



The Origins of Islamic Educational Reformations: A Qualitative Study about Networks of Pakistani Ulema in Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

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Abstract

Education in Islam is considered as an important and recommended practice ever since the advent of the Quran that took place in the seventh century. The primary aim of achieving Islamic education is to understand the preaching of Quran and spend one's life most righteously. The origin of Islamic Education is linked to madrassas where children pursue teachings of Quran. However, after the 9/11 incident Madrassas in Pakistan have come under scrutiny and several allies especially the U.S. has asked the government to re-form the Islamic education system in madrassas since they have been considered as the platform for producing terrorists and extremists. The Ulema in Pakistan have always played their proactive role in providing teachings of Islam to the children. However most of the madrassas have now been transformed into proper schooling system where religious education is integrated with modern education. In this study, Ulemas' role has been reviewed and their extensive domain from a common man to dignitaries has been reviewed. The study highlights their constructive role in society.

Keywords:

Educational reforms, Islamic Education,
Madrassas, Ulema



Introduction:

Since its inception, Islam has laid high stress on preaching and attaining education that is why the history of Islam and the origins of Islamic education has a long and rich intellectual tradition⁽¹⁾. Reformations in Islamic education have not been witnessed so often yet it cannot be denied that knowledge possess great significance within Islam as there are more than 800 verses in Quran – being the most revered book for Muslims, which promote education. In the Quran, it was mentioned clearly at multiple instances that achieving education is very crucial for a content living⁽²⁾. For instance, it was mentioned that "*As God has taught him, so let him write*" (2:282), "*God will exalt those of you who believe and those who have the knowledge to high degrees*" (58:11), or "*O my Lord! Increase me in knowledge*" (20:114)(Rabinataj and Azadboni 2012). These verses of Quran delivers emphasize and stimulus for the entire Islamic community to struggle for getting an education.

Since there has been great stress on learning and education in Islam, Muslim scholars from the origin believe that getting islamic education and preaching it is also the part of spreading Islam and make its teaching familiar far and wide. On the other hand, considering the opinion of contemporary media, the issue with Islam, and by it consequences, with the education of Islam, is that it has never experienced a reformation that freed religious inquiry of individual from the mechanism of a religious chain of command⁽³⁾. Therefore, in many cases, it is considered that Islam itself and Islamic education remains inevitable to the inflexible codes of belief from the seventh century.

The opinion of modern media is showing the assumptions of Eurocentric, which is bound by the substantial intellectual argument from Ulema⁽⁴⁾. First debate argument suggests that Islam and its belief are never controlled by an individual or any particular authoritative body or hierarchy. Since there existed a great diversity of beliefs from the origin and personnel in religion acted as the sources of oral literature along with fulfilling the duty of being a legal advisor⁽⁵⁾. In addition to that, the arguments regarding the opinion of modern media is also based on the fact that several practices in religion and legal principles that have constituted Islam is being evolved with the passage of time under the consideration of different reforms. The reformation mainly suggested in order to make the Islamic education system effective enough.

Research Objectives:

The research objectives of this study are as follow:

1. To explore the historical perspective of Islamic Education
2. To identify the aims and objectives of islamic Education
3. To study the reformation of Madassah Education in Pakistan
4. To explore the networks of Pakistani Ulema in 19th and 20th centuries

Methodology:

The research methodology of the study is the foundational aspect, which elaborates the approaches undertaken by the researchers. In general, there are two types of research approaches viz. quantitative approach and qualitative approach. The research in which statistical figures are involved is categorized as quantitative study⁽⁶⁾. Whereas the research in which observations is being performed in order

to gather non-numerical data is known as qualitative research⁽⁷⁾. In this research study, the author has adopted a qualitative approach to formulate the findings of the research, thus relied on extensive literature in order to collect data. A total of 32 research articles have been revived with the intention to collect information from prior journals. The reason behind selecting the qualitative design of the study is based on the sensitivity of the topic. Since this topic is very critical yet crucial, which holds great importance in Pakistani society, this research tends to collect information from past research papers only so that sentiments of society remain intact.

Discussion

Historical Perspectives of Muslim Education:

Islamic education is one unique kind of education that is typically different from all other types of practices and theories of education mainly for the reason that it encompasses the influence of Quran. Considering the teachings of all Islamic scholar, the Qurān is the holy book that act as the complete outline for every person and society as well as it also act as the primary source of knowledge⁽⁸⁾. It was very revolutionary for the illiterate Arabian Society when Quran advent takes place in the seventh century⁽⁹⁾. Earlier to the advent of the Qurān, a society of Arab had greatly enjoyed the precious oral belief. However, the Quran represents the word of Divine God which requires organic interaction with the help of reciting and reading its words⁽¹⁰⁾. From this time, reading and writing the Qurān become the source of acquiring blessing of Quran and thus Islamic education was the aspiration for many pious Muslims. Hence, the concept and perspective of education in Islam has unambiguously derived its source from the mutual relationship with religious teaching.

Hence, in this manner, Islamic education originates and strengthen its roots. In this regards, Mudarris and Mu'allimi.e. pious and educated Muslims, played their role in making the teachings of Qurān more accessible to the community of Islam. Earlier, Islamic education was being provided in kuttāb that can be situated at several locations such as in Mosques, tents, or at homes⁽¹¹⁾. However, it is not found in the literature regarding when the first kuttāb was established? Nonetheless, to study the Qurān and its preaching, kuttāb can be found in every part of Islamic territory virtually by the mid of eighth century. Until the arrival of western models of education, kuttāb served as an important social function for only being the channel for formal public teaching but grooming and nourishing the mind-set of primary age children⁽¹²⁾. Until now, kuttāb has though transformed into Madrassah and Islamic education schools, it exhibits notable robustness. It endures to be a vital source of religious education in several Islamic countries⁽¹³⁾.

The origin of Islamic education defines that curriculum was mainly devised for the young male children such as kids of age four so as to offer them Quranic studies and let them understand obligations of religion, for instance, fasting, praying and ablutions. At the time of origin of Islamic education, the focus was giving on raising child with appropriate principles of Islam in accordance with the holy obligations for society and parent⁽¹⁴⁾. The reason why Islamic education mainly focuses on children is that Abdul Tibawi stated that the mind of the child

is "like a white clean paper, once anything is written on it, right or wrong, it will be difficult to erase it or superimpose new writing upon it" (1972; p. 38)⁽¹⁵⁾.

In the earlier time, the approach utilized for teaching Islamic education among children was not only strict but also harsh and cruel for the young child. In order to correct the laziness or imprecision of children, corporal punishment was frequently used⁽¹⁶⁾. The central curriculum of kuttāb revolves around memorization of Qurans, however, very less or no attention was given towards making children analyze and discuss the meaning of text written in the Qurān. The rule was very simple back then, children that have memorized greater section of Quran, they were potential of promoting to higher stages of Islamic education. In most the cases there were two major areas on which western analysts criticize the kuttāb system include too much dependence on memorization and inadequate variety of subjects taught. On the contrary, the current system of kuttāb also focus on recitation and memorization of Quran but it also entail understanding and critical thinking the preaching of Islam.

It was found that due to the reason of placing values on the memorizing aspect during the early religious training of children, their approaches of learning disturb greatly which also affect them when they enter into the formal education system⁽¹⁷⁾. One of the most common issue that is being faced by modern educators of the Muslim world is that students are not capable of carrying out critical analysis and thinking independently despite the fact that they memorizes abundant volumes of books and notes⁽¹⁸⁾.

The period between 10th and 13th century is regarded as the golden period for Islamic education as it was under the captaincy of Islamic emperors. In this era, Europe seems to be intellectually hesitant and stationary, whereas Islamic Scholarship was at its peak, providing a remarkable directness to the balanced sciences, art, and even literature⁽¹⁹⁾. Most of the contribution from Muslim scientists also take place in the same era. Paradoxically, Islamic intellectuals conserved much of the knowledge of the Greeks that had been forbidden by the Christian sphere. Some of the other remarkable innovations were made in the field of botany, chemistry, mineralogy, physics, astronomy, and mathematics. It would not be wrong to state that Muslim scholars and scientists of that era regarded scientific facts as the tools to assess the religious truth.

Historical perspective of Muslim education, as defined in the study. It suggests that 'Ulema' (religious scholars) by the thirteenth century had become "*self-appointed interpreters and guardians of religious knowledge... learning was confined to the transmission of traditions and dogma, and [was] hostile to research and scientific inquiry*"⁽²⁰⁾. Despite the incredible legacy of earlier periods, the current Islamic world is perceived as incapable to react either ethnically or pedagogically to the blitz of Western development by the 18th century. European colonialism had one of the most harmful facet as the worsening of local cultural norms with the help of secularism. The early modernizers did not understand fully that to which extent secular education is fundamentally conflicting with the thought of Islamic Education and lifestyle⁽²¹⁾. In the early period of Muslim education, it was decided that religious education was a separate form of education which is personal responsibility; thus, it should not be merged with

modern education. However, now it is merged with the contemporary education and producing educated children that have competencies of analyzing matter from an Islamic point of view as well as considering the solution from the scientific aspect. Hence, a decade before, there was mainly two distinct systems of education i.e. religious and modern. However, now, both distinguished system is integrating and formulating the shape of Islamic Integrated Education system that most of the modern Islamic schools are offering.

Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education:

In the Arabic language, the term education refers to three different meanings which demonstrate different dimensions of education as observed under the belief of Islam. Observing the number of Ulema from nineteenth and twentieth-century education in the formal sense is commonly regarded as ta'lim that originated from Aalim (male Precher of Islamic Education) or Aalima (female Preacher of Islamic) implies to the meaning of knowing, perceiving, learning, and awareness⁽²²⁾. Tarbiyah, as the form of educational dimension, used to signify the state of spirituality and moral development as per the guidance and will of Allah⁽²³⁾. Another meaning of education under Islamic belief is Ta'dīb that implies to the meaning of refining, culturing, and mannerism. Ta'dības the form of educational dimension used to suggest the development of person's social behaviour. Hence, it is found that aims of education under Islamic context is not limited to only learning and memorizing the verse of the Qurān. However, it is purely based on understanding the essence of teaching concerning every aspect of living.

Islamic education entails the process which addresses complete person from its social dimensions to spirituality⁽²⁴⁾. As one of the famous Muslim philosopher, Syed Muhammad al-Naquib al-Attasof the twentieth century that integrated and comprehensive approach for education in an Islamic context is focused on the "*balanced growth of the total personality...through training Man's spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and bodily senses...such that faith is infused into the whole of his personality*" (Al-Attas, 1979; p. 158)⁽²⁵⁾. According to the theory of Islamic education, knowledge is gained so as to symbolize and achieve perfection in all the aspect of being human. Under Islamic perspective, the admirable and most useful role model in terms of a perfect human being is the last prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W) hence, the major goal of all Islamic education institutions is to provide teachings that influence people to live their lives in accordance with the life lived by Prophet Peace be Upon Him.

In order to further explain the aim of Islamic Education, Seyyed Hossein Nasr asserted that while it prepares humankind for the satisfaction and contentment in life, its eventual aim is "*the abode of permanence and all education points to the permanent world of eternity*" (1984; pg. 7)⁽²⁶⁾. Hence aims and objectives of Islamic education is dual in nature, i.e. gaining scholarly knowledge (which is acquired with the help of applying reasoning and logics) and nurturing otherworldly/spiritual knowledge (which can be obtained with the help of divine exposure and spiritual experiences). However, Ulema in prior centuries has not made efforts in order to make the provision of education equal for both, men and women. However, now several Muslim Scholars have been focusing on making

Islamic education available to males as well as females⁽²⁷⁾. To this end, perspective getting Islamic education is not limited to learning Quranic Verses. However, it is the medium to develop more preeminent ethical and divine realization the leads towards conviction and virtuous deeds.

Madrassah Education Reforms:

Reformation of the Pakistani education system is observed as the instrument to combat against radicalization and extremism in the country. However, textbooks in the curriculum are indeed examined in terms of spreading the widespread narrative that are conflict-ridden and religiously biased⁽²⁸⁾. But a number of observers have identified those schools that are explicitly providing religious education such as Madrassah as the most problematic barrier in the struggles of reforming education system of Pakistan. In several other research papers as well, Madrassah system has been identified as the place that cultivates extremism and intolerance by the international community since the war on terror took place back in 2001⁽²⁹⁾. In such consequences, there is constant pressure on the government of Pakistan from its worldwide allies, specifically the U.S., to watch and continuously investigate their activities.

On the other hand, Madaris constitute an extremely disjointed fragment of socio-educational bodies which have a different level of resources, quality of service, size, or formalization. In its roots, Madaris are majorly distinguished along the sectarian lines wherein most of the Madaris in Pakistan belong to the Sunni sect. In 1955, Wafaq – the non-governmental Madrassah Network Association was created in order to embody the diverse orientations of Islamic belief being educated at Madaris⁽³⁰⁾. At this moment, five major independent Wafaqs provide and monitor education in their corresponding orientation of sects, namely: Jamaate-Islami, Ahl-e-Hadith, Deobandi, and Bareilvi. These orientations belong to Sunni sect based on the different academic and political affiliations. However, the fifth Waqaf is related with the Shi'ite sect of Islam.

Taking the current situation of Pakistan into consideration, Madrassah are not only serving as the place to provide religious education. However, it also serves as the shelter for orphans, underprivileged children, and youth where they receive free education, lodging, and boarding facilities. With the help of these facilities, Madrassah education has been continuously expanding its social reach of education and making it accessible for the larger pools of students which helps in gaining free access to Islamic education across the country⁽³¹⁾. While it is observed commonly that several students join Madrassah for pursuing Islamic education, but it is also argued that many students get education from Madaris only as an option available to get education based on socio-economic situation. In this regard, Madaris in Pakistani Society not only provides the platform for education but also act as the social welfare institution⁽³²⁾.

On the other hand, it is also noticed that madaris for providing Islamic education has not been transformed into proper schools having approved curriculum that focuses on delivering Islamic education along with the western education system⁽³³⁾. As found in the research that there are number of schools in the Pakistan that has been established with the vision of providing conventional education along with the facility to peruse Islamic and religious education

individually for girls and boys. The example may include A-Huda Al-Mumtaz Academy, Suffah saviour school, and many such schooling systems. However, traditional approach of providing only Islamic education in Madrassah has also been transformed. Now, madaris also provided many of the opportunities to learn principals and beliefs of Islam having worth equal to any other degree programme worldwide such as Al-Huda International Islamic Institute, Olives School, Hayat-ul-Islam, International Islamic University Schools (I.I.U.I.), or Hira Foundation School. In transforming and reforming education system for Muslim children, the role of Muslim scholars i.e. Ulema cannot be neglected such as Mufti-e-Azam Pakistan Hazrat Maulana Muhammad Shafi(R.A.) has founded school like Hira Foundation wherein children receive top-class education along with the Islamic education such as opportunities to Hifz and learn Arabic Language.

Analysis of Pakistani Ulema in the 19th and 20th Century:

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Muslims had faced a significant decline in their terms of their political power and soon Europeans in the Subcontinent promptly introduced education. Soon after the hold of British, the role and networks of Pakistani Ulema has transformed as the socio-political context of Subcontinent has changed⁽³⁴⁾. Under the rule of Muslim leaders in the nineteenth century, the role of Ulema help privileges which had lost with the collapse of Muslim Political Leader. It was also being noticed that ordinary Muslims, due to changed political context, have become more concerned regarding the survival of their faith on Islam. Under these circumstances, networks of Ulema strengthen with ordinary Muslims hence, in the mid of 19th century Ulema had more connection of ordinary people instead of the rulers of that time⁽³⁵⁾. Additionally, several reformist movement, during the time period of 19th and 20th century, were also commanded by well-known Ulema along with the support of other Muslims such as Syed Jawad Naqvi or Khalid Masud.

Since the 19th century the syllabus in almost all madrassas obeys the most basic standard of Dars-i-Nizami. Islamic education mainly revolved around Hanafi fiqh in all the madrassas expect for Shia madaris wherein more than 500 years old curriculum is being followed. Hanafi Ulema used to teach a student with the help of commentaries and marginal noted and did not have proper command on the Arabic Language⁽³⁶⁾. Hence, Ulema of that time only enables students to learn verses by heart instead of explaining the text, which makes children to only use their memory for memorizing instead of using their analytical powers. Due to this limitation and drawback stagnation of knowledge was prevalent and only earned criticism from western scholars as well as from the Pakistani scholars who knew Arabic.

As the education system in Pakistan exemplifies solid dualism between madrassas education and modern schools, it is commonly observed that middle-class families send their children to madrassas mainly however, kids from posh families are commonly observed to be going in modern school until 20th century⁽³⁷⁾. The main reason behind this division is based on networks of Ulema that gives birth to negativity towards different sects. In the 20th century, the sectarian division was very high, and it was very violent in society⁽³⁸⁾. However, later in the 21st century, Ulema Network becomes wide and extensive, and student

from posh families also enrolled in the schools of Islamic education and sectarian division has been noticed with the decline⁽³⁹⁾.

Conclusion:

Ever since the origin of Islamic education, reforms have been a major concern, especially 9/11. It has increased the concern of all international bodies to reform Islamic education in Madrassas. Therefore, the government of Pakistan, and especially the western countries are now eagerly trying to implement changes in the Madrassa system while believing that non-reformed madrassas contribute immensely to serve as the training grounds for extremists and terrorists. However, it is also noticed in the research papers that Ulema and other Muslim scholars of contemporary time are also in favor of reforming the traditional system of Madrassas in Pakistan by incorporating new curriculum and educational setting that effectively and essentially based on striking a balance between Islamic teaching and Modern Western Education.



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