

Religious Education and Persistence of Poverty: A Study of Deeni Madrassas in Southern Punjab

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ABSTRACT

The phenomena of religious education and secular education are coexisting and creating apartheid in the country. The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between religious education imparted to the students of deeni madrassas and persistence of poverty. A sample of 125 students and 40 teachers of the five madrassas were selected through a simple random sampling. All the respondents of both categories were interviewed by using a predesigned interview schedule. The data later on presented in the quantitative form. The research suggested that only imparting religious education to the students is the major source of isolation from the mainstream of the society which incapacitates them to work in the job market. Hence, they became the victim of poverty. It can safely conclude that there is a relationship between religious education and poverty persistence in Pakistan.

Keywords: Deeni Madrassa, secular education, poverty persistence, religious education

INTRODUCTION

The Pakistan National Education Policy of 1999 lamented that there was an "almost a caste-like distinction between those who feel at ease in expressing themselves in Formal and those who do not". This situation continues to exist and is a product of the country's education system, which appears to suffer from a kind of 'educational apartheid'.¹

There are two broad streams of education, characterized basically by the medium of instruction and philosophy of school of thought. One stream uses English and imparts secular education and the other uses Urdu, Arabic and Persian which provide religious education. English-medium schools can be further divided into two broad categories. First, 'elite' schools run by missionary or other institutions, and private schools that charge at least a four-figure monthly tuition fee per child and whose total education costs per child can even approach five figures. And second, 'non-elite' private schools that charge up to a three figure monthly tuition per child. But the philosophy and objective lies behind this system is similar. Urdu-medium educational institutions can also be classified into two broad categories.

First, government schools and, in some cases, private schools, that charge nominal tuition per child. And second, madrassas, (institutions of Islamic religious learning) that charge nominal or no tuition fees, and in many cases, even offer free boarding and lodging. There are several other overlapping sub-streams within the four categories: government model schools, cadet schools run by the military, schools run by religious, military and private foundations, individually-run madrassas, etc. But the core emphasis of this study is to check the duality of institution (formal educational system run by the state which impart modern scientific education and the madrassas education system which in doctrine typical religious education). Since these sub-streams account for a very small percentage of the total number of schooled students in the country, they have not been included in the analysis.

The Study evolved from the assumption that there is duality of institutions in the area of education in Pakistan .There are two types of institution. Though not mutually exclusive in some respect operating in the same setup one system can be termed as official system run by the state and private sector (the official schools, colleges and universities) while other has been named as indigenous system run by the local population (the madrassas).

Both systems operate under different philosophies and pedagogical parameters. The official schools impart education and training according to government policies. In this system .the teachers are appointed and paid by the government policies as such they are accountable to the government .The school curricula are designed by the government. The certificates and degrees are issued by these schools are accepted for various public and private sector jobs. The students of these schools have the opportunity to get integrated with the institutions of higher learning within the country and abroad.²

The central assumption of this study is that the existence of indigenous institutions tends to create social exclusion and consequential poverty. The argument is that the individuals who are educated from a madrassa lag behind and lack capability to compete with the individuals who are educated from official schools. For instance a graduate of official school learns English. Mathematics and other basic science subjects and therefore has better prospects to work for government or private enterprises. Whereas a graduate of madrassa who except memorizing *koran* and some knowledge of Persian and ancient Arabic, has no training orientations to work in a modern commercial Organization. Hence a person who depends on madrassa education could be doubly disadvantageous. He comes up with education having little functional utility in the job market plus his exposure towards practical life is restricted and he is indoctrinated to perceive the things in a way that makes him largely isolated from the society.

“It is widely held that modern education can mould people into enlightened, empathetic, risk taking, thick skinned, industrious and mobile personalities that education will be of an immense help in bringing about democratization, secularism, national integration as well as economic prosperity and proper political socialization in the country. It is generally believed that the axe of the education can cut down the thick roots of traditions, superstitions, ignorance, backwardness, parochialism etc”³

The point here is that the duality of institutions provides two different categories of people in terms of their training orientations: are different in terms of “worldview” (aspirations, ideology and life style. A graduate of official school is trained keeping in view the job requirements in the market. The curricula is designed and developed by the state–controlled institutions, whereas the graduates of madrassa are taught syllabi designed by the clergy which has its on specific aims and objectives. These objectives may not necessarily be in line with the objectives of the state and state sponsored education system.⁴

The prime assumption of this study is that the social capital is conducive and conclusive in economic development and poverty alleviation. As the main economic system of the society is based on the formal education system and people who get this education generally achieve more financial stability. Where, on the other hand, it becomes very difficult for those people who could not attain modern education to sustain in the main stream of the society. Similarly, they avail very meager economic and social opportunities that interlocks them to live in this state and hence caused poverty persistence. In Pakistan, millions of students are getting this sort of education who in turn appeared to be semi-literate, nonscientific, semi-skilled and low income producer clerics.

No reliable statistics about the number of the religious Madrassas and their enrollment are available after 1972, when their number was as high as 893. This number had increased from 137 in 1947 to 244 in 1950 and, to 671 in 1960. During the past 22 years, their number is estimated to have increased by over 50 per cent to about 1,400 with an enrollment of well over 150,000 students. Of the 893 institutions in 172 there were 354 belonging to the Deobandi sect, 267 Bareilvi, 144 Ahle Hadith, 41 Shia and 105 others. Province wise, the Punjab had 580, Sindh 130, the NWFP 149 and Balochistan 44. District wise Multan topped with Sukkur 30, Bunnu 27, Faisalabad 13 and Gujranwala 8. Similarly, the number of students in Madrassas and Jamias was the highest in the Punjab where it was over 81,00. Sindh had 8,500; the NWFP 7,800 and Baluchistan 1,800. The number of teachers these Madrassas was over 5,000.⁶

Of the 2,500 Madrassas in the Punjab, the Zakat funded Madrassas do not amount to more than around 850. Besides, of some 2,225,000 students registered in Madrassas all over the Punjab, less than 20 percent belong to these institutions.⁷

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In present era, education is gaining importance among all layers of the society. Historically, this sector was ignored by the policy makers, educationist and civil society organizations hence posed low literacy in the country. In Pakistan, state of the education is really discouraging in terms of literacy rate and quality of education which has serious implications on the socio-economic fabric of the Pakistan.

Madrassas got more importance after the incidence of 9/11 in USA and Pakistan is the country where a mushroom growth of these can be viewed in all areas. In the wake of the incidence, Taliban movement was blamed as master mind of this incidence by the global community. It is widely accepted that the generic and rapid growth of the Taliban movement has taken place in the late 90s in the consequence of the Soviet occupation on Afghanistan. The main breed to strengthen the Taliban movement was supplied by the Pakistan and the students of these Madrassas were used as fuel for this movement. After the war against Russia, this movement later shifted to Pakistan and phenomena of sectarian killing and violence, klashankove culture got sudden increase which makes madrassas more controversial institution in the country.

Poverty is increasing in Pakistan despite the hectic efforts taken by the government, non-governmental and other civil society organizations. Poverty is embedded in the socio-economic and demographic structure of the country. It caused so many problems like illiteracy, backwardness, crime and violence, political and social unrest among the masses, the secret agitation against the government as well as against the system. It has so many causes but one of the main causes of poverty is mass production of semi-skilled, less enlightened and low literate young lot which seems wastage of human resource. Only imparting religious education without mixing scientific and modern education does not serve the need of the individual, economic system as well as the society. Consequently, students get low paid job, underemployment, develop typical and rigid attitude towards life, excluded from the mainstream of the society having divergent outlook. There are some elements which have come on the surface that only religious education makes ones rigid and create a clear cut sectarian divide with in a religion which sometimes serious threat to the system in the shape of sectarian killings of the innocent people.

CENTRAL ASSUMPTION OF THE STUDY

“Religious education imparted in the students of madrassa does not ensure economic security to its students hence lead to poverty persistence in Pakistan.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study has the following objectives:

1. To know about the socioeconomic background of the students of the madrassas;
2. To know about future job prospects of the students and the sectors where they can get employment; and
3. To know understand the role of religious education is perpetuating poverty among the students

REVIEW OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDIES

The purpose of this is to review and analyze the literature related to the present study. As few researches were available, which directly related to the present study thus, in present section, an attempt has been made to provide empirical studies on dual education system and poverty persistence.

Mazhar and Hussain (2001) tried to explore the relationship between religious education, job occupation and financial attainment among students of deeni madrassas. The study was conducted in the madrassas of southern Punjab. Students and teachers of the madrassas were interviewed in this concern and a pre-designed interview schedule was used as a tool of data collection. A sample of two hundred respondents was interviewed. The core finding of the study showed that there is a clear cut relationship between religious education and level of income. Most of the respondents were getting about 2000 to 3000 rupees per month from deeni madrassas with free boarding and lodging facility provided by the same. It was come to the notice of the researcher that the majority of the respondents belong to the lower class and their one of the family members was already associated with this profession.

During the study, it was concluded that the religious scholars were found in the category of the lower middle class with the higher degree of contentment. Religious education, further concluded that, develop divergent outlook among the students of madrassas and socialize in such a way that they feel themselves alien for this world and camouflaged themselves under the typical interpretation of the religion. A limited and different stock of social capital of the religious scholar in general and of the students in particular excluded them from the main stream of the society consequently they were enjoying very limited income and employment related opportunities. Continuous production of the clerics from this channel more strengthens the roots of institution in the society and hence became this institution as an integral part of this system.⁸

Another study was conducted by Ather (2002) and the focus of the study was to check the relationship between educational qualification, type of education, job placement and level of income generation. The study was conducted in Islamabad and Lahore districts of the Punjab and students of commerce and computer sciences in degree classes who have passed their final examination, on job individuals and students of deeni madrassas were interviewed with the help of interview guide. Separate group discussions were also held with the key informants. To increase the validity of the research, some university teachers were also consulted and their interviews were recorded. A sample of 400 different respondents was selected by using convenient sampling method.

Key findings of the study suggested that there is a strong relationship between level of education and level of income. The hypothesis of the study was proved with the fact that more the better institution from the person gets degree, the better the chances of job placement at better place which shows the importance of education institution and curricula being taught in the institution. Data showed that the students who were well wired with the friends, colleagues and seniors were better adjusted in job market as compare to those who were less associated with these sources. The key sources of the job placement appear to be friends, followed by colleagues and senior colleagues which show the importance of social capital in job hunting.

The researcher finally concluded that modern education is conclusive for the better job placement and financial attainment. As for as religious education concerned, students of madrassas showed lesser interest in job hunting and claimed that their education is equally important in national development.⁹

Social Development Institute (2003) assessed the state of education in Pakistan through conducting country wide study with the objective to assess the relationship between social classes and enrollment trends. Detail survey of the schools and income of the parents of the students was obtained by using interview schedule. Some available statistics regarding income and literacy level were also consulted in order to make a detail analysis.

Among students enrolled in madrassas, 43 per cent belong to poor households earning less than Rs. 50,000 per annum and about 30 per cent belong to lower-middle income households earning between Rs. 50,000 and Rs. 100,000 per annum. In other words, nearly three-quarters of the students in madrassas belong to poor or lower-middle class households. The remaining 27 per cent of students belong to upper-middle and upper income households earning over Rs. 100,000 per annum. It is notable that about 12 per cent of madrassa students belong to upper income households earning over Rs. 250,000 per annum. During the enrollment in madrassas, rural concentration was found during the study which appears to be about more than 50 per cent.

Evidence that the madrassas cater primarily to the poor and lower income sections of the population is supported by other research. According to one survey of madrassa students, 89 per cent of respondents cited socioeconomic factors and 6 per cent cited religious factors for joining madrassas. Another study found 80 per cent of madrassa students in Peshawar, Multan and Gujranwala to be sons of small or landless peasants, rural artisans, rural labourers, small shopkeepers, and imams of village mosques. SPDC's own investigation has found that, in a majority of cases, parents admitted their children to madrassas as they could not afford to feed them or educate them even in low-cost government schools.

Madrassas are able to cater to the mass of poor students based on two factors. First, their own operating costs are extremely low compared to other private or even government educational institutions. Average annual cost of tuition, books, food and accommodation is reported to be as low as Rs. 6,000 per student or less. And second, madrassas are financed liberally through philanthropy and, to some extent, government grants. A major factor in the increasing popularity of madrassas among the poor can also be attributed to the 'welfare state' role they perform.¹⁰

METHODOLOGY

This highlights the research procedure, which the researcher followed while conducting this study.

Research Method

The researcher has used survey method in the present research. In addition to gain more detail insight about the scenario; the researcher also carried out in-depth interviews of the teachers and students and took special notes in order to increase the validity of the information.

Universe

The universe of the present study consisted of students and teachers of religious madrassas who have completed their religious education and students of the madrassas residing in the District of Multan (Punjab), Pakistan.

Sampling

By following this philosophy, the researcher selected 125 cases of students and 40 cases of teachers of madrassas by using simple random sampling technique.

Tool for Data Collection

For the present study, pre-designed interview schedule was used as a tool for data collection for interviewing teachers, students and their parents.

DATA ANALYSIS

Key Findings about the Students

Table 1 given below shows age distribution of the respondents getting education in the madrassas. Data shows that majority of the respondents (45.60%) belonged to the age group of the 21 – 25 years which is ideal for the higher education. The second most dominant category of the age (36.80%) was found between 16 – 20 years of age. Only 8.80% students have been found in the age of less than 15 years which shows that they just started their education career few months before. Whereas a meager percentage (2.40%) of the respondents also belong to the age category of 31 years above that shows longer stay in the madrassas and late start of their education. The age of students and their level of interest also affect the students' level of attainment and duration of stay in the madrassa.

Table 1. Age wise distribution of the Respondents

<i>Age (in Years)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Less than 15 years	11	8.80
16 – 20	46	36.80
21 – 25	57	45.60
26 – 30	8	6.40
31 and above	3	2.40
Total	125	100

Family size of the respondents was inquired by the researcher and it was found that family member of the respondents were found quite higher which is mention in the table 5 given below. Having 7 – 8 children per family was found as a dominant trend (33.60%) which is quite higher if one correspond it with the reported average monthly income of the

respondents. There were some cases (8.00%) in which the respondents were having more than 9 children which is very much high. Only 4.00% of the respondents were reported to be only 2 children in the family. Data show that the birth control practices are not very much common among the parents of the respondents.

Table 2. Family Size of the Respondents

<i>Children</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
1 – 2	5	4.00
3 – 4	19	15.20
5 – 6	36	28.80
7 – 8	42	33.60
8 – 9	13	18.40
9 and above	10	8.00
Total	125	100

Table 3. Potential Sectors of Job after Completing Education

<i>Sectors</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Imam Masjid	89	35.18
Khateeb in private Masjid	73	28.85
Administrator of Madrassa	64	25.30
Khateeb in Government Masjids	23	9.09
Politicians	2	0.79
Translator to Government. officials	2	0.79
Total	253*	100

*: Multiple Answers

Madrassa education is not sufficient to get good job in the market said by 69.60% of the respondents. Whereas a slightly less than one third majority (30.40%) was agreed that it is sufficient to have good job. This question was further extended to the expected monthly income from their employment after completing their education. As table 4 shows 3.20% of the respondents were expecting less than 2000 rupees monthly income which is very low and the same figure of the respondents was expecting more than 7000 rupees a month which is sufficient for subsistence. More than two third majority of the respondents (34.40%) were agreed that their monthly income after completing education would be between 2000 – 3000 rupees per month. Average monthly income mention by the respondents is very low that is rather less than poverty line if one super impose this income on demographic structure, family size, perceived professions of getting job and respondents negative attitude towards family planning shows that there is a clear cut relationship between religious education and persistence of poverty in Pakistan.

Table 4. Expected Monthly Income after Completing Education

<i>Monthly Income (in Rs.)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
> - 2000	4	3.20
2001 - 3000	43	34.40
3001 - 4000	35	28.00
4001 - 5000	21	16.80
5001 - 6000	10	8.00
6001 - 7000	8	6.40
7001 and above	4	3.20
Total	125	100

Table 5 given below indicates that the students themselves were not agreed that madrassas education is compatible with the modern economic trends as it was said by the 54.40% of the respondents. Remaining were agreed that is it compatible with modern economic trends.

Table 5. Compatibility of Madrassa Education and Modern Economic Trends

<i>Category</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	57	45.60
No	68	54.40
Total	125	100

Finally an opinion was taken that only imparting madrassas education among the students without mixing it with modern and scientific knowledge and attitude is not the one of the main cause of reduced human capital among youth that hamper the growth and working opportunities and consequently leads to the ultimate poverty. Majority of the respondents (74.40%) were agreed with this fact and 25.60% of the respondents were not agreed and denoted it as theoretical statement (table 6).

Table 6. Opinion about Madrassa Education as a source of Poverty

<i>Category</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	93	74.40
No	32	25.60
Total	125	100

Key findings of The Teachers

Average monthly income from all sources was tried to assess and table 7 given below listed the amount with percentage. Lowest income category which came out during the interview was less than 4000 rupees per month. It is interesting to note that more than fifty percent (55.00%) of the respondents were belonged to the same category which is below poverty level keeping in view family size of the teachers (Table 64) which is 8 – 9 children. The next

majority (22.50%) belonged to the income bracket of 5000 rupees per month. Only one respondent was found who was earning more than 7000 rupees per month that is by and large equal to income required for subsistence.

Table 7. Respondents Monthly Income

<i>Monthly Income (in Rs.)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
> 4000	22	55.00
4001 – 5000	9	22.50
5001 – 6000	3	7.50
6001 – 7000	5	12.50
7001 and above	1	2.50
Total	40	100

Table 8. Opinion That Religious Education Is Sufficient For Prosper Life

<i>Category</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	29	72.50
No	11	27.50
Total	40	100

Majority of the respondents (72.50%) agreed that only religious education is sufficient for having prospered life. Only 27.50% of the respondents said that it is not sufficient (table 8) because economics is getting importance and religious education does not ensure economic prosperity.

Responding to the question on religious education and prosper life, multiple answers were given regard which are listed in table 10. Making complete Muslim (46.94%), securing heaven (26.53%), serving Islam (12.24%) and producing religious scholars were the objectives of the religious education told by the respondent to the researcher.

Table 10. Purpose of Madrassas Education

<i>Purposes</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
To make complete Muslims	23	46.94
To secure heaven	13	26.53
To serve Islam	6	12.24
Make religious scholars	7	14.29
Total	49*	100

*: Multiple Answers

Teaching in madrassa, Khateeb, administrator of in the madrassa, serving in government religious department were the perceived future job placement areas for their students told by the respondent as given in table 11.

Table 11. Respondents Perception about Future Adjustment of the Students

<i>Opinion</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Teaching in the madrassa	29	47.54
Khateeb	18	29.51
Administrator of madrassa	7	11.48
Serving in government religious department	7	11.48
Others		
Total	61*	100

*: Multiple Responses

CONCLUSIONS

Keeping in view the above facts yielded by the present research, the researcher drew the following conclusions:

Students of the madrassas were having very limited attainment of formal education but high attainment in the field of religious education that immune and socialize them in such a way which reduces place for formal education. The curriculum, teaching methods and styles which offered to them were so old that cut down the relationship between modern education and education of the madrassas. Therefore, they trimmed themselves in the pool of aliens and fit themselves for the better survival in the world of religion. Continuous and long tenured education and stay of the students in the madrassas reduces the chances of attaining formal education from the official school of the state. Additionally, they were inculcated such kinds of education that hamper their socio-cultural outlook matching with the world, hence they make life after death as the very parameters of achievements in life.

Madrassas internal social, economic, political and administrative system combined with the old traditional curricula and teaching methods, specific hidden political agenda of the madrassa, teachers inability and incompetency to have knowledge on contemporary issues and science subjects does not indoctrinate required level of human, social and intellectual capital among students which reduces the chances of getting employment in the mainstream of society. On the basis of the above mentioned ground, madrassa was not ‘creating poverty’ rather it was providing temporary relief to the poor children by educating and providing free boarding and lodging to them. However, madrassas were “reproducing poverty” as the poor children did not get any relevant education; hence they stood ineligible to occupy any better paid job. As a result, they remain in the vicious circle of poverty. This system further interlocks annually millions of students in the clutches of this duality of educational system and put them in the permanent and deep pool of poverty.

On the basis of the empirical findings and above mentioned arguments, it can finally be concluded that the dual system of education was contributing to the persistence of poverty in Pakistan.

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