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Educational Reforms in Religious Seminaries: An Analysis of Contemporary Theorists' Views and (Late) Dr. Mahamood Ahmad Ghazi's Thoughts

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ABSTRACT

Religious Seminaries (Madaris) are the need of the Islamic society and providing religious and classical Islamic values focusing on the core values of spiritual guidance generally in subcontinent and particularly in Pakistan. On the other, the traditional institutes are underscoring modern education, questing for the esteem based method of learning but depriving their students of competence and skills of Islam. For a long period of time now, the dichotomy in the education of Muslims in the subcontinent has put them at an immense detriment. The Pakistani madrasa has remained a subject of intense academic debate since the tragic events of 9/11 as they were immediately identified as one of the prime aspects. On this hot topic, various contemporary theorists also tried to build public narrative positively and negatively. Dr. Mahood Ahmed Ghazi was well acquainted with both of mainstream institutions and religious seminaries. He, throughout his life, played pivotal role to create harmonious alliance between these two opposite streams of institutions. The present research paper will explore the missing perspective in this discourse, the perspective of religious scholars and contemporary theorists. It will also be explored Dr. Ghazi's exquisite discourse of recommendation for the upward mobility of these religious seminaries.

Key words: *Madrassh, Reforms, Education*

Introduction

Acquisition of knowledge has always been a fundamental and integral part of Islamic traditions. Since the advent of Islam masjid was considered as the central part of learning and teaching, a place where education is imparted without

discrimination free of cost. With the passage of time, Muslim rulers established various educational institutions as an exalted seat of learning, a strong hold of knowledge, source of inspiration and a beacon of light available to every individual of the society.

The resurgence of Islamic instructive organizations in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent amid the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is a noteworthy genius from the perspectives of training and history. The British supplanted the old instructive framework with another framework and English dialect was made obligatory in instructive organizations and to land the administration positions. The Muslims demonstrated their persistent nonchalance to such a sort of strategies as they imagined that the new English arrangement of instruction was a push to axis the Muslims from Islam and a segment of Muslim erudite people thought about protecting their way of life and personality by safeguarding their conventional arrangement of training and setting up new schools in view of these customs. These religious seminaries delivered durable effects on the Muslim society amid the frontier manage and in the post-autonomy time in Pakistan and India.

The religious seminaries and its syllabi has always been a fertile stuff of discussion of Late Dr. Mahmood Ahmed Ghazi. He exerted his efforts literally, orally and practically throughout his life to prepare a harmonious system between the mainstream institutions and *Madrassahs* to prepare a unique kind of students, scholars, economists, jurists and teachers who will be the guiding star for not only for one stream rather for the community as a whole.

Methodology

This is a qualitative based research – a most extensively used method in Humanities and Social Sciences in general and Islamic Studies in particular. This kind of research is a piece of scholarship in which others' work is compiled under close enquiry and scrutiny, rather than the collecting of new, primary data directly indirectly from studious observation, keen analysis. However, it is a work of describing events from the books, lectures and institutions from various areas. Though, it may be the part of this dissertation; a narrative, descriptive and analytical methods have been used in this research.

Some Fallacies about Religious Seminaries (*Madrassahs*)

Religious Seminaries have ever been the icon of sagacity, foresightedness

and wisdom for the Muslims of all over the world. The history witnesses tremendous changes and revolutions regarding the scenario of these seminaries. Among these situations, the post 9/11 situation has a drastic impact on the religious seminaries focusing on extremism and terrorism as generating from these seminaries. Though, it may unanimously he said that there is a dire need of reforms in *Madrasah* education but it should not be resulting in hateful material assaulting the sanctity of these institutions. Late Dr. Mahmood Ahmed Ghazi was a figure who did not promulgate hate rather suggested practical reforms for these seminaries (will be discussed in next pages). A handful material of various contemporary theorists can be presented in this regard. Jamal Malik has done a comprehensive study on this topic. He concluded that “Religious scholars (ulemas) of different sects lack unanimous approach on the syllabus, role and financing of *Madrasahs*. These differences are deeply rooted in society because students and teachers of *madrasahs* represent different segments of society”.¹ He also highlights that “some *madrasahs* have left their actual role of imparting religious education and have learn engaged in preaching extremist views projecting their school of thought, which then fuels sectarian militancy”.² Tariq Rehman relates “the rising militancy to Afghan Jihad that was conducted post Soviet Union Invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. He not only identifies that the curriculum is too old but also highlights the role of seminaries in promoting sectarianism by refuting each other’s belief.”³ Muhammad Qasim Zaman narrates the Madaris reforms and their failure as “He urges that opposition to the government agenda of reforms exists to varying degrees among the ulema. His study contains dissenting views regarding the issue and motives behind them.”⁴ Christopher Canlland advises that “Religious and social services of the *madrasahs* should be recognized by the government and they may be assigned appropriate role to ensure peace in society”.⁵

Here various discourses of enmity and hatred against the Muslims and the students of religious seminaries may also be presented as:

Western media as well as government officials propagated this image of the *madrasah*. In a memo leaked to the media in Oct 2003, Donald Rumsfeld, US Secretary of Defense wrote “Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the *madrasahs* and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?”⁶

In an interview to Fox News in November 2003, he declared; “there's little places around the world where radical, extremist clerics are teaching young men and women to become suicide bombers and to go out and kill innocent men, women and children....In the same interview, he presented his ideas to reform *madrassa* education, pointing out the need to engage in a ‘battle of ideas’, encouraging young Muslims to learn science, math, language so that they can earn a respectable living.⁷

While traditional *madrassas* attracted people from all social classes during the Mughal and Sultanat periods, now these *madrassas* cater for the children of the lower middle class, the peasantry, and the poor with few exceptions⁸ This shift in student composition owes largely to the fact that education in a traditional *Madrassa* is no longer seen as providing its students with skills needed for lucrative occupations. Well-off Muslims send their children to regular schools or might arrange for a religious teacher to come to their homes to teach the Qur'an, and Islamic rituals, but few send them to full-time *madrassas*.⁹ The students of *madrassas* belong to families having emotional attachment with a particular school of thought and send their children to the *Madrassa* of same *fiqh*. The followers of different sects mostly oppose each other due to which, the sectarian division has become sharper and more violent in the society.¹⁰ Because of weak economic and social backgrounds the students are often reactionary and inflexible in their attitude and seek extremist ways for the realization of their ideological goals.¹¹

It is worth mentioning here that this kind of perception is built just on the reports of media; articles are written, debates are held and various symposiums and seminars are conducted just for perception building. None of the mentioned theorists has ever visited any *madrassah* in Pakistan and observed the system. There may be some facts but major of their perception may be called as fallacy. Late Dr. Mahmood Ahmed Ghazi is the prominent figure here to present the authentic review of these institutions. Having visited and known both the systems of Religious Seminaries and mainstream institutions, he was convinced that a large number of reforms are needed here but it should be resulted in hatred and enmity against these seminaries. There may be certain *Madaris* where these fallacies might be proved true. But a general perception about *Madaris* can be reflected post 9/11 in the following report:

The *Madrassa Scapegoat* by Peter Bergen and Swati Pandey published in Washington Quarterly in 2006 openly challenged the earlier perceptions about *madrassas*.

Here any argument to sanctify these seminaries may be nullified but the report itself sanctifying these seminaries from the hatred label: The 'truth about terrorist education', according to this report that terrorism is not linked to *madrassas* and therefore they need not be a national security concern for the United States. Detailed accounts of recent terrorist attacks have been presented in this report. The origins of terrorists involved in these attacks have been traced. No links were found between *madrassas* and terrorism.¹²

One obvious reason for this fact is stated as the absence of capacity in *madrassa* students to carry out an effective terrorist attack; "Because *madrassas* generally cannot produce the skilled terrorists capable of committing or organizing attacks in Western countries, they should not be a national security concern. Conceiving of them as such will lead to ineffective policies, and cracking down on *madrassas* may even harm the allies that Washington attempts to help. In countries such as Pakistan, where *madrassas* play a significant role in education, particularly in rural areas, the wholesale closure of *madrassas* may only damage the educational system and further increase regional tensions."¹³

The report shows the reality behind the attacks, the role of the students and the connection of these seminaries themselves to these terroristic activities.

Religious Seminaries (Madrassahs)

Madrassa, plural *Madrassas*, is the Arabic word. In literal terms it means a place for education; school either secular or religious.¹⁴ It has a historical background. The *Madrassah* of middle Ages were the mark of distinction of education and encouraged the creation of the Western university system.¹⁵ *Madrassahs* are present in across the continents: from Kenya to Bangladesh and from Senegal to Indonesia. The *madrassahs* of South Asia are part of this historical tradition and their character was predominantly religious.¹⁶ *Madrassa* got a noteworthy difficulty and endured inversion with the presentation of mainstream education. *Madrassah* instructors hence, got to be distinctly uncomfortable and built up an unbending state of mind towards religious training for Muslims.

Dr. Mahmood Ghazi introduces *Madrassah* as: "The institution had come

into existence in the earliest centuries of Islam and represented the world wide Muslim contribution to the advancement of knowledge, to the advancement of Science and wisdom, in different parts of the world. The *Madrassah* upheld the unique idea of the unity of knowledge and the unity of education for the first time. It was the first time in the history of human thought and knowledge, it was *Madrassah* which came forward with an integrated concept of knowledge, where reason and revelation were integrated together as a whole, where the traditional religious knowledge was dovetailed with the latest human discoveries as intellectual achievement, where the so-called rational sciences, inherited from the Greeks were phrased and coached in such a way that eventually at the end of the day, they turned out to be the servants of the fundamental and perennial principles of Islam".¹⁷

Various scholars like *Abu Nasar Farabi*, *Sheikh Ahmed Sarhandi*, *Sa'ad ullah Khan* (P.M of Mughal Empire) , *Shah Wali Ullah* and various other contemporaries of them came out with the serious intellectual effort. It goes credit to him, by whose efforts *Madrassah* became the hallmark of an integrated knowledge and the unity of reality represented in Muslim academia and the *Madrassah*.

The Difference between Religious and Traditional Knowledge

Dr. Ghazi considered it a tremendous danger to differentiate between Religious (Deeni) and Traditional (Dunyavi) knowledge. In his opinion, in the past thirteen centuries there was not a single moment where a difference might be created between these two branches of knowledge. Islam adopted all kind of knowledge; be from Jews, Christians, Parsis, Sikhism etc. but practiced it. With the passage of time it was difficult to judge which kind of knowledge was taken from Non-Arab or is the inheritance of Islamic civilization. The *Madrassah* education was not confined only to the Muslims, rather extended to Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Parsis etc. Apart from the Muslims, acquisition of knowledge was only confined to the typical races and groups among these religions. A negative aspect of *Madrassah* education lasted till today that was the lack of interest in the expansion of knowledge and in independent research and study. The knowledge was now by and large confined to the study of the text produced elsewhere in the Central Asian countries or in the Arab World. Dr. Ghazi presented the examples of Greek Logicians and analyzes it comparatively

with Imam Ghazali and Imam Razi. Without reading Greek logic, it is impossible to comprehend both Razi's and Ghazali's thoughts.¹⁸ He also elaborated that the modern man speaks on the frequency; the religious *Aalim* does not operate on that. For this it is impossible to teach religious sciences to each and every person. The modern scholar should also be trained not on the sole objectives of our forefathers as in 1867, when *Darul Uloom* Deoband was established, the objectives were two:

1. To provide and produce *Imams* and *Khateeb*s in different mosques.
2. To produce teachers and professors for *Darul Uloom* and similar other *madrassah*s.

According to Dr. Ghazi: the provision of teachers in the *Madrassah*s is very important requirement, but beyond these requirements there are three more requirements to streamline these *madrassah*s:

1. Requirement of teachers to teach Islamic Studies in the mainstream schools and colleges in the thousands of schools and colleges.
2. Requirement of senior scholars, professors and guides, renowned jurists to guide the nation in terms of general guidance about the challenges faced by Muslim *Ummah*.
3. Requirement of *Fuqaha*, and experts in Islamic Economics to change Pakistan or to facilitate that change and shift over from the present system into an Islamic compatible or *Shariah* compatibles system that require another category of scholars.¹⁹

Need of Reforms for Mainstreaming:

The Government of General Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008) intended to devise a comprehensive plan to, what they claimed, improve conditions of religious *Madaris*. Speaking at a seminar organized by Institute of Policy Studies Islamabad on August 3, 2000, Dr, Mahmood Ahmad Ghazi, a member of Musharraf's Security Council said:

“The Government plans to integrate religious Madaris with mainstream education system, and introduce changes in their courses and teaching methodology. This is to be done with a view to enabling these institutions to play their due role of producing not only religious scholars also leaders in all

fields of learning and human endeavor"²⁰

He often quoted evolution of reforms had already been done by *Shah Wali ullah*. When *Shah Wali ullah* returned from Arabia after the stay of about 1.5 year, he amended the syllabus of the accustomed educational system. He abolished the excessive use of philosophy, excessive use of texts and jugglery of words, excessive use of texts, commentaries, marginal notes, and commentaries on marginal notes and developed a very simple curriculum which was introduced by his father. When he felt that the syllabus was not fit to produce a competent and profound Islamic Scholar of the caliber *Shah Wali ullah* conceived, he emphasized the study of Quran, Hadith, and philosophy of *Shariah* against the Greek philosophy introduced in other institutes.²¹

In subcontinent, particularly in Pakistan this two way system of education has a catastrophic impact on the personality and character building of the students. It resulted in dual ideology religious education and secularism. The objective of secularism is to exclude education and religious education from practical life as happened in the West and various other western countries. In Pakistan, one system is limited only to the Masjid and *Madrassah* whereas the other instead of confining, running the whole system and infrastructure of life. That is called secularism. Dr. Ghazi says: *Ulema* are the responsible for this secular approach in Pakistan.²²

Dars e Nizami and its Goals

Dr. Mahood Ahmed Gazi once said: *Madrassah* was established by Maulana Nizamuddin Sahalwi; a contemporary scholar of *Aurangzeb Alamgir*, who had also presided over the academy compiling the *Fatawa Alamgiri* at the behest of Aurangzeb Alamgir. When by the middle of the eighteenth century, 1760's or 17 late 50's the British East India Company occupied Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. A charter was issued by the Mughal Emperor to East India Company granting them the authority and permission to revenue collection, to civil administration and to some civil matters. In the agreement, which was signed at the time of abdication, it was provided that as far as the Muslims were concerned, their matters would continue to be decided in terms of Islamic *Shariah* through courts manned by Muslim Judges, *Qadhis* and *Muftis*. The British East India Company agreed to this provision and established courts in different parts of three provinces. The company established various institutions of *Dars e Nizami* that continued till the

downfall of Mughal Emperor. When *Dar ul Ulum* Deoband was established, they practiced the same curriculum that continued for decades with minor amendments.²³

For the goals of *Dars e Nizami*, he said that the objectives of these seminaries are to produce *Muhaddisin*, *Mufassirin*, *Fuqaha*, and Arabic Linguists. It does not mean that instead of *Fuqaha* and *Muhaddisin*, computer technicians will be produced. But we feel that these sought specializations must be conveyed to the individuals of the society. The objective is to prepare such competent scholars as they are the experts in their specialized knowledge on the one hand, and on the other, they themselves must be the paragon of the predecessors for the public to imitate. These scholars must have the capabilities to comprehend the challenges of modern era and to combat these challenges critically.²⁴

He often put the example of Great *Imam Abu Hanifa* R.A. and Imam Muhammad R.A. If Imam Muhammad's books had not available, Imam Abu Hanifa's ninety percent *ijtihadi* opinion would not have been conveyed to us. One hand, Imam Muhammad was compiling books, he also spent few of his time in the markets to assess various running activities in the markets to judge the ways of business issues. It was a practical way to reflect those issues in Islamic *Fiqh*.²⁵

Religious Seminaries and National Demand

According to Dr. Ghazi, religious seminaries in Pakistan are serving about 1.5 million students of poor stuff. These institutes are providing food and boarding facilities to these students bearing their full accommodation without setting the burden on national finance. They are trying to eradicate illiteracy from the society to make these students the part of main stream institutions like colleges, universities and army etc.²⁶

The objective of these religious seminaries is to prepare the scholars having specializations but with the objective to make this state a welfare state. The Muslim nation should be provided the guidance to be a perfect and true Muslim in every sphere of life. To run the banking system in Pakistan, the State Bank of Pakistan has laid down a legal framework for the banks who want to operate in Islamic framework and to develop *Shariah* compatible moods. There should be a *Shariah* advisor in each bank or non-banking financial institution which desires

to opt for *Shariah* compatible moods and investments. They have established a *Shariah Board* at the country level. That Board lays down the principles and policies to be implemented and to be observed in other banks. I am not saying their concentration should be transformed to the banking system and Economics. Bankers and Economists may be remained separated but they should also be made well acquainted with the basics of their concerned business ethics.²⁷

Dr. Ghazi quoted Imam *ibn e Taimia*'s opinion "To seek the skill, dexterities and sciences for which the Muslims are deprived, is *Farz e Kifaya* on Muslims.²⁸ He often used to say the Muslims are destitute due to the lack of technology. The West is surpassing in this field, by dint of it they are ruling the world but the Muslims are just serving them. It is the duty of today's leadership to come up with its intelligent stuff, burn the hatchet, and to exert its youth to come in this practical life to compete with them in these sciences and technology. Before twelve hundred years, *Imam Ghazali* in *Al Mustasfa*, *Imam Shatbi* in *Al Muwafqat*, and late *Shah Waliullah* in *Hujja tull hil Baligha*, used the impact of Greek logic and sciences. On the same pattern, the west today is using modern scientific techniques and computer to make submit the world before it.²⁹

Reforms in Curriculum

In views of Late Dr. Ghazi, the religious seminaries today are wasting not only time but the sources as well. A student takes admission in *Madrassah* and remained there for eight years, he knows nothing beyond the linguistic difference of "SALAM" and "SULLAM". Though he may elaborate and analyze it well, but after becoming *Khateeb* and *Imam* of a mosque, no one asks him such questions rather he is asked such questions:

- What is Defense Saving Scheme?
- What is your opinion about the amendment in NIT Unit?
- What are Islamic views about transplantation?
- What is your opinion about the Parliamentarian Bill on "Rights of Women?"

Such questions are asked to him and he is unable to answer them. It is a proof that he wasted his precious eight years.³⁰

Imam

What I feel that even for an Imam, the *Dars e Nizami* is not sufficient. It

requires some purging, some additions of new subjects. The teachers of *Dars e Nizami* can teach the syllabus books, but for those who are going to teach Islamic Studies to a young boy studying O' and A' Levels, the graduates of *Madrassahs* are hardly suitable. We should have a course of two, three or four years after Matriculation for the production of good Imam. If a person has a matriculation certificate for the mainstream institutions and is also a Hafiz with *Tajweed*, he can be taught some Arabic in three years, the text of Quran may be taught to him with translation, one or two commentaries, one in Urdu, one in Arabic, some selections of the Hadith books e.g. *Ma'arif e Hadith, Tarjaman us Sunnah* by *Badar Alam*, one or two book of *Usool ul Fiqh* and some books on the modern exposition to Islam dealing with Economic legal and jurisprudential law and so on and so forth. So that an Imam is to some extent becomes competent to give answers to the questions post to him on different issues. This kind of syllabus may be designed for a period of three years after matriculation.³¹

Teacher

After these three year's elementary Islamic education which would be equal to intermediate and A' Level, there may be another course of three or four years for those who want to be teachers of Islamic studies in schools and colleges with some additional subjects to these and some exposure to the issues which are confronted by the Muslim *Ummah* now.³²

***Dars e Nizami* Teachers**

According to Dr. Ghazi it suggests the syllabus for traditional *Dars e Nizami* for those who want to teach in these religious seminaries. He recommends some modifications for them. Some necessary books which have been proved in effective, they may be replaced by the new books at least in the field of Grammar, *Surf* and *Nahav*, and instead of concentrating on the old rational sciences, *Ma'aqulaat*, some books on new philosophies and modern western thought will have to be added. There are books available in Arabic and Urdu on the good exposition of the modern western thought with some critical appreciation and understanding. These may be taught to the teachers of future *Dar ul Ulums*, so that they may have an idea of the world in which they are living and the idea of challenges facing the Muslim Nation.³³

Islamic Scholars

Dr. Ghazi suggested the higher syllabus for those Islamic scholars who are

required to guide the *Ummah*, to lead the Muslim *Ummah* in terms of their international career, reintroducing of their institutions and law, rewriting the new systems and new institutions for the future of the Muslim *Ummah*. For this purpose, a large number of institutions may be run by both traditional *ulema* and by those who combine the two streams and by modern Islamic scholars as in Bangladesh *Darul Ihsan* University, and IIU Islamabad.

Specialization in Religious Seminaries and Higher Education and Research

According to Dr. Ghazi, there must be the opportunities of Specialization for the brilliant students of these religious seminaries so that a competent staff may be floated. The following departments may be established in the religious seminaries having the objective to prepare:

- The competent teachers having the vast exposure to teach the important Islamic Science (*Tafseer, Hadith, Fiqh, Economics*) in its full swing and then to prepare a brilliant stream of the students who are able to compete with the future challenges.
- The competent teachers and scholars who may avail the opportunity, teach in the university level teaching to the best of their abilities. They may also be able to do the serious efforts of the implementation of Islam.
- The specialized staff who may eradicate the fallacies about Islam, Islamic beliefs and various other objections rose against Islam.
- The religious scholars who can separate on the basis of their strong skills to take Critique of Western sciences and present the concept or real Islamic Law.³⁴

Dr. Ghazi further proposed the research and specialization areas for the students of Madrassahs in Pakistan:

- Tafseer and Uloom ul Quran
- Hadith and Uloom ul Hadith
- Beliefs and Ilm ul Kalam
- Islamic Economics and Business
- Comparative Study of Religions
- Modern Thought and Western Studies

- Islam and Islamic Civilization in Modern Era
- Arabic Language and Literature

The Specialization course must not be less than three years. First two years, a student will thoroughly study the basic syllabus books, and in third year he will do his research thesis. He will also be directed to write two or three research articles on the concerned topics. While concentrating upon the specialization, he should also ponder over the various research works by the Western Thinkers. For this purpose, a student will have to study English Language to comprehend the subject.

He set three standards to select topics and books on Specialization Level.

1. While doing research, the basic work done by the Muslim predecessors, a student must be acquainted with it.
2. The evolution in the concerned field, a student must have a thorough knowledge about it.
3. The present situation of the concerned specialization must be before the student. What scholastic work has been done, the Muslim thinkers' contribution and the orientalist's work should also be in view of the student.³⁵

Conclusions

The institution of the Madrassa is about a thousand years old. As a system of Muslim education, it has always played an important role in teaching and preservation of Islam. It also played this role in the lives of millions of Muslims of the Subcontinent from eighth century AD onwards. However, after establishment of British colonial rule here, a modern system of education was introduced.

There is a fact that reforms should be introduced in the *Madaris* system. However, every school of thought eager for reforms has its own justification and objective. After the incident of 9/11 in 2001, United States of America believed that *Madaris* promoted anti American sentiments. They therefore, embarked on a policy to dilute the hard liner stance of *Madaris*. General Musharraf (r. 1999-2008), the trusted ally of US, decided to deal with the *Madaris* with iron hand. Pakistan Madrassa Education (Establishment and Affiliation of Model *Deeni* Madaris) Board Ordinance (PMEBO) was promulgated. In his reforms policy

Late Dr. Mahmood Ahmed Gazi's is pivotal and conducive.

Dr. Ghazi has always been keen to create harmonious alliance between mainstream institutions and religious seminaries. He thought that the students of these religious seminaries may perform their role in Pakistan mainstream to meet the global challenges faced by the Muslim *Ummah*. He had great association with this stuff and wants to seek International Languages like Arabic, English for the better interest of preaching Deen. The purpose of his life was just to revive Islam in its true spirit for the whole mankind.

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