

## **Social and Political Role of Madrassa: Perspectives of Religious Leaders in Pakistan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Madrassa is a controversial educational institution of Pakistani society. International scholarship is polarized on madrassa issue and presents two divergent pictures of this institution: one, it is a source of radical ideology, and thus, a security threat to the modern world; and two, it is a net of social security for underprivileged who are ignored by the state's social services. This paper, rather than taking position on either side, documents the perceptions of religious teachers, and thus, tries to discover the answers of certain questions; like, why is madrassa a controversial issue; why does it exist in society; why do certain students join madrassa; what is funding sources of madrassa; and what is educational ideology of this institution? The paper is based on views of sixteen religious teachers; and the data were gained through two detailed sessions of focus group discussions, in Lahore, Pakistan.

**KEY WORDS:** Madrassa, Pakistan, Islam, Jihad, Religion

### **Conceptual Background**

Madrassa institution (Islamic school) of Pakistan is facing international scrutiny after the event of 9/11 in United States. Western media connected this event of terrorism with Islamic militancy; and possibly, thousands of articles published in news papers that projected madrassa as a main source of Islamic militancy and extremism. However, academicians and scholars have been curious to understand the actual functioning of this institution in society; and while striving to understand the phenomenon, they have developed a polarized opinion.

One group of scholars understood madrassas as *jihad* factories having less to do with education and more to do with political indoctrination; incubators of Muslim terrorists; origins of conservative violent ideologies, and thus, a security threat to the modern world (Stern 2000; Singer 2001; ICG 2002, 2007; Alexiev

2003; Doumato 2003; Loony 2003; Colson 2004; Fandy 2007; Fair 2008; Brookings 2009; Imtiaz 2011; Kazmi and Pervez 2011).

The other group of scholars presents madrasa playing peaceful roles in society; like, increasing literacy rate, spreading religious morality and human values, giving space to marginalized class of society, discourage criminality, and thus, maintain a social order (Rehman 2000, 2004, 2005; Knapp 2003; Ahmad 2004; Khalid 2008, Khalid and Fayyaz 2006; Andrabi et al. 2005; Bergen and Panday 2006; Nelson 2006; Cockcroft et al. 2008; Bano 2007, 2009; Ali 2005, 2009; Rana 2009; McClure 2009; Winthrop and Graff 2010).

Traditionally, in Islamic notion, 'state' and 'religion' have been two adjacent entities; and Islamic state had a religious recognition (Khalid 2008). Accordingly, Muslims had a holistic vision of education; and almost in all Muslim societies, education was imparted without discrimination of secular or religious knowledge, through a singular educational system\_ madrasa (Anzar 2003). Thus, madrasa produced many renowned scholars and experts in various fields including natural sciences (Rehman 2004).

For centuries, madrasa played a central role in serving society and state (Talibani 1996). For society, it has been instrumental in preserving, sustaining and transmitting Islamic tradition over the generations. The tradition of Islamic learning has been core in reproducing Islamic culture, ideological goals and social control (Noor, Sikand and Bruinessen 2008). Various other studies has also shown a positive association between religiosity and prosocial behaviour of individuals in society (Ahmad 2009; Tan and Vogal 2008; Johansson-Stenman, Mahmud, and Martinsson 2008; Ruffle and Sosis 2006; Randolph-Seng and Nielson 2007).

The Muslim states had also been relying on madrassas in acquiring human resource to run government machinery, and to seek political legitimization (Talibani 1996). Since, educational sites across the world has been centrally involved in propagation, selective dissemination, and social appropriation of the discourse (Ball 1990); therefore, the ruling elite in Muslim countries have been actively engaged with official functions within madrassas, like appointments of teachers, recruitment of students, and orientation of curriculum (Nashabi 1980). Financial patronage was also one of the primary tools to maintain state's control over this institution: the ultimate goal was to control religious scholars, and through them, to the masses (Maqdisi 1961). In this regard, madrasa was also a source of legitimization of power structure of society (Noor, Sikand and Bruinessen 2008)

Under the influence of modern political thoughts in seventeenth century, when 'state' and 'church' began to be recognized as two distinct entities, and church began to loosen its grip over state in Europe: the Muslim states also could not save themselves from this social change. In the changed atmosphere, madrasa institution began to lose its significance in state-affairs; and gradually, it confined its role to religion only. Now, the re-defined functioning of madrasa was just reproducing religious leadership for rest of society (Jamal 2008). This historically

peaceful function of madrassa has been widely recognized across international scholarship (Singer 2001; ICG 2002; 2007).

Suddenly, the event of 9/11, 2001, in United States, raised a high degree of controversy on institutional functioning of madrassa. Political activism and transnational linkages of madrassa were widely asserted in number of studies (Loony 2003; Colson 2004; Fandy 2007; Fair 2008). The centuries-old institution of Islamic learning was projected as political entity, rather than a social entity (Bano 2007); and thus, madrassa was largely misperceived (Malik 2008). This confusion was hoisted by multiple factors: like sensational propoganda of Western media, unscientific researches based on anecdotal accounts, and investigative journalism (Ali 2005; 2009).

Normally, two fundamental objections are made on madrassa system. One, the current madrassa-curriculum is invalid in economic market of society: therefore, madrassa does not impart market oriented education. Rather, it darkens the economic future of its graduates, and they become economic burden on rest of society (Malik 2008). And two, it imparts radical socialization to Muslim youth (Brookings 2009). It is also assumed that the blend of economic constraints and radical socialization results in vulnerability of madrassa students/graduates for adventurism in religious extremism (Imtiaz 2011).

Generally, it is perceived that Pakistani madrassas have connections with transnational Islamic militants, who are responsible for precipitate violence and terrorism in the name of religion, and thus, cause a global social disorder (Ali 2005). Particularly, after the fall of Taliban in Afghanistan, madrassas in Pakistan have been considered supporting Taliban in many ways; like providing them sanctuary, and training of new recruits (Fair 2008). The graduates and the students of madrassas are accused of being active in supporting militant and sectarian activities, and thus, creating a social disturbance within the country and beyond (Noor, Skind and Bruinessen 2008).

In this regard, for instance, Stern (2004) claimed that global Islamic militancy grows in Pakistani madrassas, which are functioning without government supervision, and thus, have become training camps of terrorists. Coulson (2004) viewed madrassas as militant Islamic schools inculcating ideology of intolerance, violence and hate. The 9/11 Commission (2004) reported madrassas as incubators of violent extremism. Khokhar (2007) observed Pakistani madrassa playing a major role in spreading *jihadism*, and posing continues threat of violence to the modern world. Alexiev (2003) noted that all Islamic terrorist groups around the world benefited from madrassa system of Pakistan. Singer (2001) concluded that madrassa played a critical role in sustaining international terrorist network.

The issue has been continuously attracting newspapers headlines and electronic media debates across the world. And, the governments of Pakistan remained under pressure in this regard. Several madrassas in Northern Pakistan have been destroyed through missile attacks and drone bombing by NATO forces present in Afghanistan. Since foreign military actions inside Pakistan also put

question on territorial sovereignty of the country, therefore, sometimes, Pakistani forces themselves operate against madrassas and cause many casualties of madrasa students and teachers. Extermination of 82 madrasa students in Bajurh<sup>1</sup> in October 2006, and several hundred in 'Jamia Hafsa' Islamabad<sup>2</sup> in June 2007, are two examples, among others. The ultimate outcome of this process was an emergence of mistrust between the state and a social institution.

The successive governments in Pakistan have been trying to deal with Islamic militancy at two levels: one, encountering militants militarily, as short-term measure; and two, introducing reforms in madrasa system, as long-term measure. United States paid money to government of Pakistan for introducing reforms in madrasas system, and thus, to eliminate the perceived element of militancy from madrasa education (Fair 2008; Ali 2009). Interestingly, the people who paid for creating Islamic militancy during 1980s: now were paying to eliminate the same. And more interestingly, governments of Pakistan, at both the times, accepted money to act accordingly (ICG 2007).

Despite all the efforts so far have been made by the governments, the issue could not be resolved. There is a state of mistrust between the government and the madrasa establishment. Government offered financial and technical assistance to madrasas for their better role in society. But, clerics perceived it a cost of their sovereignty, and thus refused to accept it (*Itehad Tanzimat Madris-e-Dinia* Pakistan 2007). Consequently, important projects of the government, under Madrasa Board Ordinances 2001, 2002 and (amended) 2005, like 'Madrasas Reform Project' and 'Madrasas Education Board', could not achieve the desired goals. In this context, it seemed important to study this institution scientifically.

The debate on the role of madrasa is multidimensional. Some scholars think that connecting madrasa with religious militancy or terrorism is actually a political game (Bergen and Pandey 2006), and a misperception created through propaganda campaign against Islamic seminaries (Khalid 2008). In this regard, some parts of the existing literature points out that all the renowned terrorists in the world were high profile people, like engineers, doctors, economists, and military schools graduates, and none of them was qualified from madrasa (Bergen and Pandey 2006).

Bergen and Pandey (2006) referred five major events of terrorist attacks in the world, and argued that all masterminds behind these events were university graduates who had no concern with madrasa. They also highlighted ambiguity in 9/11 Commission's final report that it had linked madrasa to terrorism without giving any evidence: because it did not mention that which of the 19 hijackers had attended madrasa. Rubani, as quoted by Khalid (2008) adopted the same line and referred assassination of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, murder of American journalist Denial Pearl, and organizational command of *Al-Qaida*: and argued that none of the offenders was madrasa-graduate.

This polarization and ambiguity on the social role of madrasa is just because no nationally representative empirical study is available to depict the factual

position of this institution. This lack of scientific research is also indicative from the fact that different studies have shown different madrassa-statistics in Pakistan: ranged from 7500 to 50000. In this regard, Coulsin (2004) observed that madrassas numbers in the year 2000 were shown 7500 by Bragg; 8000 by Asian Times; 10000 by International Crises Group (ICG); and 15000 by Baldu. Similarly, Looney (2003) averred 20000 madrassas in Pakistan. Stern (2000) and Singer (2001) estimated this figure near fifty thousand (50000).

This lack of empirical research on madrassa has made it a blend of myth and reality (Ali 2005). This vacuum in research, actually, suggested the researcher to investigate this institution scientifically, and understand it correctly. To the best of researcher's knowledge, no study, in Pakistan, was conducted to investigate the opinion of madrassa stakeholders regarding ongoing controversy on madrassa. Therefore, the present research intends to fill this research-gap by documenting the perspectives of madrassa teachers regarding different issues related to madrassa. This was also important because more than two million children in Pakistan are studying in madrassa (Ijazulhaq 2007).

## Methodology

This study is a part of the dissertation project on "social and educational functioning of madrassa in Pakistan". The study was approved by the group of professors (Doctoral Program Committee) at Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. The study was got validated by the Advanced Studies and Research Board of Punjab University. It was also accredited by the fellowship committee of Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies at University of Oxford, UK. Funds for this study were provided by Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, Islamabad.

As a part of the dissertation project, this paper is based on information provided by sixteen religious teachers during the course of two focus group discussions (FGDs), held in *deobandi* and *ahl-e-hadith* madrassas in Lahore. The reason of purposively selecting *deobandi* and *ahl-e-hadith* madrassas for this paper was that, the existing literature had particularly mentioned these sects as more likely to be associated with radical Islamists groups in the World. For example, Taliban are *deobandies*; and Lashkar-e-Tayyaba is *ahl-e-hadiths'* organization (Ali 2005; Rehman 2004).

In this study, 'religious teacher' means a person with religious education, currently teaching in a madrassa on regular basis. Religious teachers, the potential respondents of the study, were contacted at their work places with the due permission of madrassas' administrators. In first meeting they were informed about this study and its objectives; and then, they were asked to participate. Among the willing teachers, eight (8) (from each madrassa) were randomly selected as participants of study. They were provided a written code of ethics, in Urdu version, explaining the rights of research-participants. The willingness of

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each individual participant regarding to take part in study was obtained in writing, prior to the commencement of FGD sessions.

As a tool of data collection, the study used a list of points to guide the process of discussions and to follow certain topics for exploring participants' views. The list included the questions: a) what is the issue of madrassa, or how madrassa became an issue; b) why madrassa exists in society i.e. what is the justification of madrassa in the presence of mainstream educational system; c) why some students prefer to join madrassa instead of going mainstream schools; d) what are the funding sources of madrassa; e) which type of education, ideology and training madrassa inculcates in its students, which determines their future social role.

The discussions were held in Urdu (the first language of the respondents) and lasted about two hours each. With the prior approval of madrassa administration, as well as respondents, the discussions were audio-recorded and written notices were taken. The participants were seated in a circular shape. The physical space was comfortable and welcoming to participants: it was neutral, private, and interruption-free. For the purpose to eliminate the psychological barriers, the respondents were made realized that their opinion was too valuable. However, reaction of researcher against the responses of participants was value-neutral and nonaligned sentences were use for probing, like "can you explain further?", "would you explain what you mean?", "I hear what you are saying", "would you describe with some example?" etc.

The questions relevant to the topics of inquiry were asked loudly to make audible for all research-participants. Time for each topic was already planned; and every participant was encouraged to talk during this time (because few respondents were extra-talkative). It was also noticed during the discussions that after two or three respondents, the participants tended to lose focus. Then the researcher helped the participants to stay focused on the topic and keep the track.

## **Participants Characteristics**

All sixteen religious teachers who participated in research were males. The age range was from 27 to 40 years. All were married with children 1 to 4. The time they had been serving as madrassa teachers was ranged from five to eighteen years. Mean of the time they spent on getting religious education was 8 years. The participants represented diverse formal educational background ranged from Matric to Masters. All participants got formal education as private students. None of the participant had parent with government service. Only one teacher reported that his father was a madrassa teacher.

## **Data Analysis**

All the audio recorded qualitative data acquired from religious teachers, in Urdu language, were transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data was translated into English language (the researcher is comfortable in both languages: Urdu and English). After that, the data was classified into different sets of categories with regards to the emerging themes and similarities (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003). In order to ensure the validity of data, the initial write-up of the results was shared with the participants of the study: they confirmed it and showed no reservation.

## **Findings**

Focus of this study was to examine the functioning of madrasa in Pakistan. During the course of focus group discussions, it was tried to understand how religious leaders, being stakeholders of madrasa, respond to certain questions related to madrasa. The questions were included: why is madrasa a controversial issue; why does it exist in society; why do certain students join madrasa; what is funding sources of madrasa; and what is educational ideology of madrasa institution? In this regard, the details of the views of religious teachers were as follows:

### **Madrasa being a controversial issue**

Madrasa has existed in Pakistan for centuries and its social and educational roles have never been controversial (Anzar 2003). Nonetheless, for the last twenty years, especially after the events of 9/11 in New York, the institution of madrasa gained salience and prominence (Ali 2005). A question was asked to the religious teachers about their reaction and opinion on the subject. A great majority of the participants thought that madrasa was unjustly accused and highlighted by the Western media and think-tanks to malign Muslims and their centuries old educational institution. They perceived that a coordinated campaign has been launched to show madrasa as an issue:

Western politicians, security agencies, research scholars, academicians, and mass media: all are participating. Some Muslim scholars, even from Pakistan, had also been borrowed to write against madrassas. Under the influence of this whole campaign, the image of madrasa has been distorted; and its peaceful role has been mad controversial.

Some of the participants strongly believed in conspiracy theories and argued that the Western powers (mainly referring to Europe and USA) were afraid of intellectual and spiritual strength of madrasa's education. They assumed that "socioeconomic system of Islam is a perceived potential threat to the Western capitalist system, after the demise of Socialism". And, "since Islam is studied in

madrassas, therefore propaganda is also against madrassas: the ultimate goal is to eradicate, or at least to modify, the spirit of Islamic education in a way that suits to the West” they asserted.

The respondents also elucidated the issue of madrassa in scriptural frame of reference. They referred certain verses of Quran translated as “Christians and Jews can never be the friends of Muslims”. They applied it on the crises in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya, Lebanon, Bosnia and Kashmir, and argued, “Christians and Jews have adopted anti-Muslim policies everywhere; and likewise, the current campaign against madrassa is also an extension of their historic enmity against Islam and Muslims”.

Apparently, for the last twenty years, there has been worldwide resurgence of religion, and conservative forces have been trying to assert their identity and seek political relevance and power by constructing threat from “other religions” (Vlas 2010). In the same line, most of the religious teachers also strived to construct an external threat to the valuable Pakistani assets like nuclear capability. They tried to establish a relationship between nuclear capability of Pakistan and “political construction of issue of madrassa-militancy”.

Western powers exert pressure on Pakistan to rollback its nuclear program. For this purpose, as modern warfare tactics, they have created an issue of Islamic militancy and connected it to the issue of safety of nuclear weapons. They propagate that militant Islamist groups can access to Pakistan’s nuclear weapons so as to misuse these against the West. In this relevance, since madrassa is the only institution that produces Islamists: therefore, it is specifically under the Western plot.

In this regard, some respondents showed an interesting understanding. Their interpretation was unique in respect of the question as to why the Westerns want to rollback Pakistan’s nuclear capability and how madrassa is relevant to it.

Economic pulse of United States is in hands of Jews, who are working on the agenda of establishing a ‘Greater Israel’ in the Middle East. For that, Israel will have to fight a great-war against Arabs. At that point of time, Pakistan, being a Muslim state, can provide help to Arabs by virtue of its nuclear technology. Therefore, as a precautionary measure, Jews are instrumentally using the influence of US to rollback Pakistan’s nuclear advancements to save their future. In this connection, madrassa is just a scapegoat.

Many of the respondents also denied any positive relationship between madrassa and Taliban militancy. They asserted that Taliban movement was a



resistance struggle against American oppression in Afghanistan. And “if American forces throw bombs and missiles on to the Pashtun population inside Pakistan (in tribal area): the victims are resentful and can join resistance movement of Taliban”. In this regard “madrassa has no role to make them militant Taliban” they maintained.

The discussions explored three main factors that could facilitate the West in establishing controversy on madrassa. One, the presence of Afghan students in Pakistani madrassas creates suspicions regarding madrassa education because some of them, subsequently, join resistance movement in their homeland. Two, former ruling military establishment in Pakistan purposely created an issue of Islamic militancy to seek political favour from the West for its aristocratic rule. Three, transnational powers “hatch conspiracies against a Muslim nuclear state, and pose a threat of madrassa-military correlation as part of the big game of destabilizing Pakistan”.

In this regard, almost all the respondents had consensus on the view that “terrorism or militancy in the world was not due to the Islamic education of madrassa; rather, economic depression and social injustice in the world played a vital role behind this phenomenon”. They explained that the poor people, who intend to commit suicide under economic and mental stress, can get involve in suicidal terrorist attacks for the sake of monetary benefit for their family. “Certain poor people can be bought as commodity to be used instrumentally by international players” they argued. They expressed that madrassa students and graduates can never indulge in such heinous crime, because

Madrassa acts as a safety-valve in society that keeps people away from heinous crimes like terrorism. It keeps youth contented, calm and peaceful. It grants not only mental satisfaction, but also provides physical amenities of life, like, food, shelter, clothes, medical cover, even pocket money. It also provides opportunities of employment in the religious market, after the completion of education.

### **Justification of Madrassa in Society**

Perceived ineffectiveness of state institutions provides space for non-state actors (Chaudhri 2009). Madrassa being a non-state actor fills the space in state’s educational arrangements and accommodates the marginalized social class. In fact, madrassa plays multidimensional social roles including counseling services on domains of life, like marriage, divorce, inheritance disputes etc (ICG 2002; Ali, Milstein, and Marzuk 2005). These social roles justify the existence of madrassa in society.

In this regard the research-participants were asked ‘why does madrassa exist in society when a formal education system is present in Pakistan?’ Responding on

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this question, the religious teachers showed their perceptions in different ways. For example, some of the participants tried to justify the existence of madrassa in society in historical context:

Historically, madrassa has been the only institution of Muslim society that has delivered secular and religious knowledge without distinction. Only madrassa-graduate could be called educated person; and generally, state-officials were madrassa qualified people. In India, this process continued up to the *Mughal*-era.

Similarly, some respondents talked about the “strength” of this institution that kept it survived in history without any support of the state.

English people captured India and divided education into ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ spheres; and provided political and financial support to just ‘secular’ education. However, it is pride of madrassa institution that it kept up surviving and imparting religious education to masses. It became possible just because civil society patronized, and trusted, this institution. Society needed it.

Some respondents also gave importance to social services of madrassa while justifying its presence in society. They highlighted certain need of society fulfilled by madrassa institution. They mentioned that “madrassa perform some distinct social and educational functions that actually justify its existence in society”. The participants pointed out three fundamental roles madrassa plays in society. First, it delivers divine knowledge; second, it accommodates marginalized population of society and provides them basic amenities of life; third, it manufactures peaceful and literate citizens, and provides them opportunities of employment, and by this way, helps the state.

Many of the participants opined that “state’s ineffective social services provide space for madrassa. They illustrated that a state has to perform three basic responsibilities for society: security, health, and education. When these responsibilities are not fulfilled by the state, the society makes its own arrangement to fulfill the gap. And same is the case with madrassa.

Some people do not have access to state’s educational service because of different reasons, including economic constraint. To them, it is blessing that the door of madrassas are open to bridge up the gap in state’s service.

In this connection, some of the respondents also mentioned that the Prophet of Islam has directed His followers to keep on seeking knowledge for whole life.

They argued that the “divine knowledge is the supreme form of knowledge that is delivered just in madrassas”. Therefore, “madrassa is the most important educational institution of Muslim society”, they maintained.

Many of the participants mentioned that madrassa plays a significant role in healing spiritual and physical ailments. People come here for *du'a*<sup>3</sup> *dam*<sup>4</sup>, or *ta'viz*<sup>5</sup>. “When doctors declare some disease incurable, and the will of God rests the last hope, people do come here for *du'a*, *dam*, or *ta'viz* for their patient”, they told. Similarly, some people contact to solve their domestic problems regarding family feuds, husband-wife relationships, and correction of spoiled children etc. In this regard, madrassa fills-up a spiritual gap in human psychology, the respondents revealed.

Many respondents argued that society’s collective thinking is always rational, and only functional and useful things can survive in society. Thus, the survival of madrassa indicates that it serves certain corners of society, they argued.

Whole life of a Muslim is dependent of this institution in religious matters; and in this regard, madrassa plays a dynamic role from birth to death of an individual. The presence of millions of students in madrassas across Pakistan is indicative of public trust on this institution that firmly justifies its existence in society.

Some respondents also comprehended that madrassas justifies its presence in society at two levels: one, rich people find here space to spend their charities in the performance of their religious duties like *zakat* and *sadqat* etc; two, it provides opportunity for poor to get education, learn religion, and earn living in religious market. In this regard, madrassa provides them free education, free shelter, free food and all other basic amenities of life. “Thus madrassa is functional for all segments of population (rich and poor)” the respondents articulated.

## The reasons for Joining Madrassa

Poverty and religious background are two likely factors for joining madrassa by certain students (Zakar 2001, Nelson 2006). In this regard, one of the objectives of this study was to understand why do certain students prefer to get admission in madrassa, rather than going to mainstreamed educational institutions? In this regard, majority of the respondents talked about four pertinent reasons of madrassa admissions. These included social conditions in the country; restricted economic opportunities in the market; geo-political atmosphere in which Pakistan exists; and significant influence of *ulema* on Pakistani society.

Some respondents argued that unemployment among mainstream educated youth was a strong instigative factor behind madrassa enrolments.

When parents are not sure about positive output against the investment of time, energy and money on

formal education: they ultimately prefer madrasa education, where they satisfy their religious conscience along with surety of employment of their children in religious market. Further, current benefits like free education, free food and free accommodation etc are extra.

Some respondents considered 'religious culture' as relatively a more powerful factor in augment of madrasa enrolments. They argued that religiosity in family and surroundings like neighbourhood and peers influences on the minds of parents and students to get them aggravated for madrasa education. "Perhaps, same is the reason why most of the educated people from Western tribal belt of Pakistan are madrasa graduates" some of the respondents argued.

It was also revealed during the discussions that some well-off families, under the influence of religious culture, take interest in religious education; however, they usually send their children for *hifz-e-Qur'an* only. Normally, these students attend madrasa as day-scholars non-resident students.

Priority of rich people is bit different: they like religious education for their children, but not at the cost of mainstream education that guarantees a good economic future. Since *Dars-e-Nizami* (madrasa syllabi) requires six to eight years, but they do not afford consuming much time on religious education: therefore, they opt *Hifz-e-Qur'an*, which usually takes two to three years to complete: and one can also continue it as part time, along with mainstream education.

'Economic Constraints' were the most pertinent factor behind madrasa enrolments that emerged during the discussions. However, majority of respondents were reluctant to accept it as sole contributory factor for madrasa admissions. They argued "it does not mean that economic constrains solely can instigate for madrasa enrolment: rather, certain level of family's religiosity is also must besides economic constraints". In fact, the phenomenon of madrasa admission seemed a blend of poverty and religiosity.

In this frame of reference, some respondents specifically mentioned that "middle socio-economic class of society was more religious" and thus, more likely to be associated with madrasa education. Otherwise, "rich class of society is enjoying luxurious life, free from bindings of religion; whereas, destitute class is ludicrous under economic misery, and has no sense of education or religion" they maintained.

It was also found during discussions that natural disasters and hardships in human life can also become the reason of madrasa-admissions. In this regard,

some of the participants specifically drew attention towards the recent earthquake in Northern Pakistan.

This earth-quack caused to leave numerous children without guardians. Then, madrassa adopted these children and performed all parental responsibilities and provided them all amenities of life including family atmosphere, and religious education.

## Funding Sources of Madrassa

State of Pakistan outlays nothing on madrassas (Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan 2009). In this concern, it was also a part of this study to investigate about funding sources of institution of madrassa. Accordingly, it was found that madrassa runs by the philanthropy of civil society. Society owns this institution and supports it logistically and financially; and state spends nothing on this institution. The question emerged as to why people give fund to madrassa? Against this question, some of the respondents stated that

It is religious duty of every Muslims to take care of needy and poor people of society. Normally, the religious people perform this duty. Since the madrassa students are generally needy and poor: therefore, people send their alms and charities to madrassas.

Some of the respondents also mentioned an Islamic injunction about alms giving that preference should be given to the nearest needy. Thus, the people send their *zakat*, *sadqat*, skins of sacrificed animals and other kinds of charity, preferably, to nearest (local) madrassas.

The respondents also revealed that some madrassa have agricultural or commercial property donated by philanthropists or bought by madrassas. This property is given on rent that also provides sufficient amount of funds to meet expenditures of madrassas.

The respondents also mentioned that sometimes the local-gains become insufficient to meet extensive expenditures of madrassa. Then, madrassa-administration sends envoys to other areas for fund-raising. These envoys visit mosques of their own sects, along with documentary evidences. With due permission of concerned mosque-administration, they make appeals before the people who come to the mosque for payer.

Since madrassa administration was responsible to meet all kinds of expenditures including salaries of the teachers: therefore, the administrators need to be very active in fund raising. They make contacts with potential philanthropists; and also make appeals during religious gatherings like Friday

sermons and Eid prayers etc. They also pull public attention through wall-chalking, posters, banners, handbills, leaflets, and newspaper ads etc.

It was also found during the discussions that some madrassas have also foreign links for fund raising. Foreign donor could be alumni of madrassa, or some other philanthropist belonging to the same sect. Besides individuals, some civil society organizations of Muslims in foreign countries also send funds to Pakistani madrassas.

Almost all the respondents expressed that private sources of funds grant a financial autonomy and sustainability to madrassa institution. And, perhaps, this is the reason why madrassa stakeholders neither seek state's assistance nor like state's interference in the affairs of madrassa.

## **Educational ideology of Madrassa**

'Education' prepares individuals for certain roles in society (Ballantine 2011). This shapes up personalities in a destined matrix (Bernstein 2008) and actually, is instrumental to achieve certain ends (Sadovnik 2010). In this regard, one of the objectives of this study was to explore what kind of education, training, and ideology madrassa inculcates in its students; and accordingly, what social roles madrassa students are supposed to perform in future. In this regard, following major themes emerged during the discussions.

It was found that the current madrassa education was focussed on just producing religious leadership for society. The students read *Dars-e-Nizami*, which was purely a religious curriculum. Although some madrassas had also arrangement of formal education for their students; however, primarily, students were being prepared to play religious roles in society. Like, they could become madrassa teachers, madrassa administrators/owners, religious writers, *imams* of mosques etc.

In this concern, majority of the respondents expressed that "society also expects from madrassas just to prepare religious leaders". Madrassa graduates are supposed to remain restricted serving religion only. That is why *zakat*, *sadqat* and other charities are paid to madrassa. "If madrassa graduates choose professions (other than religion) like government or private jobs, the society will automatically stop financing madrassa, and the system of religious education would collapse in society", the respondents revealed. They declared madrassa as "a powerhouse in society that generates, distributes and maintains supply-line of religiosity in society".

Regarding the debate on the perceived controversial role of madrassa, majority of the respondents asserted madrassa-education as entirely different to that of its propagated image during recent past. They discussed educational ideology of madrassa as:

Madrassa inculcates an ideology of love, peace, mercy, and well-wishing for all mankind. It teaches

that human life, honour and property are the most respectable entities. It proclaims that an innocent homicide is like a massacre of all mankind; and saving just one life is like the saving of all human-race. It also affirms 'suicide' a heinous crime. It suggests that all public is God's family: and therefore, serving this family causes pleasure of God almighty. In this context, it is irrational to think that madrassa students can become terrorists or suicide attackers to takes innocent lives. Rather, madrassa students are the most law-abiding citizens of the state.

Some respondents argued that "Islamic teachings in madrassa reject all forms of terrorism, injustice, extremism and impatience". They asserted that "madrassas were not military training bases or arsenals: rather, they are centres of learning what God has said and the Prophet has interpreted". The respondents invited all those scholars who blame madrassa as producing militants that they should physically visit madrassas and "do not construct data while sitting in their offices". They said that madrassas were always open for surprise-visits.

Some respondents also expressed why the "peaceful" ideology of madrassa came under criticism. They told that madrassa teaches "supreme power is Allah; Muslims should trust on Allah, and do not fear except Allah". They supposed that "this religious ideology does not match to ideals of the Western powers because it gives valour to Muslims not to fear from infidels, and stand firmly before them". The respondents considered this ideology as a "psychological challenge for Western technological hegemony": otherwise, "madrassa students are the most peaceful and contented youth that never indulges in any kind of anti-social activity, like, strikes, protests, and vandalism (as many school/college students occasionally do)".

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

This discussion and conclusions are based on the provided data by the teachers of religion in madrassas. The data may be regarded as private perceptions of religious teachers on certain issues related to madrassa, including its role in society. The issues for discussion were selected from ongoing scholarly debate in existing relevant literature. In this regard, it was important to know the perceptions of the people (stakeholders of madrassa) who were being discussed in literature.

The data showed a considerable diversity among the respondents' perspectives regarding the issue of madrassa-militancy correlation. Although, the teachers expressed multiple reasons as to why madrassa became a controversial issue; however, they had consensus on the point that madrassa was not a genuine issue: and rather it was just an illusion. Unscientific scholarship and mass media also played major role in making this illusion (Ali 2009).

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Some teachers of religion pointed out that madrassa came under limelight because of Taliban in two ways. One, few renowned Taliban leaders had been associated with Pakistani madrassas in terms of their studies. And two, several war-affected Afghan-families shifted to Pakistan, and mostly, their children studied in madrassas. Among these children, some, subsequently, joined Taliban movement against American forces. This created suspicions for madrassa's education and its role, and made madrassa controversial. The same understanding has also been described in Bergen and Panday (2006), Khalid (2008) and Khalid and Fayyaz (2006).

However, the data also revealed that the curriculum of madrassa was still same, across Pakistan, as it has been in the past when there was no allegation on madrassa for creating militants (same has also been found in Rehman 2004). This indicates that despite a lucid connection between madrassa and Taliban, it cannot be safely predicted that institutional role of madrassa is to create militants. Further, technically, madrassa is unable to produce terrorists in modern era of science and technology, because madrassa is still stuck on religious training (Bergen and Panday 2006).

Majority of respondents perceive that issue of madrassa has been politically constructed by the Westerns; and the causal factors behind controversy were 'Pakistan's nuclear capability', 'socioeconomic system of Islam', 'historical rivalry of Jews and Christians against Muslims' and 'conservative ideology of madrassa'. In fact, this religion-based understanding of madrassa teachers leads them to see the World divided into two confronting groups: believers and infidels. Ultimately, this worldview of religious teachers shifts to madrassa student, which shapes-up their personality in a distinct matrix. Some other studies have also argued in the same line (Fandy 2007; Fair 2008; Brookings 2009; Imtiaz 2011; Kazmi and Pervez 2011).

The data explored that madrassa justifies its existence in society because of its socially accepted certain roles. The religious teachers mentioned four main social roles madrassa plays in society: one, it delivers divine knowledge; two, it provides marginalized population with life-necessities and education; three, it produces law-abiding literate citizens for state; and four, it also provides them employment opportunities as well. Besides this, madrassa has also a healing function; and people come here for *dua* and *taviz*. Same multi social role of religious institution has been mentioned in Ayyub (2000) and Farmer (2007); and a positive association is observed between religion and mental and physical health in Seybold and Hill (2009).

Zakar (2011) and Haddad (1986) have mentioned the importance of mosque and madrassa in Pakistani society. They explored that people have great trust on religious institution, and thus, it has been hub of social and educational activities. In the same line, the data of this study explored that institution of madrassa is equally important for rich and poor Muslims. For example, for rich, it provides space to invest charities (compulsory and optional) for the purpose to perform



religious duties and to please God here and hereafter. Similarly poor get benefit from this charity and send their children to learn religious education here free of cost.

Although, the major reason behind the madrasa enrolments was poverty (Ali 2005, 2009;; Rana 2009; Khalid 2008; Andrabi et al. 2006; McClure 2009; Winthrop and Graff 2010); however, a certain level of religiosity in familial background was also needed for the discourse (Nelson 2006; Bano 2009). Against the question which of the two (poverty or religiosity) plays more important role in madrasa admissions: the majority of religious teachers claim religiosity as more important factor, which endorsed the study of Nelson (2006). Unemployment among youth qualified from schools and colleges, was also a factor behind detachment from formal education and attachment to non-formal i.e. madrasa education. The same assumption is also presented in National Education Policy (2009).

Financially, madrasa is sovereign and independent of state funding. It runs with civil society's philanthropy. In fact, religiosity created by madrasa for society, is paid back to madrasa in the shape of philanthropy made by the society. This cyclic process grants financial sustainability to madrasa institution. The financial autonomy of madrasa by virtue of trust of the Public has also been stated in Khalid (2008), Bano (2007; 2009), and ICG (2002; 2007).

Studies like Fair (2008), Brookings (2009), and Imtiaz (2011) have mentioned that madrasa does not impart any skill to its student that could enable them to earn living from economic market. In this regard, the present study explored that general economic market is not focus of madrasa education. Rather, the mission of madrasa is to train students for future religious roles. Interestingly, society also expects the same. If madrasa graduates choose professions other than religion, the society automatically would stop financing to it: and the existing system of religious education would not stay alive.

Bergen and Panday (2006), Khalid (2008) and Bano (2009) assert madrasa as a safety valve or social security net in society. Same is the perception of religious teachers. They think that madrasa accommodates marginalized population with food, shelter, education, clothes, medical cover and employment. It also morally trains youth to avoid sin and crime. Therefore, it contributes in culmination of social causes of criminality (economic factor and moral decay). In this sense, madrasa helps in maintaining social order in society. Different other studies has also concluded that religious people have more prosocial attitude (Tan and Vogel 2008; Johansson-Stenmam, Mahmud and Martinsson 2008; Ahmad 2009).

This study, like all qualitative researches, has also certain limitations. Normally, qualitative research, because of its in-depth nature, relates to small and selective sampling (Cormack 1991). This selective sampling suggests low population validity, and can be considered as weakness of the study (Bryman1988); because the researcher might have been influenced by a particular disposition while selecting certain samples (Carrl 1994).

In this frame of reference, four limitations of this study can be identified. One, the sample was small, and it consisted of only sixteen madrassa teachers, from whom the data were collected in two sessions of focus group discussions. Two, sample was purposively selected from urban Lahore, and thus, respondents' opinion may not be representative to all religious leaders particularly in rural setting. Three, since the sample was drawn only from *deobandi* and *ahl-e-hadith* madrassa: therefore, the finding of this study cannot be generalized over the madrassa of all sects. Four, in the context of ongoing controversy and hot debate on madrassa, followed by the problems faced by madrassas, the religious teachers were interested in defending, rather than interpreting, the role of madrassa.

Nonetheless, this study is the first of its kind that explored the opinion of religious teachers regarding current debate on the functioning of madrassa institution and related issues. In this regard, the study also laid a good foundation for future research in this particular area. Further research with larger sample and triangular methodology is needed to investigate the potential role of madrassa institution in preparing religious scholars also fit in market economy. In this regard, it is important to keep religious teachers on board, through training and research, for bringing madrassa into the main stream of education.

The main stream of education should be a uniform curriculum for all schools, up to the level of higher secondary school (grade 12). It should be a blend of religious, cultural and scientific knowledge, as promised in the Constitution of Pakistan 1973. In order to avoid sectarian element, the agreed-upon contents should be included in the curricula. At next stage, the students would have choice to choose any specialized field of educations, like, medical, engineering, agriculture, or religion etc. This system of education should work under the close surveillance, control and support of the state.

## **Notes**

1. Bajurh is a village in tribal area of Pakistan. Here, Jamat-e-Islami Pakistan had a madrassa, which was
2. demolished through an air strike and all the students died. Allegation was that "this was producing terrorists". Like Bajurh, nobody was left alive inside this madrassa in Islamabad. Army did this activity with the name of 'operation silence'. Allegation was that "madrassa challenged the writ of the government in capital city".
3. Dua is process of begging something from God
4. Dam is a cultural practice in which a person recite some verses of scripture or somewhat else in his mouth for the purpose to remove sickness etc of the person who come with a problem
5. Ta'viz is a written material on small piece of paper that a person keeps with him for some specific cause to avoid illness or misery.

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