

# **Islam and Politics**

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**Renewal and Resistance in the  
Muslim World**

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*Editors*

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# **Madrassas in Pakistan: Role and Emerging Trends**

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**R**eligion has always played an important role in shaping South Asian Muslim society and politics. A strong education system was brought by Muslims when they first arrived to the region, helping embed religion into almost all aspects of public and private life.

*Madrassas* (religious educational institutes) were the center of these educational activities and provided guidance not only for religious matters, but for worldly affairs. Students studied science, medical and engineering courses, algebra, geometry, logic, and philosophy alongside *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and Arabic and Persian grammar. The broad and practical nature of the syllabi enabled the students of *madrassas* to be good doctors, engineers, architects, teachers, and statesmen.<sup>[1]</sup>

However, with the advent of British rule in 1857, *madrassas* began to lose their influence. The British built new schools to train people in administrative affairs and divided the system of education into two separate domains: religious and secular, traditional and modern, old and new. The framework and objectives of the curricula in *madrassas* and the secular schools established during British rule were very different. This created a rift between their graduates that only widened with the passage of time, creating mutual suspicion and incomprehension.

Moreover, the scarcity of resources for developing innovative methods of research and teaching, including technology, forced *madrassa* scholars to adopt a defensive approach: they limited their educational activities to protecting religious texts (the Qur'an, collections of *hadith*, sayings of the Prophet, and those relating to *fiqh*) and transmitting them to younger generations.

## **Madrasas in Pakistan**

Even after the creation of the new Muslim homeland of Pakistan, the opportunity for *madrassas* to regain their influence was lacking, and the doors for government employment were still closed to their graduates because of the dominance of modern education in the country. Therefore, the objectives of the religious education system in Pakistan remained

the same as they were under British rule in India: preparing *imams* (leaders) for mosques, teachers for schools, orators for weekly sermons, and religious leaders to carry out rituals and social responsibilities such as *nikahs* (marriage contracts), divorce, inheritance, and funerals.<sup>[2]</sup> *Madrassas* remained largely divided into various schools of thought.

Voices from both inside and outside *madrassas* are raised intermittently in support of bringing change to the system. International events and situations have affected the thinking of those associated with *madrassas*. The first major event was the Iranian Revolution in 1979, which gave *Ulama* (religious scholars) and religious segments of society a sense of having political power. Another critical development was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan around the same time. A broad spectrum of Muslims, including not only scholars and students of *madrassas* but also the modern educated university teachers and students, supported the people of Afghanistan in ousting the Soviets from their homeland. This laid the basis for cooperation by people of different schools of thought and religious circles, who were all concerned with the Islamic cause and the well-being of Muslims.<sup>[3]</sup>

A more recent influential event was the American invasion of Afghanistan. Whereas the earlier events energized the *madrassas*, this has caused religious schools to consider modifying their basic role of providing religious education.<sup>[4]</sup> The policies of Western powers and the international media often treat *madrassas* solely as a breeding ground for terrorists.<sup>[5]</sup> This has brought *madrassas* of different schools of thought closer because of their common feeling of being misunderstood.

Apart from these international political events, the increasing number of Islamic centers and communities in the West has created a need for *madrassa* students to understand Western lifestyles and modern-day issues. Equally important is learning different languages to communicate with Westerners and provide guidance to Muslim diasporas. *Madrassas* have begun to make concerted efforts to meet these challenges, rather than trying to avoid them as they have in the past. Religious leaders are calling on *madrassas* to teach subjects that will make their students more relevant in the modern world.<sup>[6]</sup>

These questions are not new, but the extraordinary increase of the debate surrounding them is. How should the current syllabus be reconciled with the contemporary era? How should this change take place? What is the impact of national and international attention on *madrassas*? Pressures from many quarters add urgency to these matters, including those stemming from the US-led “war on terror,” demands for change in the *madrassa* system by foreign countries, the publication of reports on *madrassas* by several international organizations,<sup>[7]</sup> and actions by the government of Pakistan for the reform of *madrassas*.

This paper is an attempt to increase understanding of emerging trends in *madrassas*, and is based on empirical research carried out in 56 leading *madrassas* from all schools of thought.<sup>[8]</sup> These institutions were chosen because of the excellence of their scholars and the

number of students attending, and because their influence extends beyond the school walls into their communities. This influence has two important dimensions: smaller *madrassas* look toward prominent ones for guidance, and graduating students who establish new institutes follow the same trends as at their alma maters. While the 56 schools surveyed are not representative of the wide range of schools in Pakistan, they are representative of the best and most progressive trends, and therefore deserve special attention as credible models of reform.

## **Process of Change in Madrassas: Basic Factors**

While analyzing the emerging changes in *madrassas*, it is important to have an overview of the role and influence of these schools in society and the role of the founders, leaders, and boards in individual *madrassas*:

- *Madrassas* consider their independence their most vital asset and are reluctant to allow the government to play any direct role in their educational system, syllabi, and financial matters. There is little possibility of bringing any change to *madrassas* if it impinges on their independence.
- *Madrassas* fulfill a fundamental need in society. Around 97 percent of Pakistan's society is Muslim, and it is inevitable that there would be a demand for religious education. Even the very liberal members of society want their children to have a basic religious education. Government schools do not offer even the minimum religious requirement, learning the Qur'an. For this reason, it should not be surprising that the number of *madrassas* is growing—as is the number of private schools offering mainstream education.
- Demands are growing for *madrassas* to widen their role in society by adding modern education to their religious curricula. Making voluntary changes because of public demand may enable *madrassas* to accept more monetary support from external sources, as long as this assistance does not require that they sacrifice their independence.
- The expectations of *madrassa* sponsors and the matters for which the general public seeks guidance from *madrassas* are important factors in the process of change. The general public's interaction with *madrassas* is not limited to religious jurisprudence. Now people are looking to religious schools to answer questions about economic, financial, sociopsychological, and professional matters.<sup>1</sup> Globalization and the media are also helping *madrassas* disseminate their teachings to a wider audience.
- The founders of *madrassas* and the boards they are affiliated with play a vital role in the process of change. Traditionally, the identity of every *madrassa* is associated

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<sup>1</sup> These include banking, insurance, business contracts, Islamic laws and principles regarding guidance for the upbringing of new generations in the West, and issues of living as a minority in a predominantly non-Muslim society.

with its founder and its successive leadership. Until recently, each *madrassa* was governed independently,<sup>2</sup> and the founder adopted the system and the syllabus of his alma mater. Now *madrassa* boards are gaining influence.

- Hostility toward *madrassas*, government pressure for reforms, and an extraordinary interest in them at the international level have brought five of these boards together to establish a new organization: Ittehad-e-Tanzeem-e-Madaris-e-Deeniya (United Madrassa Organization—ITMD). This body, though still very loose in structure, has become an important player in affecting the process of change. On the one hand, it carries out discussions and negotiations with the government. On the other, it is helping to unite *madrassas* that belong to different schools of thought. Recently, ITMD suggested that the government create a separate board (Inter-Madrassa Board) to oversee this organization.<sup>3</sup>

The process of change is continuously working its way through the *madrassa* system, albeit slowly. Changing circumstances will continue to make it necessary for *madrassas* to prepare themselves for contemporary needs. There is a realization of this fact in *madrassas* at all levels, and they are taking initiatives on their own.

## **Emerging Trends in Madrassas**

### ***The Role of Madrassas and Their Graduates***

How *madrassas* perceive their role in society can be seen from descriptions administrators give of the ideal *madrassa*: it should provide education and training as well as promulgate religion in the wider community, play an effective and practical role in the reformation of society, provide guidance in religious affairs, and promote religious tolerance. Leading *madrassas* cite as their distinguishing characteristics a high standard of religious and contemporary education, discipline, and extracurricular activities, with a view toward broadening the educational approach.

These approaches are also expanding the scope of *madrassa* graduates in practical and professional fields. Teaching at *madrassas* still appears to be the primary preference for their graduates, but now an increasing number are finding positions at other types of schools,

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<sup>2</sup> Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al-Arabia was the first board that came into existence. This was followed by Tanzeem-ul-Madaris Pakistan (1960 and revived in 1974), Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al-Shia (1983), Rabta-tul-Madaris Al-Islamia (1983), and Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al-Salfia (1983).

<sup>3</sup>This suggestion has been accepted in principle during talks between ITMD and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2007). The suggested board will consist of seven members, with a vice chairman and two members nominated by the *madrassa* boards. According to the decision, it would be implemented after the required legislation; however, this suggestion has not gone through the legislative process yet. Source: “Letter Number IBCC/ES/3780-02,” Inter-Board Committee of Chairmen, Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, October 6, 2007.

and at colleges and even universities.<sup>4</sup> *Khatibat* (Imam for Friday congregational prayer) in the military is also an important destination for the graduating students of *madrassas*. A number of *madrassa* graduates have permanent jobs of engaging in *dawah* (proselytizing) and other religious activities abroad.

### **Leadership, Administrative, and Financial Affairs**

Traditionally, the founders of *madrassas* were the sole leaders, and there was rarely a governing body or advisory council. Because of this, most *madrassas* worked in a rather informal manner. There was no proper system or policy for the admission of new students, uniforms were rarely required, and keeping records of students or taking attendance was almost nonexistent. Similarly, there was little or no attention toward expanding study and hostel facilities. Financial matters in most *madrassas* were governed in the same loose fashion. Present research has found that the role of leadership has not changed significantly, but there have been notable improvements in administrative and financial areas. Past and current trends are summarized here:

- The *Muhtamim* (administrator) is usually the founder of the *madrassa*, and is often succeeded by one of his children or a family member. One objection to *madrassas* is that this practice makes the schools personal property passed down from father to son. However, the point of view of the *madrassas* seems to be that since the *Muhtamim*'s children assist him from early childhood, they are better groomed than an outsider to take over. The founder considers the administration of his *madrassa* a religious duty and wants his children to continue serving this cause.

An increasing practice is to establish an executive committee or advisory board, which oversees a *madrassa*'s management and the appointment of its head. However, there is no standard set of administrative regulations, and policies differ from school to school.

- In many leading *madrassas*, new methods are being used for organizing their administration. In the past, there was no system of entry test, and any tests given were not well organized. Now there is a proper announcement for admission, and candidates must submit certain documents. In most leading *madrassas*, admission tests are conducted, and there is a very tough competition for entry. The testing has produced competent and hardworking students, and an overall improvement in educational standards.<sup>5</sup> Admission standards for *takhassus* (a specialization that is considered equivalent to postgraduate study) are high, and at many schools an 80 percent is mandatory on the entry test. In almost all the leading *madrassas*, and many medium-level *madrassas*, computerized records of the students are maintained, including

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<sup>4</sup> The graduates of Jamia Ashrafia, Lahore, are teaching in a number of private and government universities in Lahore. The graduates of Dar-ul-Uloom, Karachi; and Jamia Al-Rasheed, Karachi; are performing their counseling and training services in banks and financial institutions.

<sup>5</sup> Entry tests evaluate not only the educational capabilities of the students but also their character and interests.

procedures for students who want to go on leave. There are also separate departments for international students and their unique concerns.<sup>6</sup> These trends show developing professional attitudes in the administration of these *madrassas*.

Similarly, in many *madrassas* there is a proper system of taking attendance; putting daily attendance reports on notice boards; maintaining monthly, quarterly, biannual, and annual reports; and informing parents about their children's performance.<sup>7</sup> Many *madrassas* now require uniforms.<sup>8</sup> Benches and desks are being introduced in primary and middle-level classes, so students no longer need to sit on the floor.

- Despite improved management, *madrassas* are facing a severe lack of space and accommodation. Many rooms are being used for students' instruction and residence, and they are often overcrowded. Some rooms do not have enough sunlight and ventilation, and some *madrassas* must use the same hall for prayer, dinner, and study.

However, many leading *madrassas* in this study have made significant improvements. The grounds, buildings, and libraries of some are better than some of Pakistan's private universities.<sup>9</sup> Most *madrassas* have built dorms, and have appointed live-in wardens to supervise the students. Some *madrassas* have established dispensaries and arranged for doctors to provide health care facilities to their students. Construction projects for dorms with modern amenities are high on the priority list of many *madrassa* administrators, but the funds are not available.

For those with the funds to upgrade facilities, inadequate planning is a serious obstacle. Construction often continues while students are in residence. There are also frequent alterations in plans: washrooms are built and then demolished and relocated, and residential blocks are demolished for building shops. The probable causes of this are interruptions in resource flows and advisors who are not professional builders.

- Free education, accommodation, food, health care, and books have been a tradition in *madrassas* for a long time. Poor and rich alike have received these benefits, but new trends are emerging. The prospectus of Jamia Salfia (Faisalabad) emphasizes gradually doing away with this practice. Some leading *madrassas* ask students from financially stable families to contribute to their educational and residential costs. One *madrassa*'s materials state: "The accommodation and food for the students are provided from *zakaat* (charity), so financially stable students are advised to deposit their monthly expenses." Many middle-class and upper-middle-class families are willing

<sup>6</sup> One such example is Jamia-ul-Uloom Al-Islamia, Banori Town, Karachi.

<sup>7</sup> In the office of Mufti Naeem of Jamia Banoria Al-Alamia, Karachi, there are two television sets with closed circuit cameras for administrating the *madrassa*, and he uses a microphone while issuing directions to the teachers or students.

<sup>8</sup> In most cases, a white dress (*shalwar qameez*) is now compulsory.

<sup>9</sup> Such as Dar-ul-Uloom, Karachi; Jamia Banori Town, Karachi; and Jamia Al-Rasheed, Karachi.

to pay the expenses of sending their children to a *madrassa*,<sup>10</sup> in part because of changes in the schools' philosophies, systems, and syllabi. "It is not necessary that a student of religious institution performs the duties of Imams or Khatibs of a mosque or becomes a religious teacher,"<sup>[9]</sup> says one religious scholar who wants to introduce electrical/electronics, mobile phone repair, and computer courses.

*Madrassas* used to publish handbills and pamphlets asking wealthy people to assist them. While this still continues, a number of *madrassas* are producing impressive prospectuses, and some even publish these in multiple languages.<sup>11</sup>

- In general, *madrassas* lack financial resources, and most administrators interviewed for this study acknowledge that instead of developing permanent sources of income, they must depend on aid, *zakaat*, and, in some cases, the hides of sacrificed animals. One reason for this reliance on charity is the concern that if *madrassas* start businesses, their priorities may get confused, and they may pay more attention to commerce than education.

Nevertheless, because of the changing environment and the establishment of many other welfare organizations that depend on the same charity sources, many leading *madrassas* have started small economic and business activities.<sup>12</sup> While *madrassas* are well aware of the practice of *waqf* (endowment), and of its being a main source of income for many institutions in the past, only a few leading *madrassas* have established *waqfs* and meet their expenses through the generated income.

Normally, *madrassa* teachers are poorly paid and sometimes suffer financially in later life. Some leading *madrassas* have started offering loans and pensions for teachers and other employees, and many cite improving teachers' salary packages as part of future plans.

## Academic and Educational Affairs

Teacher selection, teaching methods, courses, syllabi, and teacher training workshops are in a continuous state of evolution in *madrassas*. Many new offerings and initiatives—modern

<sup>10</sup> Sixty percent of students in Jamia Islamia, Rawalpindi, are day scholars. The children of elite families are also studying in Jamia Muhammadiyah, Lahore; Jamia Rizviyah, Lahore; and Jamia Ashrafia, Lahore. "Providing a standard atmosphere and environment in *madrassas* for financially stable families" is part of a short-term goal written in the prospectus of Jamia Salfia, Islamabad. These examples show the growing trend of children from stable families coming to *madrassas* for their studies, as well as the goal of providing better facilities to the students on the part of the schools.

<sup>11</sup> Such as Al-Markaz-al-Islami, Bannu; Dar-ul-Uloom, Karachi; and Jamia Arabia Ahsan-ul-Uloob, Karachi.

<sup>12</sup> Jamia Banoria, Karachi, is worth mentioning here. This *madrassa* has established a high-standard restaurant, marriage hall, and shopping complex that has become the main source of income for the *madrassa*. Similarly, Dar-ul-Uloom, Karachi; Jamia Al-Rasheed, Karachi; and Jamia Al-Uloom-ul-Islamia have also started economic activities. Jamia Mansoora, Sindh, has in its possession 1,300 acres of land, which provides a handsome income. However, the income is still not sufficient to meet the expenditures and other requirements of these *madrassas*.

languages, extracurricular activities, modern educational institutes, women's education, and a growing emphasis on research and specialization—are becoming part of the *madrassa* system:

- The survey of leading *madrassa* administrators and affiliated boards suggests they have begun changing their syllabi. This is quite obvious at some places and less advanced at others.<sup>13</sup> One administrator spoke of removing unnecessary books from the syllabus, modernizing the teaching of the Qur'an and books of *hadith*, and bringing the syllabi of the school and the board in line.<sup>[10]</sup> Another said that textbook notes needed to be revised in view of the contemporary context, as they were not comprehensible to modern students.<sup>[11]</sup>
- In some *madrassas*, economics, political science, and comparative study of religions are included in the syllabus. Guest lectures by specialists are offered on many subjects,<sup>14</sup> as are short courses/programs on Islamic trade, Islamic law, and family laws. One purpose of these courses is to draw educated people, businessmen, and the public to the schools.
- In most *madrassas*, teachers are selected from the graduating students. Induction depends on the personal relationship between student and administrator, the student's ability, and the administrator's opinion of the student's interest in teaching. Although the importance of a teacher in any education system can hardly be overemphasized, in this system its significance is much higher. The credibility and the status of *madrassas* are always associated with their faculty. In spite of putting so much emphasis on competent teachers, there is no arrangement for teacher training in most *madrassas*. Nevertheless, all the leading *madrassas* realize the need for teacher training, and there are some programs in the works.<sup>15</sup>
- In most cases, the teaching style is still conventional, but it is changing in a number of leading *madrassas*. More progressive teachers use modern techniques to make their lectures more effective.<sup>16</sup> Students are encouraged to ask questions, which was not common in the past. Physical punishments have also been reduced, particularly in *madrassas* located in cities.

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<sup>13</sup> In the second quarter of 2007, a convention of the scholars of Jamia Ashrafia, Lahore, was organized, in which one session was dedicated to assessment of the need to reform institutions' syllabi. Similarly, Jamia Faridia, Sahiwal, and some other *madrassas* publish books written by their teachers and teach them in their institutes.

<sup>14</sup> A few examples are Jamia Imdadia, Faisalabad, and Jamia Nusrat-ul-Uloom, Gujranwala.

<sup>15</sup> The endeavor of Jamia Al-Rasheed in this regard is particularly worth noting. Its special training program has achieved considerable acceptance and popularity among *madrassas*. *Madrassa* teachers from all over the country participate in this course, and they have achieved noteworthy results.

<sup>16</sup> Jamia Al-Rasheed, Jamia Ashraf-ul-Madaras, and Dar-ul-Uloom in Karachi and Jamia Usmania in Peshawar are among those *madrassas* using new teaching aids, such as multimedia.

- While there is an impression that *madrassa* students are not good in contemporary subjects, students in leading institutions are encouraged to appear at outside exams,<sup>17</sup> where they compete with mainstream students. Although contemporary education is still limited in most *madrassas*, there are examples of *madrassa* students getting higher positions on exams than other students.<sup>18</sup>

Many *madrassas* have started providing guidance to their best students for admission to colleges and universities. *Madrassas* often bear the expenses of higher education for these students, and hope they will return to the *madrassas* to work. In this way, *madrassas* are benefiting from the experiments and experiences of institutes of contemporary education. In the past, teachers considered *Dars-e-Nizami* (an eight-year course that starts in the 10th grade; the end result is considered the equivalent of an MA) and *takhassus* sufficient qualifications for teaching in a *madrassa*, but younger teachers are eager to pursue college and graduate studies.

- There is also an improvement of attitude toward other schools of thought. Almost all the leading *madrassas* encourage their top students to study books from other schools of thought, and many have these books in their libraries, where all students may freely access them. Moreover, there are limited instances of students from other schools of thought being allowed admission, such as the Shiite who was allowed to enter a *madrassa* of the Deobund school of thought in Bahawalpur. This is still uncommon, and in most cases a student will not be issued a degree if he belongs to another school of thought.
- Research and specialization are among the top priorities of the heads of the *madrassas* who were interviewed in the survey. Some *madrassas* are also encouraging their teachers toward research by providing an honorarium for their endeavors and arranging for their articles to be published in academic journals.<sup>19</sup> The topics of research, however, usually pertain to traditional religious issues. Among the exceptions is Jamia Al-Markaz-ul-Islami, Bannu, which has been holding conferences for many years on jurisprudence which include discussion of society's contemporary issues. In order to improve the system of education and research activities, most leading *madrassas*

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<sup>17</sup> Matriculation, higher secondary, and bachelor's classes are regularly held in Jamia Usmania, Peshawar; Jamia Al-Rasheed, Karachi; Jamia Naeemia, Lahore; and Jamia Mansoorah, Lahore; among others.

<sup>18</sup> There are many such examples. A student of Jamia Al-Uloom, Multan, achieved second position in the examination of the Multan Board (Arts Group) several years ago. Similarly, another student of the same *madrassa* achieved first position in the Multan Board in 2006. Recently, two students from Jamia Ahya-ul-Uloom, Bahawalpur, achieved first and second positions in MPhil. Students of Idara Uloom Ul Islami, Muree Road, Rawalpindi, regularly rank in matriculation and intermediate examinations conducted by the Rawalpindi Board.

<sup>19</sup> Jamia Salfia, Islamabad, has made it compulsory for their teachers to write at least one research article in a year.

have decided to expand their libraries and research centers.<sup>20</sup> Considerable resources are being spent on new books.<sup>21</sup> However, English magazines and journals are still few and far between in these libraries, and cataloguing in most cases is not carried out in a scientific way.

- Another trend involves extracurricular activities. There was a time when activities such as speech contests and quiz competitions were considered a waste of time. Most leading *madrassas* now emphasize that they are striving to develop the well-rounded personality of their students, who are increasingly provided with playing grounds, even in far-flung, rural areas.<sup>22</sup> Where grounds are not available because of limited resources and lack of open space, students are encouraged to take part in sports on nearby grounds.<sup>23</sup> Volleyball, football, and cricket are played in almost every *madrassa*. Morning assembly and exercise are also being instituted.<sup>24</sup>

Speech contests are held in most leading *madrassas*, and some<sup>25</sup> provide their students with proper training for public speaking and debating.<sup>26</sup> Schools prefer educational and topical themes over traditional ones, and encourage logical and educated discourse rather than emotional speeches. The selection of different topics for international conferences and programs organized by *madrassas* reflects a movement from sectarian emphasis to global and regional issues.<sup>27</sup> For example, the topics of the annual All Pakistan Speech Contest, organized by Jamia Rizvia<sup>28</sup> (of the Brelvi school of thought), are similar to those of Jamia Salfia (of the Ahl-e-Hadith school of thought).

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<sup>20</sup> Jamia Khair-ul-Madaris, Multan, is one such institute that is planning to establish a formal center for carrying out research on contemporary issues and providing guidance in this regard.

<sup>21</sup> The library of Dar-ul-Uloom, Karachi, is considered to be the largest, whereas Jamia Farooqia and Jamia Banoria, Karachi; Jamia Rizvia, Rawalpindi; Dar-ul-Uloom Al-Islamia, Lahore; Nusrat-ul-Uloom, Gujranwala; Jamia Ashrafia, Lahore; and Jamia Khair-ul-Madaris, Multan; have purchased a large number of books on various topics in the last few years.

<sup>22</sup> Such as in Dar-ul-Uloom, Hangu, Northwest Frontier Province.

<sup>23</sup> A swimming pool has been constructed in Jamia Al-Rasheed, Karachi. The students of Jamia Ashraf-ul-Madaris, Karachi, are receiving martial arts training from a national champion. The administration also has plans of constructing a swimming pool on the roof of the *madrassa*.

<sup>24</sup> Jamia Noria Rizvia has hired a retired head constable for the morning exercise. Jamia Faridia, Sahiwal; Jamia Islamia, DG Khan; Jamia Abi Bakar, Karachi; and Ihya-ul-Uloom, Bahawalpur; also start their educational activities with assembly in the morning.

<sup>25</sup> Such as Jamia Naeemia, Lahore; Jamia Ameenia Naqshbandia, Gujranwala; and Jamia Rizvia, Lahore.

<sup>26</sup> Jamia Imdadia, Faisalabad, is planning to construct a function hall in the middle of Faisalabad City for the organization of big events, such as speech contests and awareness programs.

<sup>27</sup> For example, the schedule of seminar week “Knowledge and Awareness” at the end of the first term of the year in Jamia Salfia, Islamabad, is quite interesting. A few topics of the seminar are “Madaris [*madrassas*]: Torch Bearer of Humanitarian Services or the Centres of Terrorism,” “The Dawah and Dissemination of the Quran and Sunnah in Europe,” and “Medical Sciences and Quran and Sunnah.”

<sup>28</sup> Previous topics of Jamia Rizvia’s “All Pakistan Speech Contest” include “Why is America Afraid of

- Many *madrassas* have strong writing and language programs. Magazines are published to improve students' journalistic capabilities.<sup>29</sup> Some publish magazines in English, and one publishes in three languages: Urdu, Arabic, and English.<sup>30</sup> Some *madrassas* also publish online *fatawas* (jurisprudential decrees) as well as lectures and papers online.<sup>31</sup>
- Publication of monthly magazines, interest in journalism, establishment of think forums, participation in TV programs, and planning for the establishment of radio and TV channels show an increased understanding of the significance of media. *Madrassas* included in the study often mention getting assistance from experts and donors. Survey respondents also indicated an interest in the fields of information technology, web development, and other technologies.
- The trend of learning foreign languages is also growing significantly. Many leading *madrassas* consider fluency in other languages a benchmark and plan to develop language courses in the near future. Those that have already begun, by hiring teachers and purchasing language-learning aids, have been reasonably successful. Some *madrassas* have set up sound-proof and air-conditioned language labs no different from those of any modern institute.<sup>32</sup> The interest in foreign languages is not confined to English. Spanish is already being taught in Jamia Ashraf-ul-Madaris, Karachi, and Chinese and French are being considered. Many graduates from such *madrassas* are serving abroad in Europe and America.
- The heads of leading *madrassas* approached during this research appear to be especially interested in establishing modern education institutes where learning the Qur'an by heart, translation of the Qur'an and selected hadiths, and contemporary education (in some instances O Levels and A Levels) would take place alongside each other, with many classes conducted in English. The Deoband and Ahl-e-Hadith schools of thought are most prominent in these efforts. The existing schools of this kind are progressing quite successfully. The fee structure in these schools is low compared to other such education institutes.<sup>33</sup>

Madrasa?,” “Madaris: the Largest Network of NGO,” “Islam: the Guarantor of Global Peace,” “Tauheed and Prophethood in the West and the Responsibilities of Muslim Ummah.”

<sup>29</sup> Practical examples of this trend can be observed in Jamia Al-Rasheed, Karachi; and Jamia Naeemia, Lahore.

<sup>30</sup> Such as Al-Farooq (Jamia Farooqia, Karachi), Truth (Jamia Al-Rasheed, Karachi), and Al-Blagh International (Dar-ul-Uloom, Karachi)

<sup>31</sup> Such as Dar-ul-Uloom, Karachi; Jamia Banoria, Karachi; Jamia Ashrafia, Lahore; and Jamia Rizwia Zia-ul-Uloom, Rawalpindi.

<sup>32</sup> For example, Jamia Ashraf-ul-Madaris's, Karachi; Dar-ul-Uloom, Karachi; and Jamia Al-Rasheed, Karachi. Jamia Usmania, Peshawar, is planning to establish an institute of the English language.

<sup>33</sup> Jamia Ahsan-al-Alam, Karachi; Jamia Mansoorah, Sindh; Dar-ul-Uloom, Karachi; Jamia Hamadia, Karachi; Jamia Haqania, Akora Khatak; Jamia Khair-ul-Madaris, Multan; and Jamia Al-Markaz Al-Islami, Bannu;

## **Women's and Girls' Education**

The establishment of *madrassas* for women's education is worth commenting on separately. As in other spheres of life, women's education was not a priority in the past. Changing international dynamics; the focus of international organizations on women's education; criticism of the low literacy rate among women in Muslim societies; and movements such as feminism, women's empowerment, and the economic independence of women have caused Muslim societies to respond in educational, philosophical, and practical fields.

Parents of girls are more inclined than in the past to provide their daughters with education. There is also a general perception that the environment in the mainstream education system has not been developed on the basis of the sociocultural traditions of society. Against this backdrop, there is a tendency, particularly among religious people, to consider *madrassas* a more appropriate choice for girls. Demands that *madrassas* provide for girls have motivated sponsors and administrators to reallocate resources for women's education.

Considering this national and international focus, many leading *madrassas* have established separate branches for women. They have also introduced course changes to meet the specific needs of women. Most importantly, an eight-year *Dars-e-Nizami* course has been reduced to four years,<sup>34</sup> which has further attracted women and their parents toward a *madrassa* education. The debate about effectiveness of the reduced course is still going on, and it is expected that *madrassas* may increase the course length. There are also instances of women who have graduated from mainstream schools being admitted to *madrassas*, particularly those from religious families.

*Madrassas* with programs for girls report that despite having fewer facilities, girls are outperforming their male counterparts.<sup>35</sup> The standard of questions raised in class by girls, and their interest and participation in lessons, are of better quality. After graduating, most of these women return to their hometowns to teach. *Madrassas* still lag behind in the area of women's education, in part because there are very few women teachers for girls.

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have established such *madrassas*, and they have maintained a high standard of education in them. Jamia Al-Rasheed, Karachi, has started establishing schools in Karachi, and intends to set up similar schools in other cities in the next few years.

<sup>34</sup> *Dars-e-Nizami*, a course designed by Mulla Nizamuddin Firangi Mahali, is used as the standard curriculum in many *madrassas* across South Asia. Key features of the course include a holistic curriculum with subjects such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, philosophy, logic, geography, literature, and chemistry, as well as the Qur'an, *hadith*, *fiqh*, and Sufism. Graduates of the program are able to move onto higher studies and careers in a variety of fields.

<sup>35</sup> In Jamia Ahsan-ul-Uloom, Karachi, and Jamia Usmania, Peshawar, girls are fewer in number than boys and study in separate classes, meaning that boys have direct interaction with the teachers and girls do not. However, girls are also securing first positions in exams.

## **Outreach**

The omnipresence of media, especially electronic media, have made *madrassas* reconsider avoiding it, as had been their practice traditionally. Debate about the permissibility of appearing on electronic media is ongoing, with as many in favor as opposed,<sup>36</sup> but the use of the Internet and CDs is becoming quite common in leading *madrassas*. In many, online programs for issuing *fatawas* have been introduced.<sup>37</sup>

There is also noticeable progress in welfare activities by leading *madrassas*, which are undertaken to provide services and attract people to religion.<sup>38</sup> For example, welfare organizations administered by *madrassas* worked on rehabilitation and reconstruction in the areas of Azad Kashmir and the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) after the 2005 earthquake. The expressed goal of these projects is to achieve the will of Allah while increasing the number of religious-minded people in society. *Madrassas* that have not yet taken the initiative have plans to establish free dispensaries and hospitals.

Providing guidance on day-to-day matters has remained an important aspect of the work of *madrassas*, and leading *madrassas* have a system of issuing large numbers of *fatawa*, sometimes reaching more than 300 a month. The number of questions about religious matters asked in person or by phone is usually more than that. Most *madrassas* keep a record of these decrees and some publish them in their magazines.

People often seek out *madrassas* to act as mediators in social and financial disputes. The two main reasons *madrassas* get involved are to help people avoid complex, costly, and long court procedures; and because of people's desires to seek guidance that follows the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. In fact, *madrassas* in many areas of the NWFP and Baluchistan also issue verdicts on *faujdari* (civil) crimes that are accepted by the people.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Maulana Adnan Kakakhel from Jamia Al-Rasheed, Karachi. Similarly, the head of Jamia Banoria Almiah, Karachi, Mufti Naeem, and other teachers of his *madrassa*, openly speak in favor of electronic media. They also participate in religious programs on private TV channels. Leading scholars such as Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani, Maulana Muhammad Rafi Usmani, and others have also started appearing on TV programs in recent years.

<sup>37</sup> For example Jamia Ashrafia, Lahore; Dar-ul-Uloom, Karachi; and Jamia Hamadia, Karachi.

<sup>38</sup> Jamia Husnia, located in an underdeveloped area of Sindh, Shahdad Pur, has established an eye hospital and dispensary, and has plans to expand its welfare activities in the future. Similarly, the heads of Jamia Hamadia, Karachi, and many other *madrassas*, are also running welfare projects. A hospital has been established in Jamia Uloom Al-Sharia, Rawalpindi, with four specialist doctors. Jamia Al-Muntazir, Lahore, has established a free dispensary and is providing ambulance service. Jamia Rizvia, Rawalpindi, under the supervision of Zia-ul-Uloom Kifalah, has collected millions of rupees, which were delivered to the victims of earthquakes and used to build mosques, *madrassas*, and shelter homes.

<sup>39</sup> Jamia Fahmedia Ghausia, Peshawar, has performed the role of mediator in some very serious matters related to the tribal areas. Such examples are not confined to the Frontier or Baluchistan. In cities such as Karachi, people contact Mufti Zar Wali Khan of Jamia Ahsan-ul-Uloom; Dr. Abdur Razzaq Sikandar of Jamia

## Conclusion

Although this survey was carried out in the leading *madrassas* of Pakistan, *madrassas* in South Asia share a similar history and structure. Trends in *madrassas* throughout the region would not be much different from those discussed in this study. The survey showed that the response of *madrassas* to international criticism and debate regarding them has been guarded. Confidence in their system predominates. *Madrassas* have deep roots in society and are not ready to compromise independence and autonomy, or to eliminate their basic character.

In view of the needs and opportunities of a changing society, heads of leading *madrassas* indicate their desire to play more effective and far-reaching roles. In spite of differences in schools of thought, the survey found no considerable differences in the thinking of leading *madrassa* administrators or religious education boards toward introducing changes. The Deoband school of thought appears to have taken a comparative lead in implementing changes. Some institutes of Ahl-e-Hadith, Brelvi, and Shiite schools of thought have also set good examples.

Although there is widespread desire for change, movement in that direction is slow. The survey responses suggest that this is mostly because of the lack of adequate human and financial resources. The availability of resources from trusted sponsors could spur the process of taking initiatives and act as a catalyst in building confidence for change among *madrassas*.

Another dimension is the greater implementation of modern changes in the *madrassas* of big cities, especially Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi, and Islamabad. In these cities, many new and grand religious institutions have been built, and some older institutions have established new practices. People in bigger cities naturally possess a wider perspective, and acquiring financial resources is often easier.

A deeper analysis of the findings shows that there are two distinct groups among *madrassa* leaders. One is proactive in taking initiatives: employing modern communication tools and information technology, introducing new fields of knowledge, and conducting experiments in administration and training. The other group is more hesitant because of limited resources or personal reservations. Typically, the younger generation of religious leaders is more vibrant and active in experimenting, while the older prefers traditional approaches.

What will be the role of *madrassas* in South Asia in the future? While they seem to be going in the right direction, change is not keeping up with the fast pace of globalization and its effects on the region's societies. In order to play a dynamic and effective role, *madrassas* need to be proactive and visionary, and reach out to the world.

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