinded logic and freethinking. The increase in public sector support to Madrasah education year by year leaves no scope for surprise at the increase in the influence of religious fundamentalism. Through the support received from local and foreign organizations, these groups gradually became very powerful. They expanded their range of influence in the social and political spheres of the country despite their stance against the history and traditions of this nation. Following the repatriation of the bloc that had been involved in looting and raping in support of the Pakistanis in 1971, they provided both open and silent support to the Madrasah system.

The Madrasah system is especially encouraged with the covert objective of retaining and cultivating the religious element in politics. This has also entered the arena of higher studies – up until 1995, documented evidence is available regarding the influence of the fundamentalist Chhatra Shibir (the student wing of the Jamaate Islami party) as well as the backing it received at the Kushtia Islamic University. Enormous funds from foreign sources are utilized to allow Shibir to gain a stronghold in this university as well as other universities. The

safety and aggressive activities of the members are ensured by creating a strong and effective sphere of influence in the surrounding communities.

The religious political parties have strong branches in the majority of Madrasahs in the country. A significant and active segment of Madrasah teachers support Islamic fundamentalist politics and operate as activists. Students receive direct and indirect encouragement from their teachers to join this type of politics.

According to several national dailies, the majority of the Madrasah teachers in the districts of Rangpur, Nilfamari, Kurigram, Lalamonirhat, Gaibandha are actively involved in cadre-based violent politics of the Jamaate Islami which professes to be working towards a religious revolution. Due to their involvement in these activities, the focus and concentration they provide to their students' education are only marginal. In some Madrasahs, students are openly and directly instructed in the activities of the Jamaate Islami and the Islami Chhatra Shibir.³ An anti-fundamentalism and anti-communal protest meeting was held on October 24 at Rangpur organized by the Shommilito Sangskritik Jote (Combined Cultural Alliance) in protest of the fanatical fundamentalist anti-state and anti-government "education" that was provided in the Darul Ulum Mahmudia Madrasah of the Baro Aulia village in Rangpur. At the meeting, speakers stated that unless the extremist fundamentalist Taleban-like education being promoted in Madrasahs all over the country could be stopped, the very freedom and independence of the nation would be at risk.⁴

Following the arrest of Mufti Ijharul Huq, the leader of an extremist faction of a fundamentalist group in Chittagong, it was revealed that he was involved with the Harkatul Jihad group. It has also been alleged that he is in communication with the international terrorist network including Osama Bin Laden. It is suspected that Mufti Ijhar provided arms training to young men from Madrasahs. There are also allegations that he embezzled foreign funding intended for Madrasahs. The papers reported that teachers and students were provided with weapons training related to the Harkatul Jihad and the Taleban in the Lalkhan Madrasah of Chittagong⁵. Madrasah teachers of Ukhia, Ramu and Teknaf borders were in contact with the Harkatul Jihad center in Ukhia where the police discovered an enormous cache of weapons⁶.

According to a news report, there are around 7,500 trained cadres of the Harkatul Jihad spread throughout Bangladesh. They operate under the guise of

Madrasah teachers or Khadims of mosques. It is believed that they are preparing for a take over of the country.

A large segment of these cadres of the organization has received their arms training in Pakistan. Alongside the Afghan Mujahids, they were provided arms training in the non-government Qawmi Madrasahs in Pakistan. Although these Madrasahs were primarily established to provide religious education, these were turned into militant camps because of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Hundreds of students are still going to Pakistan to study in these Madrasahs for a particular reason; the reason being to receive militancy training in these famed Madrasahs under the guise of receiving higher educational degrees⁷.

The police have ascertained that the Harkatul Jihad was connected to the bomb planted at Kotalipara, Gopaganj, to assassinate the Prime Minister. Although the police have been unable to capture the key player in this incident, Mufti Hannan, the arrest of his four sisters and their husbands has revealed the relationship to the Madrasah based fundamentalist terrorist activities as well as to the Harkatul Jihad. The educational life of Mufti Hannan began at the Gohordanga Madrasah at Tungipara. Later he completed Hafezi from Shorshina Madrasah in Indirhat, Barisal and studied for six/seven years in Deoband, India before returning home. He then went to Pakistan via India, became a Mufti and moved on to Myanmar where he received training in the Martial Arts and bomb making.

A loyal worker of the Harkatul Jihad, Mufti Hannan, in collaboration with his elder brother, Oliuzzaman Nannu established the Ideal Cadet Madrasah in Ghaghor. This Madrasah, located at the homestead of the brother of Kazi Firoz Rashid, a leader of the Jatiya Party, provided military training to its students⁸.

Through the active efforts of these individuals, Harkatul Jihad became a dreaded name to the inhabitants of Gopalganj. It has been reported that Harkatul Jihad has strongholds in 38 Qawmi Madrasahs in the district. The Gohordanga Madrasah acts as the headquarter for these centers. These Madrasahs and orphanages provide military and arms training in the Talebani style. Side by side with teaching the Quran, these Qawmi Madrasahs provide commando training. This fundamentalist terrorist group has initiated operations in many mosques and Madrasahs in different parts of the country. They have developed a wide network of armed cadres throughout the South including in Faridpur, Madaripur, Shariatpur, Magura, Narail, Bagerhat and

Khulna.⁹ They consider mainstream politics to be their adversary and can go into operation against it anywhere at any time.

According to another report, Harkatul Jihad and Chhatra Shibir cadres with their weaponry have established strongholds in 11 Indian Chhitmahals of Panchagarh. They are attempting to enroll Qawmi Madrasah students from Panchagarh and the adjacent Nilfamari districts from these bases.¹⁰

A South African religious organization named Edera E Khoddamul Quran opened about 450 schools in the cluster villages across Bangladesh for Islamic instruction in primary level. There are allegations that arms instructions are provided in these institutions as well. The head of this organization, the South African named Ahammad Sadiq Ahammad is known as a Laden rebel.¹¹ According to reports, the majority of the foreign patrons of the Madrasah system subscribe to extremist religious views.

Among the local patrons, those who provide financial support are often not directly involved in the administration of the Madrasahs. Those who are, usually support religion-based politics. Some of these individuals are full time activists of some religious political party or support violent terrorist activities committed in the name of religion. It may be assumed that without the encouragement of the patrons, the students and teachers of the Madrasahs would not openly subscribe to extremist politics. A public meeting was held in the Paltan Fields on March 8, 2000 organized for teachers and students of the Madrasahs and Olama Mashayekhs. It was openly declared in the meeting to continue the movement with jihadi fervor until Talebani rule was imposed in this country. In the meeting, to which thousands of Madrasah students were brought from the remote corners of Bangladesh, it was announced that the Talebani revolution would be completed by 2000¹².

Teachers, students and patrons of Madrasahs are socially influential people in their own localities, especially in the rural areas, as country people possess an inherent religious sensibility. It is this naïve sensibility that gives birth to their respect for teachers and students of Madrasahs, who are commonly known as Maulana, Alem, Maulvi. As most of the Maulana, Alem, Maulvis also possess a political identity, it is easy for them to gain influential roles in the community. These individuals usually take advantage of these opportunities. They take on the role of a kind of custodian of the poor “lower class” rural inhabitant. This tradition works more in favor to his personal advantage as well as to the gain of his group or class. When they see anything happening

within their spheres of influence which goes against their own gains, then they use the weapon of Fatwa with the help of the opportunistic local members, chairman, Imam*, etc. The victims of these Fatwas are usually the poor and women. The fortnightly supplement published by the Daily Janakantha in 2001 presented a selection of 69 cases of Fatwa from among the thousands that occurred during the 1991-2000 period to show the variety of ways that they have harmed women. Among the victims, some have died, some have been divorced, some have suffered terrible abuse.

The gradual rise of the fundamentalist factions has also resulted in Fatwas against NGOs and their employees involved in the development process, against civil society individuals who believe in the freedom of speech and freethinking. In addition to declaring a number of notable personalities Kafir or Murtad, they have destroyed the property of NGOs and persecuted women involved in the development process.

Caning or whipping, stoning to death, physically punishing someone by burying them in the earth waist down, ostracism, stop supply of drinking water, levying huge amounts of money as fines, declaring them Kafir or Murtad, prohibiting cultural activities, forcing people to “Hilla” marriages, forcing people to re-marry are methods through which they continue their persecution of women, financially vulnerable males, progressive writers, thinkers, development activists, workers and organizations and the very socio-cultural tradition and identity of the Bangalis. Every proclamation of a Fatwa involves one or another Alem or Maulana who has been Madrasah educated. According to Islamic terminology, these people act as Muftis. A Mufti must be an expert on the Quran, the Hadiths, Izma and Kiyas. However, in reality these so called Muftis are deficient in learning and understanding and their Fatwas frequently cause distressing situations. When they call the Freedom Fighters “Bastards”¹³ or Sheikh Mujibur Rahman a “Kafir”¹⁴, this becomes another disgrace for Bangalis as a nation.

With the assistance of a few opportunistic Chairmen and members (of the local Union Council), and other influential community members, the Madrasah educated Maulana, Maulvi, Imams, Muezzins and other Fatwabaz (those who issue the Fatwa) continue to instigate an inhuman practice called “Hilla” marriage – a practice that is prohibited by the Muslim Marriage laws.

* Of the mosque.

Nevertheless, the Fatwabazs continue with this brutal practice, which results in broken homes for countless women. On January 1, 2001, citing one such case that occurred in Naogaon, two High Court Division Justices, Judge Golam Rabbani and Judge Nazmun Ara Sultana under the Bangladesh Supreme Court proposed a law to be enacted by the National Parliament declaring issuing of all Fatwas a punishable offence. In addition, this verdict proposes a number of actions. These include: instructing law and enforcement and judicial agencies to give priority to Fatwa cases; make a short course on Muslim Family Law compulsory in all schools and Madrasahs and instructing Imams to discuss these laws at the mosques during the Juma; creating a non-disparate mode of education as long term strategy; drafting laws in the light of section 410 of the constitution so that religious freedom as well as law and order is maintained; sending copies of this verdict to the Home Ministry, the Law Ministry, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Religious Affairs. The violent activities undertaken by the teachers, students and patrons of Madrasahs to counter this landmark edict had a significant negative effect on the law and order situation. Their destructive behavior included acts such as killing of police personnel inside a mosque, digging up railway fishplates. As the situation steadily declined, in response to an appeal filed by the Fatwabaz faction opposing the verdict, the Appeals Court postponed the decision first for six weeks and then for three months.

In December 1999, Proshika, a national NGO, in collaboration with a number of local NGOs held a festival at Brahmanbaria to celebrate liberation and the ideals of the Liberation War. The violent actions of the Madrasah teachers and students to prevent the festival made headlines. A large number of grassroots development workers took part in the celebration held from December 7 to 11, 1998. At the instigation of the fundamentalist faction, several hundred local Madrasah students attacked the gathering with sticks, hatchets, axes, hockey sticks, shovels. Although the gathering included men and women, the primary target of the attack appeared to be the underprivileged women who were present. They assaulted the woman with brutal ferocity and after beating them up started yanking at their clothes. They actually pulled the clothes off of several women. Their attack was so vicious that they even forcibly disrobed a young girl who had come nearby to visit a doctor. Several courageous young men of the locality covered the girl in a burkha and helped her to return home.¹⁵ These incidents are reminiscent of and sometimes surpass the barbaric actions of the Pakistani army and their collaborator Rajakar-Al Badr, Al Shams forces of 1971.

After attacking the meeting, on December 8 (the anniversary of the day that the town of Brahmanbaria had been liberated in 1971), the “Jihadi” forces attacked, ransacked and committed arson on the offices of NGOs and development organizations in the town as well as those located nearby. According to the Central Coordinator of Proshika, total damages done that day for ADAB and non-ADAB NGOs exceed the amount of Taka 100,000,000 (approximately US\$1,724,137.9).¹⁶

These incidents prove that akin to many other areas, with the direct assistance of the fundamentalist forces, the Madrasah “people” have been able to attain a socially acceptable position in Brahmanbaria as well. In this incident, one of the driving forces was Maulana Sirajul Islam, the Principal of the Sirajul Ulum Islamia Madrasah, who is popularly known as Bara Huzoor. Also Maulana Nurullah, the Khatib of Kautali Masjid Maulana Md. Abdul Hafiz, a known collaborator of 1971 and Syed Md. Ahammad Miah also played important roles. Organizationally, the incident had a direct connection with the Jamiya Islamia Unusia madrasah. Almost all of the teachers and the students of this Madrasah took part in that day’s mayhem.¹⁷

-
1. The Rebirth of Religion Based Politics in Bangladesh, Dr. Syed Anwar Hossain, Weekly Bichitra, November 30, 1984
 2. Ibid
 3. The Daily Janakantha, June 18, 2000, Pg. 15
 4. The Daily Sangbad, October 25, 2000
 5. The Daily Janakantha, September 6, 2000, Pg. 1
 6. The Daily Janakantha, August 30, 2000, Pg. 12
 7. The Daily Janakantha, August 3, 2000, Pg. 1
 8. The Daily Janakantha, July 30, 2000, Pg. 12
 9. The Daily Janakantha, August 9, 2000, Pg. 12
 10. The Daily Janakantha, August 10, 2000, Pg. 4
 11. The Daily Inquilab, July 14, 2000
 12. The Daily Sangbad and the Daily Janakantha March 9 2000, Pg. 1
 13. This Fatwa was proclaimed by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad at a Tafsir Mehfil held in Chittagong. *The History of Fatwa in Bangladesh*, Dr. Muhammad Hannan, Pg. 79
 14. This Fatwa was proclaimed by the Khatib of Baitul Muqarram, the national mosque. *The History of Fatwa in Bangladesh*, Dr. Muhammad Hannan
 15. Grassroots Organizations Versus Fundamentalism: Brahmanbaria, A Report by the Bangladesh Charcha Kendra
 16. Ibid
 17. Ibid

Curriculum and Teaching Methods of Madrasahs

The quality of education that is generated from a particular kind of education system, depends much on the syllabus, curriculum, the teachers and his/her teaching methods. The experience of the individuals who develop the curriculum, how well they understand the psychology of students of a certain age, how sincere and committed they are towards the history and tradition of the nation, how well they can comprehend the realities of modern life are issues that need to be taken into consideration. It is unfortunate that the expertise of those who are responsible for developing the curriculum for the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board is not beyond suspicion. Despite constant revisions of the curriculum, its current state does not ensure mental or intellectual development of the students.

In application, Madrasah education is slightly spiritual in nature. In this system, the aim of life is believed to be comprehension of the divine by the individual. Hence, the only objective of education becomes to provide an understanding of the divine. As the practice of religion is the primary objective of Madrasah education, this concept takes precedence. However, it should be mentioned that even this ideology is not properly practiced in the Madrasah system. The intrusion of worldly and material issues make comprehension of the divine a difficult matter.

“Geography and Economics” is included in the Dakhil 2000 as optional subject for the Science Group and Compulsory for the General Group by the Curriculum and Textbook Wing of the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board. The curriculum¹ for Geography and Economics” includes the following:

The galaxy, the stars, the solar system, phases of the moon, the shape and size of the earth, the annual and diurnal rotation of the earth, latitude and longitude, the International Date Line, the Antipodes, the increase and decrease of day and night and change of seasons and the Temperate Zone.

The relationship between the sun and namaaz, the difference in the times of namaaz depending on the Meridian, the latitude and longitude of the Kaaba, the latitude and longitude of the Kaaba from different locations in the world, the distance of the longitude of the Kaaba from different locations in the world, the difference in the times of namaaz in different locations in the world,

the lunar and solar months, the difference in lunar months in different locations in the world, the difference in time for Rozaa in different seasons, the advantages to the Hajj pilgrims because of the location of the Kaaba, the advantages in the relationship between the timing of namaaz and the sun, and the advantages in the relationship between the rozaa, the Hajj and zakaat and the moon.

It should be noted that this syllabus for the Dakhil level is considered equivalent to the Secondary School Certificate. Two important subjects, Geography and Economics, have been given a full 100 marks course. However, instead of including the important topics in the remaining 50 marks, the course simply teaches a few geographical terminologies and then “religionize” the rest of the course material. It should be noted that after introducing the terminology in the first part, the second part focuses on relating to the Kaaba. How a student who studies this Kaaba-centric very limiting course can be considered the equivalent of a student who has followed the general geography course is a valid question.

Social Science in the Dakhil level provides an introduction to the political background of Bangladesh with a “muslim” slant, which only gives the student a one sided view of politics. A number of important topics relevant to the history of the subcontinent have not been considered necessary to be included. In addition, a number of chapters have been included in this curriculum that may serve to encourage communal feelings and beliefs in a student. The curriculum² for this subject has been reproduced below:

The Condition of Muslim Society with the Arrival of the British, the Expansion of English Education in the Subcontinent, the Rejection of English Education by the Muslims, the Acceptance of English Education by the Hindus, the Unrestrained Entry of the Hindus in the Job Market, Severe Economic Crisis of the Muslims, the Decline of the Importance of the Alems in Society and the State and the Rise of the Hindus. Nawab Abdul Latif, Syed Aamir Ali’s Recommendations Regarding English Education. The Muslims’ Disregard of the Bangla Language and the Causes Thereof. The Practice of Bangla in Addition to English in Hindu Established School and Colleges. The Beginning of English Education of the Muslims at the End of the Nineteenth Century. The Birth of the Secular Faction Among the Muslims. Reasons for the Formation of the Muslim League, the Pakistan Movement, the Ebb in Muslim Politics Following the Partition, Economic Discrimination in Pakistan, the Leadership of the Secular Class, the Liberation war of Bangladesh.

A person who takes on the responsibility of teaching should be rich in modern thought and scientific reasoning. It is incumbent upon the teacher to better him/herself by keeping up to date in the various relevant fields of knowledge. Rabindranath Tagore once wrote, "A good teacher will be a good student; the youth of a teacher's mind cannot be spent at his acceptance of studentship...Where the teachers themselves are active in the practice of knowledge, it is there that the students can clearly see knowledge itself." However, it would not be inaccurate to say that there are only a few teachers who regularly continue to study even after they have become teachers. This tendency is even less evident among Madrasah teachers. The majority of Madrasah teachers are uninstructed in modern and secular methods of teaching. To their students they impart the same narrow views and beliefs that they themselves hold. These teachers mainly teach their students how to become blind believers without questioning anything. There is no custom to examine, review or discuss facts or theories. Creativity is stifled instead of being encouraged. As the teachers are unable to accept any new scientific discoveries, the students also lack that mentality. This is a lifeless world of rote memorization, restricted thinking, and blind faith.

A good teacher should have a pleasant and grave personality, s/he should be lively, hard working, deft at encouraging enthusiasm and motivation to learn, natural, agreeable and refined in behavior, original, flexible, be a good speaker, witty and decisive. However, it is almost impossible to cultivate these qualities in those who emerge from the closed world of the Madrasah system. Hence, it is not possible for them to become good teachers. It is very natural for a student to become the kind of teacher s/he that they themselves had come into contact with.

If, instead of encouraging the curiosity of the students, their minds are set certain boundaries in their road to knowledge, then their intellectual and mental growth is obstructed. This is how Madrasah students are made to lag behind compared to an individual studying under the general education stream. Where, through encountering the ideals of democracy and tolerance, under general education the student has the potential to develop into an individual with humanist values, under the Madrasah system a student learns to stand on the ground of blind religiosity. Hence, a great divide is created between the two in terms of thought, judgment and life values. The thinking of Madrasah students regarding issues such as health, education, family planning, female

education, female leadership etc is strongly negative. They are always against developmental and progressive movements.

The cultural level of a Madrasah student is not of the level desired of a citizen of today's world. Living in Bangladesh, they dream of Arabia, proud of the grandeur of Arabia. These rootless thoughts and delusions of inferiority create identity and existential dilemma for individuals. Students fall prey to this dilemma from their very educational institutions. No interest is discerned on their part regarding the occasions and national celebrations so close to the hearts of Bengalis. The First of Baishakh, 21st February, March 26, December 16 – none of these days create enthusiasm within them. Many Madrasahs do not even observe these national holidays. Rather students are taught to identify the customs and ceremonies that mark these occasions as Bid'at. They consider music, dance, theatre, and fairs to be inappropriate and stay away from them. In place of the traditional Bengali music and dance, only devotional music such as Gazl, Hamd, Nat are encouraged.

It has been mentioned that apart from the state owned Aaliya Nisaab Madrasahs, the Qawmi, Hafezi and other Madrasahs primarily rely on donations from the populace for funding. Teachers take part in the process of obtaining the money, and it is compulsory for the students to participate as well. Students and teachers of these Madrasahs are engaged in this “begging” routine almost throughout the year. In the rural areas, during Autumn when the farmers begin threshing the paddy, a group of people wearing long robes, panjabis, caps and turbans with receipt books can be seen begging for paddy. Usually these groups comprise one-teacher and three/four students. The culture of dependency and of “begging” that the students are exposed to at an early stage remains within their minds in later periods of their lives.

The Madrasahs promote bans and prohibitions in terms of clothing as well. Even when their student days are over, as in other aspects of culture, the students are unable to express or practice current fashions or even personal taste in matters of fashion and attire. A separate apparel culture develops in the same society. Students are allowed absolutely no flexibility at all in this aspect. In the general education system, some schools have a specified uniform, which is not necessary outside of the school. But the uniform that the Madrasah promotes is turned into clothing for all times. The kind of pressure that students must face in this aspect has made headlines in the newspapers.

According to a report, 12/13 students of the Padmapara Rahmania Dakhil Madrasah of Gabtoli thana, Bogra who dressed in shirts and trousers had their heads shaved and their shirt collars chopped off. Although this Madrasah did not have any official requirements in terms of clothing, it was announced that all male students were required to wear panjabi and pajamas and female students would have to wear scarves to class. When, despite the announcement, several boys came to class in shirts and trousers simply out of habit, an Assistant Teacher, Maulana Rustam Ali, grew angry and initiated this act. The humiliated students complained to their parents and a meeting was arranged at the Madrasah compound where Maulana Rustam Ali was penalized to the tune of Taka 1,000 and fifteen days suspension³.

A similar incident that happened in the Bhoripasha Syed Murtoza Dakhil Madrasah of Baufol Potuakhali was reported by the Daily Jugantor. A student assaulted an Assistant Teacher of the Madrasah when he was ordered not to wear shirts and trousers to class⁴. The process of limiting and curtailing the rights of the individual and forcing a foreign culture upon the students discourages the development of a tolerant and open environment.

Creativity flourishes in an open environment. As the Madrasah system does not encourage freethinking, it does not produce any artists or creative individuals. There are a few exceptions – Shahidullah Kaiser, Dr. Qudrat E Khuda – but they are merely exceptions. There is not a single Madrasah teacher who has been able to make a place for himself in mainstream creative literature. The works of those who are working in this field abound with fundamentalist values and are unable to gain acceptance from the mass populace. The few individuals who have studied under the Madrasah system and have earned renown as literary figures have either later been educated under the general education system themselves or at least have been heavily influenced by secular thoughts and ideas of individuals who have been educated under the general education system. The names of Mir Mosharruf Hossain, Nawab Abdul Latif, Syed Aamir Ali, Moniruzzaman Islamabadi, Akram Khan, Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah, Qazi Motahar Hossain, Mohammad Ali, Monsur Uddin, Dr. Enamul Haq, Abul Fazal, Golam Samdani Quraishi can be mentioned in this regard.

Sadly enough, a number of Madrasahs in Bangladesh have totally prohibited usage of Bangla; it is compulsory to speak in Urdu within the boundaries of the Madrasah. This practice has not been issued from the Board or from any institution; this is the product of the fertile brains of certain teachers.

Noncompliance with this order may result in barbaric abuse of students. The Darul Ulum Madrasah of Rangpur is one such institution. Instead of the national anthem, these Madrasahs teach “We will become Taliban, Bangla will be Afghan” type of slogans. Instead of nurturing humanistic values within students, they are taught to achieve domination over opponents through any means (including physical attacks) at all⁵.

The quality of education currently provided under the Madrasah education system, does not provide much scope for students to develop as modern human beings. The conservative attitudes of the authorities, low quality teaching aids, unskilled teachers, high levels of corruption, fundamentalist and backward looking politics – all these factors combine to ensure that a good teaching learning environment does not exist within the Madrasah system.

In the Bangladesh period, science was included alongside religious instruction to make Madrasah education more dynamic and relevant. However, in the majority of Madrasahs, the methods used for science and the teachers themselves have no understanding of scientific reasoning or thought. Although the restrictive Madrasah has made space to include science, no steps have been taken to contend with the barriers to developing a rational or scientific mindset. If students are introduced to a coconut plant by the method of “What is Allah’s grace, juice in the top of a tree” or if, despite plenty of evidence regarding the theories of astronomy, students are introduced to a literal explanation of the seven heavens, it becomes almost impossible for them to achieve a scientific mindset.

Sections from the Natural Science textbook (Board Memo No. Text/107/S-3, Date 6.1.94) issued under the new curriculum of the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board may be examined. The book uses quotations from the Quran quite often. Although these quotations are translated in Bangla, in most cases the language is almost incomprehensible, and certainly beyond the comprehension of a Class III student. In addition, the translations are not accurate, and contain serious errors. The quotations used in the text that are in the words of the creator use the first person. However, it reads “We” instead of “I” throughout the book.

In Islam there is only one creator, but this books presents more than one creator. The people who have selected this book as required reading for students have committed Shirk in the eyes of Islam and are making the students themselves sinners in the eyes of Islam. It is reasonable to assume that

if this book were issued as a textbook from a department or organization other than the Board, then the Madrasah board and supporters themselves would have arisen in protest against it. Page 9 of the book, under the Nurturing Animals section, attempts to establish that plant and animal life sustain environmental balance by saying that Allah has created everything by maintaining a balance. This has been mentioned in the Holy Quran as “The earth...we have created conservation materials to wholly maintain the balance” Sura 15 Verse 19, so destroying the plant and animal life will threaten this balance. Hence it follows that as the Quran says that Allah has created plant and animal life in a balanced manner, that is why destroying this will create an imbalance in nature; not because an unbalanced environment various natural disasters will occur, which will threaten humanity.

Page 15 of this book introduces “water” thus: “Water is a special Neyamot (gift) from Allah. Allah has created life from water. The Quran says, ‘We have brought all living things out of water’, Sura 21 Verse 30 (Partial). It is notable that even this quotation erroneously says We instead of I. The chemical composition of water or the fact that is an essential element is not mentioned anywhere in the chapter – information that the student needs to know to learn more about water. Certain issues are introduced in this chapter without relevance that will encourage the student to concentrate on issues other than the topic being studies – water. Studying ‘water’, the student will learn of Neyamot, creation of life from water and the Holy Quran. It is almost certain that in the Madrasah science class, the student will not get true answers regarding even the issues his/her mind is drawn towards. And any answer s/he might get will not enhance knowledge regarding water. The latter part of the chapter on Water describes sources of water, the various states of water, the water cycle, etc. It first explains how seawater vaporizes and forms clouds, and then returns to the earth through rain, thereby completing the cycle. It then goes on to quote the Quran: “Allah is He who makes it rain from the sky, from which We create plants in pairs – each distinct from each other”. Sura 20 Verse 53. Here too, through the misquotation the attempt is to introduce Allah, not enhance knowledge of water. This misquotation can give rise to confusion in the student’s mind – does such a natural cycle really exist, or does it merely rain because Allah makes it rain?

This kind of confusion regarding scientific concepts from childhood does not help towards clear thought or understanding in later life. Science education under the Madrasah system actually pushes students towards this kind of confusion, which plays a role in developing unscientific and irrational minds.

When these individuals enter the reality of the workplace or mainstream society, they constantly encounter issues and situations that they cannot accept nor do they have the courage to totally reject. This dilemma makes them unable to participate in any forward-looking movement. They merely strengthen the followers of the irrational and involve themselves with anti-progressive activities with an eye looking towards the afterlife.

The quality of Madrasah education began this decline with the establishment of the Aaliyah Madrasah in Calcutta in 1780 under Colonial India. In a report made by Chapman after he became the Principal of the Aaliyah Madrasah in 1907, he wrote that the reason for the decline in quality of Madrasah education was that the old school of teachers were retiring and there seemed no possibility of equally qualified teachers taking their place.⁶ Commencing in Calcutta, this decline continued even after the transfer to Dhaka after the Partition in 1947. Unqualified teachers, low quality education, no compulsion to improve the situation as the children of the upper class and educated families ignored the Madrasahs – all these contributed to crippling the Madrasahs system. The low cultural levels of Madrasah teachers, lack of knowledge regarding Islamiyat or oriental studies have all relegated the “modern” Madrasah system to such a state that the possibility that this system will be able to develop an individual who might play a strong and positive role in the development of the nation is almost zero.

-
1. Syllabus and Curriculum (Dakhil and Class IX), Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board, Pg. 34
 2. Ibid, Pg. 36
 3. The Daily Janakantha, July 9, 1999, Pg. 11
 4. The Daily Jugantor, September 10, 2000, Pg. 8
 5. Letter entitled “Take Strict Steps Against the Madrasahs that are Dens of Iniquity” in The Daily Sangbad, August 25, 1999, Pg. 4
 6. Badruddin Umar, The Education Commission Report and Regarding Religious Education, Sangskriti, 25th Anniversary Issue, Pg. 27

Education Financing: A Comparison

Although according to the 1972 Constitution Bangladesh was established as a secular nation state, the then Awami League government continued full-fledged support of the religion based Madrasah system. In this context a number of Madrasahs received state approval during Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's rule. The political changes of 1975 only made the increase in the number of Madrasahs easier. Since then a number of steps have been undertaken to increase the number of Madrasahs. The Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board was created by the then President Ziaur Rahman on February 27, 1978. Following the establishment of the Board, allocations for Madrasah education has gradually increased and a large number of new Madrasahs have been established. In 1980, the Zia administration brought Madrasah teachers under the governmental pay scale.¹ This decision later acted as a major catalyst in the spread of Madrasah education.

In a seminar entitled "Discrimination, Corruption and Instability in the Education of Bangladesh: Preparation for the 21st Century" organized by the Bangladesh Economic Association, Anu Muhammad reported that in the last 27 years, the number of primary schools have increased by 165% while Madrasahs have increased by 767%. Similarly, number of students at primary schools have increased by 197% while Dakhil Madrasah students have increased by 1,223%.² Although the government promises to develop Bangladesh in step with the 21st century, pouring money into an outdated backward looking educational system such as the Madrasahs reflects implementation of double standards at policy level.³

In addition to this institutionalization of Madrasah education, every budget submitted after the Liberation increases the allocation for Madrasahs. This increase in allocation indicates that if not as a matter of belief, at least for political reasons, all governments of Bangladesh have played a positive role in favor of Madrasah education. This can be seen from the following tables.

Table 4: Increasing government allocation to Madrasah education (In crore Taka)

Financial Year	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99
Budget	180.12	204.04	206.02	268.05	295.00

Source: Politics of Madrasah Education, Muniruzzaman, The Daily Sangbad, July 12, 1999

Table 5: Increasing per capita expenditure in government educational institutes (In Taka)

Financial Year	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
College student	2,788	3,140	3,213	2,959	3,785
Madrasah student	4,470	4,845	4,980	7,603	6,900

Source: BANBEIS

Table 6: Increasing per capita expenditure in non-government educational institutes (In Taka)

Financial Year	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
College student	1,138	1,362	1,404	1,089	1,426
Madrasah student	946	922	1,044	1,211	979

Source: BANBEIS

Table 7: Expenditure on Teacher Salaries in Non Governmental Colleges (Intermediate and Degree) and Madrasahs (In Million Taka)

Financial Year	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000
College teachers	1,200.43	1,698.40	2,170.70	2,458.40
Madrasah teachers	2,062.80	2,685.80	3,290.10	3,473.30

Source: Bangladesh Education Statistics at a glance, 2000, BANBEIS

According to Table 4, allocation for Madrasahs in Financial Year (FY) 1994-95 (Taka 180.12 crore) increased to Taka 204.04 crore, Taka 206.02 crore, Taka 268.05 crore and Taka 295.00 crore in FY 1995-96, 1996-97, 1997-98, 1998-99 respectively. Due to the continually increasing allocation, per capita expenditure for students in Madrasahs is much higher than in governmental colleges. In FY 1992-93, student per capita expenditure is Taka 2,788 in government colleges while for Madrasahs it is Taka 4,470 (Table 5). In 1993-94, student per capita expenditure for government colleges was Taka 3,140 while it was Taka 4,845 for Madrasahs. Student per capita expenditure in government colleges versus Madrasahs were Taka 3,213 against Taka 4,980, Taka 2,959 against Taka 7,603, Taka 3,785 against Taka 6,900 in FY 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97 respectively. Student per capita expenditure in non-government colleges versus non-government Madrasahs for FY 1992-93, 1993-94, 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97 was Taka 1,138 against Taka 946, Taka 1,362 against Taka 922, Taka 1,404 against Taka 1,044, Taka 1,089 against Taka 1,211 and Taka 1,426 against Taka 979 (Table 6).

The comparison between expenditure on teacher salaries in non-governmental colleges (Intermediate and Degree) and Madrasahs reveals a dissimilar picture (Table 7). In FY 1996-97 Taka 1,200.43 million has been expended on teacher

salaries in non-governmental colleges where Taka 2,062.80 million was spent in Madrasahs. In FY 1997-98, 1998-99 and 1999-2000, expenditures on teacher salaries in non-governmental colleges versus Madrasahs amounted to Taka 1,698.40 million against Taka 2,685.80 million, Taka 2,170.70 million against Taka 3,290.10 million and Taka 2,458.40 million against Taka 3,473.30 million respectively.

In the 1996-97 Revenue Budget, allocation per non-governmental Madrasah was Taka 392,000 and Taka 357,000 per non-governmental school/college.⁴ The 1997-98 Revenue Budget allocated Taka 400 crore for 13,461 primary schools, Taka 126 crore for 1,436 non-governmental colleges and Taka 227 crore for 6,835 non-governmental Madrasahs. Comparing the number of institutions reveals that allocation for Madrasahs is higher.

In a discussion on Madrasah education in the National Parliament, the current Information Minister said that public expenditure for Madrasah education for the current fiscal year is Taka 329 crore, which is Taka 25 crore more than the last year of the BNP regime. That year i.e. 1995-96, expenditure in this sector was Taka 304 crore. The Minister also reported that the various steps undertaken by the current government to improve Madrasah education includes two more projects at Taka 199 crore and Taka 31 crore. Another project to train teachers is being undertaken at Taka 10 crore.⁵

In the financial year 2000-01, Taka 39 crore 61 lakh has been allocated to the Madrasah education sector under the Annual Development Program (ADP). From this allocation Taka 18 crore 24 lakh, sourced from Islamic Development Bank funding, will be spent on reconstruction and restructuring of Madrasahs. In the next financial year, Taka 1 crore 37 lakh has been allocated to be spent on a training institute for Madrasah teachers. Taka 20 crore has been allocated for the development of government and non-government Madrasahs in the next financial year⁶.

Under the general education system, government grant allocation is implemented under separate management. For instance, the Directorate of Primary Education is responsible for allocation to primary schools, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education is responsible for allocation junior high schools, colleges and local offices. The National University is responsible for degree colleges and the University Grants Commission (UGC) is responsible for allocations to universities. On the other hand, under the Madrasah education system, a single Board is responsible for all allocations

for Ebtedayee, Dakhil, Alim, Fazil and Kamil –all five levels of education. This leaves plenty of scope for irregularities and corruption.

1. The Daily Inquilab, July 15, 1999, Pg. 1
2. The Daily Sangbad, September 17 2000, Pg. 12
3. Politics with Madrasah Education, Muniruzzaman, The Daily Sangbad, 12 July 1999
4. Ibid
5. The Daily Sangbad, July 8 1999, Pg. 1
6. The Daily Inquilab, June 10, 2000, Pg. 1

Possible Fields of Work for Madrasah Students and their Contribution to the National Economy

There exists widespread unemployment in this country. There exists a huge disparity between the number of jobs available in the public and the private sectors and the available workforce. Despite the fact that unemployment is a major problem in this country, it is also often heard that positions are left empty due to lack of qualified and skilled workers. Because of the disparate educational system extant in this country, both qualified and unqualified workers are produced.

Qualification is the keyword. A qualified and competent individual does not remain unemployed in the long run – even if the work may not be according to his capacity. Even if this notion appears logical consolation, it is not really a notion that raises hope. It is not enough to simply blame the existing discriminatory education system or the competence or incompetence of a student to account for someone with a graduate or post graduate degree in physics becoming a banker – it is necessary to raise questions about the very system of the state. In this country in most cases, a student of chemistry never does become a chemist. S/he has to go door to door simply to get the opportunity of a clerical job. This is why our educational system is broken down, almost dead; specialists term it “clinically dead” and pull at the very roots by saying that “It is our wretched, ruined, repressive state system that has given birth to this stagnant education system of today’s Bangladesh.”¹

The continuity that has led to the current state of our education system has been discussed to some extent while speaking of educational policy and other issues. There is no doubt that the British Colonial power introduced this discriminatory system by applying “divide and rule” policy in its communal aspect to accomplish their narrow but long-term strategy. To this end they collaborated with both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalist groups at various times. The discriminatory attitudes that the British used to fulfill their evil designs were encouraged by the Pakistani rulers to achieve their own ends. Unfortunately, instead of declining with the birth of Bangladesh, this discrimination has gradually grown. The high idealism of the constitution of Bangladesh that had pushed blind religious idealism far away are shattered when steps are taken to entrench discrimination in the educational system defeating the values of secularism and socialism. This not only obliterates

hopes for religious tolerance and equality but also for peaceful coexistence of people of different faiths, creeds and caste.

The kindergarten, model school, cadet college, Madrasahs run side by side with the general education stream are each and everyone an indicator of the discriminatory attributes of our system. This kind of contradictory systems of studying contributes nothing to society except base, communal mentalities. The amount of resources used by governmental and non-governmental sources to sustain these institutions is much higher than expenditures made in general education. The first three types of institutions are only open for children from relatively affluent families as these are quite expensive and affordable to only a small segment of the population. It goes without saying that the fields of work and job opportunities for individuals who come out of these institutions are broader and better. They also have opportunities for employment abroad as their medium of education is English – which is treated as a second language in general education. Despite the many sacrifices made for the Bangla language and the blood that has been shed, students whose medium of education was Bangla are gradually being marginalized in local workplaces. The class system that has thus been and is being established is having a negative impact on the social mindset. Professor Sirajul Islam Chowdhury made a commentary on articles presented by speakers at a seminar held on September 16, 2000, organized by the Bangladesh Economic Association. Regarding the three types of education – English medium, general education and Madrasahs – he said, those educated in English medium schools will lead the country in the coming times. And the poor of the country study at Madrasahs and become poorer.² Those who had determined the objective of Madrasah education to be developing true caretakers and protectors of Islam, the 56 members of the Shamsul Haq Commission – it is almost certain that none of their children are studying in Madrasahs. This is the colonial legacy of the urban middle class. They know that having a student in a Madrasah, a student is not prepared to function or interact in modern society. Badruddin Umar once said, that one of the key indicators and decisive evidence that Madrasah education is ineffective and backward is that the bureaucrats who determine policy in favor of and are strong supporters of the Madrasah system never send their children to study in Madrasahs. They never even think about it. Hence, this education is not meant for rich or even middle class families; this is meant for children of the poor. The reason for this is that in today's world, even the poor feel the need for education, and that need should be met in some way. Through the Madrasah system that need is met in such a manner that a large number of poor children spend years and years in Madrasahs in the

name of education and in reality remain uneducated and unqualified for the workplace. The children of the ruling class with opportunities and education maintain their power and position in society by keeping the poor Madrasah educated people in the dark. From this context, the discrimination inherent in the Madrasah system will become clear to anyone.³

After the establishment of the Madrasah in Calcutta by Warren Hastings in 1780 following the Oriental School of Educational Policy till today, the Madrasah education has continually expanded through patronization from the state as well as from other sources. Till date this system is producing less qualified individuals at higher investment. After completing their degrees their fields of work remain very limited. Although those who have studied in Madrasahs and are their well wishers believe this to be an opportunity, in reality it is merely a mechanism to keep them behind. The aim of Madrasah education is not to develop caretakers and protectors of Islam, but to create an inequity between the upper and lower classes. This inequity ensures that the upper classes retain their advantageous position in life through education compared to the children from the lower classes. Coming from poor and comparatively unsophisticated cultural levels, moving through the Madrasah system, these individuals are stuck forever in a subordinate position socially, financially and culturally. They never actually come into competition with children from the richer families. With the expansion of education the ruling class is using education very cleverly to maintain their class interest. To ensure this they are using religion – religion that is related more to oppressive politics and feudalistic class-consciousness than true faith.⁴ The ruling reactionary class always act as patrons to this system because it is easier to exploit and rule if there are more blind people than those who can see the truth.

In the existing Madrasah system, job opportunities for those who study under the Khariji, Hafezi, Qariyana is very limited. There is not much they can do apart from teach at Madrasahs and maktabas, work as Imams at mosques, speak at Waaz Mehfiles, work as Maulvis at schools, perform various family religious occasions such as deaths or circumcisions, or serve as private tutors. Aside from these, they recite the Quran, register marriages, and perform janaja (prayers for the dead), monazat (special prayers) and akikah (naming ceremony). As the Aaliyah Madrasahs are in contact with general education, students from this stream have slightly larger opportunities. A student who has completed the Dakhil or Alim levels from Aaliyah Madrasah can join higher general education if s/he chooses as Dakhil and Alim is considered the equivalent of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher School

Certificate (HSC). These students may gain equal opportunities with a general education graduate in the workplace. However, the education they receive in childhood and adolescence precludes their having a progressive mentality in most cases. As they lack the liberal mindset for freedom in learning, even if they do study at university level in most cases they are unable to free themselves of extreme conservatism. Hence even if the certificate qualifies them for the workplace in reality they remain unqualified. There is no opportunity to sit for the Bangladesh Civil Service exams directly after completing Aaliyah Madrasah. As the Fazil degree is not accepted as equivalent to Honours degree, even if a student has completed Fazil, s/he must complete a BA degree from some college.

Job opportunities for those who study in the Madrasah system throughout or those who complete the Fazil and the Kamil levels also become severely limited. In this case as well, teaching at Madrasahs or schools, becoming an Imam, the army, Islamic banks, Islamic NGOs, the Islamic Foundation, the Madrasah Board are the fields of employment open to them. However, the majority of the large numbers of students who graduate from the Madrasah system each year remain unemployed. This class of students inhabits the rural areas of Bangladesh and lead anti progressive activities. These include becoming members of fundamentalist groups, obstructing progressive initiatives in the name of religion, issuing fatwas. There are a large number of mosques in Bangladesh, and the government is undertaking mosque-centered educational initiatives⁵ – although this assurance has been voiced by the Prime Minister to gain political mileage, this can also be viewed as an attempt to lessen the burden of the large numbers of Madrasah graduates.

A segment of the students who remain unemployed, who are also influential in their localities and possess the resources, often opt to establish new Madrasahs of their own. This is one of the reasons for the gradual increase in the number of Madrasahs and for the unplanned establishment of Madrasahs without regard to government policies or requirements. This is also the reason for the scenario uncovered in a study conducted by the Bangladesh government where it was found that in several Madrasahs the number of teachers exceeded that of the students⁶.

Although the Aaliyah Madrasahs provide instruction in general science and social science, the quality of the teaching is doubtful. The majority of the Madrasahs that teach science lack laboratories, in some cases they do not even have science teachers. The Madrasahs also do not have teachers competent to

teach the topics that are studied under social science. The students are not encouraged to undertake or participate in literary or cultural activities, sports or even to read books outside the prescribed syllabus. National and international “days” are neither observed nor are the students given a positive idea about the value or the meaning of these “days”. Hence, the students do not develop a scientific or reasoning state of mind nor are they capable of adapting socially. It was in this context that the Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh (ADAB), the apex NGO body, met with the Finance Minister prior to the announcement of the Budget for the Financial Year 2000-2001 and proposed reducing allocation to unproductive sectors and the Madrasah sector and channeling those resources to the health, education and technical sectors. Regarding Madrasah education the proposal states that the trend during the past few years has been that the allocation for Madrasahs has been increasing taking up a significant amount of resources meant for the education sector. In return for the increase in resources, the majority of Madrasahs have not been able to deliver an acceptable level of education in terms of quality. The social value of this education is not even comparable to that of mainstream education. Hence, a large segment of the student population does not receive an applicable and effective education. What should be done in this context, taking into account social worth, is to grant resources to Madrasahs capable of providing mainstream education and to decrease resources to unqualified Madrasahs, reallocating those resources to general education⁷. Similar analyses were presented at a Roundtable organized on May 13, 2000 by ADAB, PROSHIKA, Samonnoy and Sangbad⁸. In protest, a report published in the Daily Inqilab stated that currently 500,000 students were studying in madrasahs, which indicates the rising popularity of Madrasah education. According to the report the reason for this popularity is that no Madrasah-educated student had suffered from the curse of unemployment. The report also opines that the current Madrasah education system has received national and international recognition as an advancing, scientific, progressive and competitive system of education⁹. Chairman of the Dawah Academy and Associate Professor of the Dawah Department of the Islamic University Dr. Abdur Rahman Anwar also pronounced in a statement that Madrasah education does not produce unemployment¹⁰.

Where claiming that the mainstream education of the country is mobilized and scientific would be an overstatement, claiming that Madrasah education encompasses these virtues is the height of absurdity. The reality is that no one comes to study at Madrasahs with the idea that Madrasah education will save them from the curse of unemployment and that they will easily get jobs. Poor

religious parents often send their children to Madrasahs because of a belief that this will bode well for them in the afterlife and because they cannot afford to spend more on their children's education. When they are unable to earn enough even after completing their studies, it is then that the parents realize the ineffectiveness of Madrasah education. It should be said however, that if working as Imam in mosques or teaching at a maktab is considered to be good jobs then Rahman Anwar's contentions may appear to be logical. In reality, Madrasah education pushes the group of financially challenged people further into social, cultural and mental decline.

Speakers at a seminar held at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) on November 18, 1997 said that per capita expenditure for Madrasah students was the highest, yet their contributions in national life were the lowest.¹¹ Findings from a survey report show the situation of Madrasah educated individuals in the various levels of the national workforce. Ms. Umme Salma Begum conducted a study on selected government, semi-government, autonomous and non-government organizations for her Masters thesis on Religious Education under the University of Durham. The survey showed that 90 percent of the employees in those organizations came from general education, while only 8 percent came from the Madrasah system. If teaching, as a profession is not included, then this statistic further decreases to a mere 0.43 percent.¹²

-
1. "On a Democratic Education System", Hassan Azizul Haq. Education in Bangladesh: Past, Present and the Future, Pg. 132-133
 2. The Daily Sangbad, September 17 2000, Pg. 12
 3. The Democratic Education Movement in Bangladesh, Badruddin Umar, Sangskriti, September 2000
 4. On the Education Commission Report and Madrasahs and Religious Education, Badruddin Umar, Sangskriti, 25th Anniversary Issue, Pg. 25
 5. The Daily Inquilab, August 30 2000, Pg. 1
 6. The Daily Janakantha, September 24, 2000, Pg. 17
 7. The Daily Ittefaq, June 3, 2000, Pg. 1
 8. The Daily Inquilab, May 17 2000, Pg. 13
 9. The Daily Inquilab, June 4 2000, Pg. 1
 10. The Daily Inquilab, May 7 2000, Pg. 7
 11. The Daily Janakantha, November 19, 1997
 12. Dual Education System in Bangladesh: the Causes of Social Alienation of Madrasah Educated People, Umme Salma Begum, Philosophy and Progress, June-December 1999

Madrasah Education and Women

The seeds of religious fundamentalism that Madrasah education sows within the Muslim population are against all kinds of progressive initiatives, especially violently against the women's movement. Not only Islamic fundamentalists, all types of religious fundamentalism single out the natural differences between men and women, eventually confirming women's subordination to men¹. Fundamentalism is never comfortable in viewing women and men as equals and does not encourage such ideas. To the contrary, the preferred and expected behavior of fundamentalism is to eliminate all freedoms that women may possess and to lock her up within the household.

Several steps undertaken by the state in the post-Liberation period is partially behind the rise in religious fundamentalism that Bangladesh is witnessing. Among these the increasing patronization of religious (Madrasah) education, the addition of the ideals of "Complete trust and faith in the all powerful Allah, Nationalism democracy and socialism meaning economic and social justice..." and "Complete trust and faith in the all powerful Allah will be the basis for all activities" instead of the four ideals of "Nationalism, Socialism. Democracy and Secularism" through the Fifth Amendment made during the reign of Ziaur Rahman, institutionalization of religious education by establishing the Madrasah Board, the unlimited right to enter politics through registration, the passing of the State Religion Bill promulgated by General Ershad are notable. It was these constitutional and political opportunities that created the scope for political repatriation of a number of Rightwing fundamentalist political parties including Jamayate Islami. In the shadow of Martial Law, with the opportunities presented by the totalitarianism of the Ershad regime, Jamayate Islami strengthened itself. The fundamentalist policies of Jamayate Islami were gradually spread throughout rural Bangladesh through the activities of its student wing (Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir), Madrasah students and the maulanas². The implication is that Islamic fundamentalism has spread in the country through the existing Madrasahs and their related institutions.

As certain Madrasah degrees are considered to be the equivalent of degrees obtained under mainstream education, many Madrasah students have gained the opportunity to study at the universities. With them they are bringing the seeds of the blindly irrational conservatism they learn in the Madrasahs. Reactionary activities are widening their reach, infecting the universities with

fundamentalism. These activities are receiving support from closet conservative/fundamentalist university teachers. As a result female students at the universities are hindered in their pursuit of education. The recent incidents at the Islami University are a significant example³. It cannot be said conclusively that female students in other universities do not face similar harassment.

The Middle Eastern oil rich, Muslim countries have a big role to play in Bangladesh, and usually the only participants in that context are the Madrasah educated, blindly religious faction. Foreign funding is encouraging Middle Eastern anti-woman conservatism through financial institutions, political parties, social organizations and Islamist NGOs. In addition, a large number of people employed in the Middle East carry similar cultural beliefs, values and practices home and play an overall role in the empowerment of women.

Four distinct actors are now in play in the power politics that goes on in the rural areas of Bangladesh: the government, NGO, Moral-Matbor (Community leaders) and the fundamentalist faction⁴. Moral Matbor (Community leaders) and the fundamentalist faction are usually of similar characteristics. For them the value with the highest priority is that which furthers their own interests. The government works through devious strategizing at times to survive, which sometimes works in favor of the fundamentalists. Although NGOs work in favor of progressive values, the rapid increase in the number of Islamic NGOs financed by oil-money from the Middle East⁵ implies that the days when it could be claimed that NGOs were practitioners of progress and liberalism are over. The Islamic NGOs are pushing the rural inhabitants towards conservatism and strengthening the hold of Moral-Matbor (Community leaders) and the fundamentalist faction over them. All these are contributing towards the creation of stagnant rural areas, where life is lived without mobility, without dreams, without a future. Inhabitants of villages where progressive NGOs are active dream of moving forward and the Moral-Matbor (Community leaders) and the fundamentalist classes cannot get away with whatever they want. However, wherever the networking of progressive NGOs is weak, they are having to fight with various bans and prohibitions declared by the exploiting class and Fatwas are being aimed at them and their beneficiaries.

Progressive NGOs aim to create change and awareness in women and want to make them self-sufficient through economic empowerment and able to emerge from the male power structure. They want to ensure her familial and social

empowerment through her participation in the decision making process. The fundamentalist faction identifies this role change of women as the primary reason for social disorder and believes that to reinstate woman's traditional role under man is to reinstate the social order. Fundamentalism aims to surrender the responsibility of "taking care" of women not only to the family but also to all males of society⁶. Which is why a common man has the courage to remark, Go away you woman doctor. If the wife dies, let her. I'm off to dig her grave. I'll bury her and marry another one. There's no shortage of women is there, I'll not let your filthy hands touch her. Our Huzoor speaks the truth. This shamelessness of women cannot be tolerated. No Purdah, no nothing. Running around on a motorbike. Teaching singing dancing in schools. Planting trees. Coming to the villages to make everyone Christians."⁷ Or influential members can threaten the community saying, If you work with them (NGOs), you'll all become Christians, If either the husband or the wife becomes a member of an NGO, then they will automatically be divorced, NGOs are bringing women out of the household and the Purdah. The Fatwa on automatic divorce because of membership with an NGO was enforced on Nozimon of Deogram in Bogura. Her 18 years of marriage was annulled with a single Fatwa.⁸

Why does fundamentalism (the breeding ground for which is Madrasah education) behave so and teaches to behave so with women? The reason is explained by Ayesha M. Imam in her essay *Women and Fundamentalism*. According to her, women are the central issue from the fundamentalist perspective because she contains and is the continuation of culture (as she has the power of procreation). If women become aware of this, then that will constitute a blow to the male power structure. This will eliminate possibilities of control and power by using the tool of religion. It was this fear that had led to the excessive fury of the fundamentalists at Taslima Nasrin. In addition, if women become aware, a major source of income of Maulanas – giving holy water, amulets, talismans, holding milaads – will decline. Poor uneducated women of the villages are their principal clients. As progressive NGOs are making villagers aware of the wrongdoings of these religion peddlers and are also providing healthcare services, the fundamentalists are against them too.

The village Waaz Mehfiles are the major medium through which the fundamentalist forces communicate their ideals and values. The main topic of these waaz, is usually woman. A large part of the waaz comprises descriptions of the Hurs (heavenly maidens), Purdah and the virginity and honor of women⁹. How women are presented in these waaz mehfiles have been

described in Badruddin Umar's essay entitled *Waaz Mehfil and Women in Politics*. He writes, "A few days ago a man was telling me that when he was young, his father did not allow him to attend waaz mehfiles that were held near his house. When he asked his father the reason for this when he was slightly older, his father had replied that although the waaz that the maulvis performed in these mehfiles began with the name of Allah, they soon began speaking of women – almost all of which was ugly, vulgar and harmful to the mind. Hence it was inappropriate for children to go there."¹⁰ These maulvis or maulanas speak against all progressive movements of society and try to attract the audience by speaking of women in a uneducated manner. Audiocassettes of these waaz are readily available in rural areas. Listening to the statements again and again on these tapes turn them into matter of belief for the uneducated and unaware villagers. This provides further scope for oppressing women.

Reactionary forces have used religion to further their interests in various social and political spheres giving birth to such a perverted religious value system that instead of leading people towards freedom, it is becoming a cause for unease. Truly religious people are not threats to other citizens, society or the state; hence we have nothing to say against them. However, religious hypocrisy has become so entrenched within some falsely religious people, that they have become threats to other people, to society and to the nation. During this time of women's emancipation across the globe, they raise the barrier of conservatism in the path of women forging ahead. A meeting was held recently chaired by Maulana Mohammad Toiyab, the Information Secretary for the Islami Morcha and Joint General Secretary of the Islamic Oikkyo Jote, an upstart political party. The meeting vehemently condemned the recent government decision to make it compulsory to include the mother's name and identity as part of the child's identity, declaring that making the mother's identity compulsory in this case was merely to legalize prostitution¹¹.. This kind of comment regarding women and women's rights can only be made by the Maulanas who have been educated from the morally bankrupt institutions of Madrasahs and are using religion as a tool to further their own interests.

Madrasah education is never fair towards women and it is a historical truth that the opportunity to participate in this type of education is limited. It is only at maktab level that women get wide opportunities to study in learning Qaeda, Ampara and the Quran. Yet even here the key students are the boys.¹² Opportunities for women in higher levels of Madrasah are limited, because the responsibility of Dwini education of women lie with the father, the son, the

brother or the husband.¹³ Even if this is compulsory for the family, there is no reason to believe that the Madrasahs are open to women. However, the scope to move beyond this conservatism and promote coeducation has come into existence in latter times. A large number of female students are studying in Madrasahs across the country despite the fact that their numbers are much less than the number of male students. Even as teachers, women get lesser opportunities in Madrasahs. The share of female teachers against the total number of teachers is negligible. All these are indicators of the Madrasahs' viewpoint regarding female education. This discrimination even exists in the employment of 3rd and 4th Class employees in Madrasahs. Table 8 presents a comparison of the situation of men and women in the Madrasah system.

Table 8: Number of students, teachers, 3rd and 4th Class Employees in Madrasahs by gender

Institutions		Students		Teachers		3rd Class Employees		4th Class Employees	
Type	No.	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
Dakhil	4865	1755434	811128 (46)	60113	1925 (3)	4183	187 (4.5)	9207	461 (5)
Alim	1090	501500	182924 (37)	17576	436 (3)	1018	36 (4)	2292	82 (4)
Fazil	1000	565824	155160 (27)	19509	375 (2)	1791	42 (2)	3986	63 (2)
Kamil	141 *3	112590	14301 (13)	3602	37 (1)	401	3 (1)	861	22 (3)
Total		2935348	1163513 (40)	100800	2773 (3)	7393	268 (4)	16346	628 (4)

Note: The percentage of girls and women are shown in the brackets and the government institutions are shown through the (*) marks.

Source: Primary Report of National Education Survey (Post-Primary) 1999, BANBEIS

The table above shows that total number of Madrasah students is 2,935,348, among which 1,163,513 are female – about 40%. Percentage of female students in the Dakhil, Alim, Fazil and Kamil levels are 46%, 37%, 27% and 13% respectively. Total number of teachers is 100800 and 2773 (about 3%) teachers are female. Percentage of female teachers in the Dakhil, Alim, Fazil and Kamil levels are 3%, 3%, 2% and 1% respectively. Total number of 3rd and 4th Class employees in Madrasahs is 7393 and 16346. Share of female employees in both categories is only 4%.

The number of female Madrasah students is ever increasing. Although this may appear to indicate that there has been vast change in the Madrasahs regarding coeducation, this is not borne out by reality. Madrasahs identify

coeducation as the source of all disputes and difficulties. There are a number of teachers and Fatwabaz who are active in condemning coeducation. A report was published in the Daily Janakantha entitled *Madrasah Student Eva Under the Sword of the Fatwabaz* regarding an incident that occurred in Daulatpur Salehia Islamia Senior Madrasah of Daulatpur village under the Nilganj union, Kalapara thana, Patuakhali district. This Madrasah was established about 60 years ago when, under the leadership of village Sufi Abdus Sattar, the Principal, Vice Principal and several members of the Managing Committee decreed that male and female students could not study together. As a matter of fact, female students in Class IX and over were prohibited from even entering the Madrasah grounds. This rule is still enforced. According to the documentation, there are about 100 female students in the Dakhil and Alim levels (the actual number is less). The small number of regular female students that they do have study and sit for exams at home.

This year it was decided that the female students would also be taught at the Madrasah. However, what was actually arranged was for female students to attend class in a room about five hundred yards from the main building of the Madrasah. A piece of cloth was stretched across on one side of which sat the teacher on the other side the girls. Ignoring the anger of the Fatwabaz, complaining that the classes were not being held according to the decisions made, Ishrat Jahan Eva, a second year Alim student, went to attend class in the Madrasah on September 6 – 60 years after the Madrasah was established. She was told that to attend the Maulvi Shah Alam's class. However, when Eva refused to attend class with the cloth barrier hung in the middle, the Vice Principal threatened to forcibly seat her among the male students. Eva's determination forced the teachers to allow her to attend class. She was even taught a few subjects in second floor classroom for 3/4 days. Then a son of a Managing Committee member of the Madrasah verbally abused Eva in front of the Principal. He threatened to physically and sexually assault her if she returned to the Madrasah. When Eva complained to the students and the teachers, the Principal and the Vice-Principal decided that Eva was to blame and instructed her not to come to class from September 20. Eva was forced to seek redress from Co Chairman of the Madrasah, the Chairman of Nilganj Union, Abdul Hamid Munshi. As of writing this report, Eva had not received any justice.¹⁴

If even in the 21st century this is how the Madrasahs view co-education, then it is easily imagined what kind of education that institution offers. It is very natural that students who come out of these Madrasahs will not have a high

opinion of women. They will learn that woman is a lower class being who should be shut up within the four walls, over whom any kind of control can be acquired in the name of religion.

In the meantime, the number of female Madrasahs has increased rapidly. According to the inspection report signed and presented by Syed Mahbubur Rahman to the Education Ministry on June 30 1998, there are 459 female Dakhil Madrasahs in Bangladesh, 31 Alim, 9 Fazil and 1 Kamil.¹⁵ Aside from these 500 Madrasahs under the Aaliyah Nisaab there are a large number of female Qawmi Nisaab Madrasahs. Within 1997-98, many Qawmi female Madrasahs have been established in the peri-urban areas of Dhaka and Narayanganj. This may be good news for students and parents who are not comfortable with co-education and appear to further the interests of female education. However, these female Madrasahs teach blind religiosity and extreme conservatism more than they actually educate their students.

The female Madrasahs that have been established through the encouragement and activities of those who use Madrasahs to further their group or class interest play a role in keeping women far removed from modern and progressive education. In particular, what education is provided to women in the government unapproved Qawmi Madrasahs is not known to anyone – not even the people of the community. Although these Madrasahs have allegedly been established to spread religious education, in actuality they are there with the sordid aim of furthering a political agenda. The activities of the fundamentalist groups go on under the cover of these Madrasahs. The female Qawmi Madrasahs that operate outside state control are creating female fundamentalists. A story published in the Daily Sangbad reports¹⁶ that while visiting a female Qawmi Madrasah, the journalist saw 19 essential rules chalked out on a blackboard to be followed by female students. These include:

1. Women must not laugh, shout or call out in a loud voice
2. They must not talk to males other than their fathers and brothers
3. They must not watch or listen to television or the radio
4. They are forbidden to go to the market or to any formal occasions
5. Grown up girls are forbidden to salam any man

According to a Huzoor of the Madrasah, girls should definitely be punished if they do not follow these rules. He thinks that girls who study too much

become women of loose morals. Allah has created women only to service man, therefore they should be kept within strict control.

The expensive infrastructure of the Madrasahs indicates that they could not have been built within such a short time without outside assistance.¹⁷ A report published in the Daily Janakantha on January 30 1999 describes the arrival of foreign financing and its impact. The report details a murder that happened in mosque adjacent to the Digolia Palong Madrasah in Ukhia, Cox's Bazar. The murder was a result of a dispute related to the distribution of funds that had arrived from abroad.

The Madrasahs instill in women the idea that as women it is a great sin for them to receive “anti-Islamic” modern education. They begin to believe this so strongly that they eventually impart this belief to their children as well. *The Female Madrasah Movement in Bangladesh*, published by the Islamic Foundation, describes behaviour xx that must be learnt and followed by students of the female Madrasahs. The intense repression that these behavioral tenets will push the female students towards can never play a positive role in their future lives. Several behavioural principles decreed in that book is as follows¹⁸:

1. Going out alone should be absolutely banned
2. No modern frivolities should be encouraged. Using any kind of make up is prohibited in the Madrasah
3. They must wear long kameez and dresses in accordance with the Shariat and must always have a large orna (large scarves) draped around their bodies
4. They should avoid open roads as much as possible while going to Madrasahs and other religious gatherings xxx. If you meet a man on the road in the village then move to the side of the road with your face turned away. Wait until he has passed.
5. There should be no conversation with each other while walking.
6. Apart from the topics included in the curriculum of the Madrasah or them majlish, do not speak of other issues with the teacher.

“Woman is like gold jewelry, she must be kept carefully. Treated without care, with the nonobservance of the Purdah, defiles the environment. Like gold, if women are not guarded carefully, then they might be stolen or robbed. That is why women must be kept behind the veil” – was the view expressed by

Maulana Alimul Huq, the founder of a female Madrasah during discussions with the author. His remarks clearly reflect the viewpoint of Madrasah educated and Madrasah patrons regarding women, which is out of tune in the context of today's social reality.

It should be mentioned that the Education Policy accepted by the Ministerial Committee of the Bangladesh government, which was developed by the Shamsul Haq Commission, recommended encouraging establishment of female Madrasahs to promote female education. How establishing female Madrasahs would encourage female education is an idea that raises many question if one considers the kind of views that are promoted in female Madrasahs regarding the role and position of women.

-
1. Fundamentalism in Bangladesh and Women, Suraiya Begum, Samaj Nirikkhon-54, Pg. 17
 2. Ibid, Pg. 15
 3. The fundamentalist faction made indecent allegations against six female students who traveled outside of the campus. They were forced to leave their dormitories. A number of other female students residing in the dormitories also left. When four students attempted to sue the known fundamentalist faction for slander, not only were they unable to lodge a case, in the face of threats they were forced to leave the campus altogether. The Daily Janakantha, June 2, 2000, Pg. 4
 4. Fundamentalism in Bangladesh and Women, Suraiya Begum, Samaj Nirikkhon-54, Pg. 8
 5. According to the Directory of member organisation of AMWAB (Association of Muslim Welfare Agencies of Bangladesh) 1998-'99, the number of registered NGOs was 90 till 1999.
 6. Development and Fatwa: Rural Women in a Tug of War, Geeti Ara Nasreen, Samaj Nirikkhon – 54, Pg. 58
 7. The Fortnightly Supplement of Janakantha, February 7-21, 2001, Pg. 5
 8. Fundamentalism and Women in Bangladesh, Suraiya Begum, Samaj Nirikkhon – 54, Pg. 6
 9. Ibid, Pg.11
 10. Against Religious Reactionism, Badruddin Umar, Pg. 69
 11. A press release of the organization, The Daily Inquilab, August 30 2000, Pg. 8
 12. Madrasah Education in Bangladesh (Background, Present Status and the Position of Women), Abul Momen, Pg. 50
 13. The Female Madrasah Movement of Bangladesh, Principal Maulana Begum Nurjahan Akbar, Pg. 38
 14. The Daily Janakantha, October 15, 2000, Pg. 15
 15. The History of the Fatwa in Bangladesh, Dr. Mohammad Hannan, Bangladesh Nari Progoti Sangha, 1999
 16. The Daily Sangbad, February 15, 2001
 17. The Daily Janakantha, February 1, 1999
 18. The Female Madrasah Movement in Bangladesh, Principal Maulana Begum Nurjahan Akbar, Pg. 55

Madrasah Education and Values

Ethics or the judgment of right and wrong is related to a human being's development from a child (a biological entity) to an adult human (a bio-cultural entity). Sociologists call this process of growing into an adult from a child "Socialization" implying that this is the process that turns us into creatures worthy of society. The cultural elements of each society teach people how to behave, what to do and what not to do, what to think and what not to think. The anthropologist Teaylor has defined culture as being "the knowledge, behavior, beliefs, art, values, laws, practices and habits that a person inherits by being a member of a society."¹ It has been seen that human beings inherit values from the system and practice of values prevalent in their society. This inheritance occurs through education. Education provides humans with the structure of values and ethics to be followed.

Humans receive the education that constructs these values from various elements and institutions of society. These elements and institutions are usually the family, neighbors, friends, school, mass media (books, newspapers, and the electronic media). The whole educational infrastructure of a society evolves from the principles and values determined by that society. In this discussion regarding the Madrasah education in Bangladesh and the system of values that has evolved from it, it is important to consider these aspects related to the overall nature of culture and education. For the type and impact of institutional education on the development, change or transformation of social mores or cultural values is significant.

The conflicting condition that exists because of the influence of Madrasah education has a historical significance in our social and cultural structure. The establishment of a Madrasah, the faith and ideology active behind the establishment of the Madrasah, the product of the institution and the related politics and economics – taking all this into consideration indicates that this conflict regarding values exists because of historical-political reasons.

The cultural environ that the Madrasah creates as an institution leads to the creation of a religious political hegemony, which legalizes political power play in the guise of religion. The conflict between the two systems of values, which stand negating each other, initiates different historical journeys of cultural, political and economic transformation.

For instance, the values that led the majority people of East Bengal to take part in the war to liberate Bangladesh and the values that led some people to form the Shanti Bahini (the active collaborators) are opposite. According to reports, all members of the first unit of the anti-Liberation militia force, the Al Badr were Madrasah students². The ideology or the values that Madrasah education had given birth to had taught them that Islam and Pakistan were one and the same; and the splitting of Pakistan had appeared as a split in Islam itself³. Hence it is important to analyze the basis of the ideologies espoused by the faction that is against the development of Bengalis as a nation during the Pakistan era as well as after Liberation. This ideology, which stands opposed to the ideology of Bangladesh, has conspired against the Bengali movement to establish a non-communal and democratic society. The Madrasahs have played a key role in the establishment of the ideology that has always challenged and continues to challenge the development of a democratic culture in Bangladesh. The elite classes, the class in power, are the ones who stand behind the classification of Bangladeshi society that has been established through Madrasah education as well as those who use religion as a tool to gain their own ends. To feed this interest group, a system of education is needed which will create a conservative ideology. In turn this ideology will foster the belief that “Arabic is the greatest language in the world”, “Islam is the greatest religion in the world”, “the establishment of an Islamic state should be the only aim in life”, “women are second class citizens of society” and “secularism is another name for atheism”.⁴ It goes without saying that the elite classes – no matter which country in the world they belong to – are corrupt and self-serving. Their interests revolve around remaining in power. If the elite classes are “religious”, then they still are in the same category and their primary tool to ensure that they remain in power is religion itself. It is the religious elite who have identified one particular religion as the national religion in the constitution. Hence, what is being touted as moral education is in reality Madrasah education and its components under the guise of Islam. Of which, the single controlling power are the elite class who had formed the Shanti Committees (Peace Committees – collaborators during the Liberation War) and who today continue by disfiguring the national anthem.⁵

The moral void that exists in Bangladesh today is a matter of concern for any citizen. Murder, rape, acid throwing, mugging, extracting illegal tolls, drug addiction, kidnapping, human trafficking, dowry related crimes, Fatwa crimes take up most of the space each day in the newspapers. Identifying the root causes and resolving them has b

ecome the responsibility of everyone – the state and society. Although all sectors including the civil society have become gradually active, there appears no respite to be had.

Lack of healthy and dynamic political activity, uncontrolled drugs and arms, the invasion of satellite entertainment, the gradual rise of fundamentalism, increasing poverty – although all these elements are blamed for the rapid increase in crime and immorality, it is also necessary to examine the other elements that are directly or indirectly related. It is necessary to examine whether there is any connection between the so-called moral education or Madrasah education and those who are related to these activities.

Maulana Abdul Latif Chowdhury of the Qibla Fultoli Madrasah claimed in a press release that lack of Islamic education was the cause of all these murders, terrorism, and corruption in the country. Islamic education makes human beings honest, responsible, hardworking, and idealistic. It is because the Madrasah education exists in this country that there are still honest and ideal individuals in existence.⁶ The people know quite well of the role played by the Madrasahs and the people involved during the Liberation War. Their role in the post-Liberation period in terms of setting moral exemplars for all as well as their role today can be seen from some selected examples.

In the last quarter of the 20th century, women involved in development activities began traveling in the rural areas on motorbikes and bicycles for work related purposes. Many people have lauded this development as progress for professional women; on the other side a segment of the same population (both educated and uneducated) have identified this as an indicator of the degeneration of women in terms of morality and character and Madrasah students threatened to prevent this behavior.

The nefarious attack that was made by young Madrasah boys on the sports day for primary students of the public Aaliyah Madrasah of Sylhet, where their rage was expended on the young girls participating in the sports competitions as well as the national flag, must have been an attempt to bring about the alleged morality.⁷

The fact that what the majority people of society deem as progress appears to be moral degeneration to Madrasah people making them take actions to eradicate it must be an outcome of Madrasah education. The values promoted through Madrasah education attempts to retain non-progress in national and

social life. Reviewing this example of the participation of the Madrasahs in establishing their so called morality as well as selected incidents of their personal and professional lives that have been published in the newspapers point toward the moral vacuum that exist within them. There is no need to go into controversial subjects; there are no actions that are morally contemptible to all human beings that the Madrasah related people are not deeply involved in – whether that action is murder, rape, sexual assault, embezzlement or cheating at exams.

The editorial of a daily newspaper remarked that the grand festival of cheating during exams was the biggest proof that Madrasah education does not improve the moral values of individuals. Also, the newspapers often publish details of various disreputable activities that go on in Madrasah hostels, or setting up of bogus Madrasahs to embezzle funds. Madrasah students bring copying/cheating materials to exam halls in their socks, shoes or underwear. These are examples of improvement of their moral values...these false alms will come of no use to this nation except to discredit it.⁸ Truly, they are setting examples that discredit our nation in many ways. According to one report Hafez Sajjadur Rahman, teacher at the Shuigram Maulana Fazlul Huq Hafezia Madrasah of Palashbari thana headquarter, was sacked following proof that he had had sexual relations with a number of his male students. The Hafez had conducted his heinous activities for quite sometime by intimidating the boys in the classroom or the mosque.⁹ According to another newspaper story, a Madrasah teacher and Imam of the mosque raped an 11-year-old girl in Balaganj of Sylhet. Hafez Maulana Tajul Islam was private tutor to the child.¹⁰

Embezzlement and fraud are taking place often in the numerous Ebtedayee and Dakhil Madrasahs throughout the country. We only get to hear a few of these through the newspapers. These crimes are being committed by the teachers who have been employed to provide moral education. How can those, who are themselves immoral and unethical, be considered appropriate to impart lessons of morality to students?

Through the indulgence of the single Board that deals with Madrasah education, many Madrasah teachers are becoming entangled in corruption in order to obtain false registrations. In the Dakhil exams held in March 2000, over 23,000 students participated with false registrations. At least 2,881 Madrasahs were involved in the false registration scam. The majority of these Madrasahs were female Madrasahs. Interestingly, some of these Madrasahs with false students themselves were operating with falsified registration.

About 7,000 students were ejected from the exam halls for cheating during the Dakhil exams.¹¹ This kind of corruption was going on in Madrasahs for a long time. It is only recently that governmental probes and investigations are bringing these to light. The quality and level of morality practiced in the Madrasahs become clear from the disclosure of similar incidents. If this is the morality practiced by the teachers and the students, then it raises questions regarding the future of this educational system.

The quality of education determined by the current educational system seems to make passing without cheating almost impossible. The majority of public exams held in the country witnesses a flood of cheating. If the so-called moral education, the Madrasahs also follow in the footsteps of the rest of the country, then how can we believe it better than its peers? Because of the emphasis on moral education, the expectation of people regarding the behaviour and values of Madrasah educated and the Madrasah teachers is high. The revelations of the last few years have damaged that expectation, firmly entrenching in people's minds the belief that Madrasahs mean centers of dishonesty, fraud and other corrupt and degenerate practices.

-
1. Primitive Culture, E. B. Teaylor, Pg. 1, 1871
 2. Ekattorer Ghatok Dalarera Ke Kothai, Third Edition, Muktijuddher Chetona Bikash Kendra, Dhaka 1988
 3. The Rise of Fundamentalism in South Asia, Shahriar Kabir, The Daily Janakantha, November 4 2000
 4. These quotations are taken from the survey conducted by BNPS in 2000 as well as from various slogans voiced by the Islamic political parties of Bangladesh.
 5. A parody of the national anthem was published in the Daily Inquilab on October 20 2000
 6. The Daily Inquilab, May 22 2000, Pg. 8
 7. During this attack young boys from the Madrasahs ruthlessly assaulted primary school girls and set fire to the national flag. All educational institutions in Sylhet observed a one-day strike in protest of the incident. The History of the Fatwa in Bangladesh, Dr. Muhammad Hanna, BNPS, 1999, Pg. 70
 8. The Education to Create False Alems, the Daily Sangbad, June 13, 1998
 9. The Daily Muktakantha, December 21 1997
 10. The Daily Muktakantha, September 2, 1998
 11. The Daily Sangbad (Editorial), June 28, 2000, Pg. 4

The Civil Society on Madrasah Education

Civil society members and individuals related to the Madrasah system were interviewed through two questionnaires (See Annexure). Through the cooperation of the field level workers, we were able to obtain the requisite number of completed questionnaires on time. Several completed questionnaires from respondents related to Madrasahs have been used in the preceding chapters. This chapter makes an overall assessment of the completed questionnaires, which clearly demonstrates the viewpoints of the various groups.

Citizen representatives, or civil society members of the major areas of the nation shared their perspectives and opinions regarding Madrasah education. The confusion and the gaps in the existing Madrasah education system is revealed unambiguously present in their opinions regarding religious education and Madrasah education. The respondents included teachers, Madrasah teachers, writers, intellectuals, development researchers, lawyers, and politicians. The topics covered in the questionnaires were:

1. Madrasah education versus the reality of the 21st century
2. The necessity of Madrasah education in ethical development
3. The influence of Madrasah education on the women's emancipation movement
4. Similar education for all versus Madrasah education
5. The role of Madrasah education on the progressive movement
6. The mutuality of Madrasah education and communal politics

Madrasah Education versus the Reality of the 21st Century

Despite the wide dispersion in the variety of different aspects of modern life, respondents had similar views on this issue. The traditionalist Madrasah education system, which is against change, is unsuited to meet the needs of the new age – whether those be the needs of the individual, the society or the state.

The world is changing fast. On one side science and technology is transforming the lives of human beings overnight, on the other side a group of human beings is reciting, memorizing the Quran without understanding the words or the language. Conscientious members of society feel that these two

images are significant. Their discussion ranged on the aims of Madrasah education, its target population and its role in satisfying the needs of the individual, the society or the state.

It was agreed that the majority of Madrasah students came from the poorer classes. The participation of the middle classes are negligible. The primary reason behind this is the customary belief of gaining virtue and grace. The religious elite classes of society play a major role in promoting the religious ideology that is active in sustaining this customary belief. This class is always prepared to draw a clear divisive line within society. This line facilitates control of the Madrasah educated. Naturally they become a people separate in thought and behaviour from the mainstream. The majority also exhibits a tendency to return to mainstream education as a result of this division. The civil society believes that this is a clear indicator of the failure of applicability of Madrasah education. Implying that this education is not meaningful in the reality of today's world. They also challenge the effectiveness of this education by citing the marginal contributions of Madrasah educated individuals to the fields of art, literature, sports, culture, science etc. even those who are firm supporters of the Madrasah education system believe that this education is outdated and needs to be reformed.

Ethical Development and Madrasah Education

Ethics and values develop based on cultural ideology. Our social institutions are the patrons of our cultural ideology; which is why differences in culture, differences in environment and other conditions give rise to differences in the system of values. Different and contradictory outlooks on values and ethics may be seen in individuals who have grown within the same socio cultural ideology.

Civil society is against the belief that particular religious rites and rituals are necessary to develop the sense of values and ethics. They believe that values can be developed in a family and an environment where the practice of logical and high thinking is possible. Just as religion can be the basis of ethics and values, so can secularism; just as class, caste, gender, environment can provide elements of a system of values, so can human virtues such as honesty, magnanimity, nobility, patriotism. Yet discrimination exists in our society and the opportunities to express virtues limited. Hence the level and quality of the values of this society is not that high. Due to inherent weaknesses, Madrasah education is in a worse situation in this aspect. The opportunist class has one interest in sustaining the discrimination that exists in the education system of

Bangladesh and that is to maintain their position of power. The ideology that is channeled into the brains of the relevant people derive from the sacred concepts of religion. Hence all religious institutions combine to silence any criticism any examination of this “sacred” system of education. It is this combined institutional forces that are active in continuing the Madrasah system, which gives birth to an intolerant ideology and fanatical values. These intolerant people easily label people *Murtad*. Yet the contention that it is possible to develop rational, ethical and moral human beings without Madrasah education is supported by the general education system of our country. Which is why despite the fact that this is a Muslim majority country, the nation is a People’s Republic, not an Islamic state. Despite the non-existence of Madrasah education, there are people of high values and morals in many countries.

The Influence of Madrasah Education on the Women’s Movement

The civil society believes that Madrasah education plays a negative role on the women’s movement. Madrasah education does not give equal status to males and females. It also encourages misogyny. Madrasah education is against female-leadership, and teaches that women are subordinate to men in behaviour, attitude, in the workplace. The majority of those educated in Madrasahs think of women as nothing else but reproductive objects. Speakers at religious mehfilis or meetings have a common tendency of making verbal attacks on women. Instead of religious or theological discussion, speakers at these programs mostly talk against the natural proclivities of human beings. Individuals who grow up in the closed community under the Madrasah system have very little opportunity to become freethinking human beings. The concept of the intense sinful nature of human sexuality that they are exposed to from early childhood motivates their aggressive and violent stance against the women’s movement.

The civil society states that if the curriculum and environment is not woman-friendly, then an educational system cannot be supportive of the women’s movement. The antifeminism of Madrasah educated individuals is notably obvious as both the curriculum and the environment of that type of educational institution are hostile towards women. Civil society members also pointed out that although even general education cannot be said to fully support the equality of men and women, but due to the open nature of the existing environment in these institutions, students are not taught to become fervent misogynists. Hence although Madrasah educated individuals are usually not seen to take part in the women’s empowerment movement, individuals

educated in the general mainstream system do provide direct and indirect support. Madrasah education gives birth to reactionary behavior, which is antithetical to women's liberation, democracy, human rights and above all, the national ideology.

Similar Education for All versus Madrasah Education

According to the opinions of the civil society, there should be a single curriculum for all citizens of the country up to a certain level of education. Which implies that they are in favor of a single system of education in the country. They opined that discriminatory and dual systems such as Madrasahs and cadet colleges should not be allowed to exist. They want the same system and the same opportunities for all regardless of economic status, gender, or religion. They believe that there is no need for religious education under the general curriculum. What is needed is a curriculum that will help develop moral and human virtues. There may exist the need for individuals versed in religious education to perform religious occasions and rituals. Hence there can be religious educational institutions such as Madrasahs, but in limited number and scope. In addition, these institutions should be in keeping with the modern age and based on scientific learning.

The civil society believes, that although education is mentioned clearly in Section 27 of the constitution, education in this country is in the state it is today because we lack an education policy that can be appropriately implemented and favorable political environment. They stated that a single educational system for all needs to be established that emphasizes learning of primary language. Religion can be studied as optional courses in the secondary and higher secondary levels, so that those who want to study this subject at higher education levels are not hindered. They believe that the policy that views education as divided into education and Madrasah education needs to be changed. It is very important to introduce a similar and single stream education up to higher secondary level. As different educational streams are in existence, it is not possible to offer religious education under a single, definite curriculum. This leaves scope for contradictory, inconsistent and inaccurate explanations/instructions regarding religious dictums, which often take a violent and aggressive form. It is to save the nation from these risks and threats that the establishment of a single educational system is a key demand of civil society.

The Role of Madrasah Education on the Progressive Movement

According to the civil society that the present Madrasah education system is directly against social progress. The education that is provided in Madrasahs creates blind religious faith, hatred towards followers of other religions, and intolerance towards different ideologies. It creates citizens who believe in religion based states where power is seized through violence and where public and social life should be bound by the dictum of religious doctrine. They are never supporters of social progress. A very small number of these individuals have played a positive role and participated in the progressive movement and that because of either individual or family influences. The role of the majority in this case is negative.

According to them the reason for this is that the environment and the curriculum of the Madrasah is not favorable towards the development of rational human beings. Naturally the positions they take are on the side of irrationality and blindness. Hence they can never play a positive and progressive part in issues such as women and gender equality. Thus it is natural that these human beings who have developed as the caretakers and followers of an unchanging culture participate against social change and progress.

The Mutuality of Madrasah Education and Communal Politics

Madrasah education is not secular. It is the clearly expressed opinion of civil society that an educational system that is not, will by necessity encourage a communal mindset. According to the experience of the civil society members, the Madrasah educated believe that Islam is the greatest religion and that with the advent of Islam all other religions have become obsolete. The civil society opines that this belief is intolerant towards other religions and stems from an aversion to other systems of beliefs. The expression of this intolerance makes clear the direct connection between them and communal politics. What concerns the civil society is that as this ideology is ingrained in their minds, they are always if even indirectly in favor of communal politics and gains violent expression at the least opportunity. Referring to recent reports in the dailies, they held that the extremist communal political instruction and arms training that was going in various Madrasahs with foreign funding was evidence of the direct connection between Madrasah education and communal politics. The civil society's assessment is that their presence in any progressive movement is negligible compared to their presence in any reactionary movement. The only reason for this is the illiberality and intolerance towards different ideologies of Madrasah education.

Conclusions

Those who believe that it is essential to learn Arabic as the Quran and the Hadiths have been written in Arabic, also believe Madrasah education to be essential. However, it is not pragmatic to speak in favor of the existing Madrasah education system instead of in favor of improving the Arabic language education that exists in the graduate and post graduate levels. The reason being that Arabic language teaching and Madrasah education is not one and the same thing. In the Madrasah students are merely taught to read and memorize Arabic not to understand the language. With the opportunities that exist at university level, a student can become a true expert in the language. Madrasah education is not necessary for that.

Our findings under this study show that Madrasah education is not necessary to develop as moral and ethical human beings. As a gradually declining stream of education, there is no real possibility that Madrasah education will develop morally superior citizens. To the contrary, individuals educated under this system appear to surpass others in immoral and unethical activities. If Madrasah education is an essential element for the development of moral and ethical human beings, then it follows that a country, which does not have Madrasah education, does not have moral and ethical citizens either. However, as in the past, even today there are no grounds to make such a claim. In addition, the argument that Madrasah education is needed to provide education on Islam is also not acceptable. There are a number of Muslim countries, where Madrasah education in the mode of Pakistan or Bangladesh does not exist. In addition, the Madrasah system that exists in Bangladesh has different streams of thought, which provides different interpretations of Islam – which are not comparable to each other. The majority of the individuals who serve as teachers in Madrasahs lack adequate learning in Islamic theology, Arabic or even the Quran. Hence, many misinterpretations are also promulgated in the name of Islam.

In the speech delivered to the inaugural meeting of the Commission on February 3, 1957, the leader of the Ataur Rahman Education Commission, the then Chief Minister Ataur Rahman Khan pointed out the differences between Madrasah education and religion: “It is necessary to rethink the concept of Madrasah education. Because this education is not being able to do good for either the society or for the individual. It would not be xx to say that Madrasah education is totally unnecessary. There should be no confusion regarding

Madrasah education and religious education.¹ This confusion exists among both education and uneducated people of our country. Religious feelings and thoughts can arise within one even without Madrasah education. As there is no requirement that to study religion one must have a certificate from a Madrasah, an individual studying under the mainstream system can xxx by studying religious texts by himself/herself.

Hence, it is important for us to distinguish between Madrasah education and religion. It is important to receive religious education, but it is not necessary to receive this education through the existing Madrasah system. Anyone can study religion at higher education levels if they want to – the universities offer courses on a number of theology and religion related disciplines. In addition, under the current curriculum of general education, religious studies have been made compulsory from class VI to X.

The education policy that the current government is endeavoring to implement attempts to combine Madrasah education and general education. The recommendations related to the large number of Madrasahs existing that have been made in the policy will not succeed in fully resolving the inequalities existing in the field of education. However, bringing the primary level of Madrasahs under the general curriculum is an indicator of progress. It will be fruitful if other progressive steps are taken at later times. However, fears remain as to whether the steps under the Shamsul Haq Commission education policy, which are to be implemented within the next ten years, are abandoned due to some sudden political change.

-
1. The Educational Thought of Qudrat E Khuda, Shahidul Islam, The Prothom Aalo Shamoyiki, December 8, 2000