

Koch, Thorsten
 University of Wales Trinity Saint David
 TRDL7066
 19 March 2018

IN HOW FAR DO PAKISTANI MADRASSAS (MADĀRIS) CONTRIBUTE TO RADICALISATION?

(c. 1071 words excluding footnotes and references; neither title, nor bibliography, part of the core text;
 references based on MLA format; transliteration: Oxford Islamic Studies Online.)

Introduction

Pakistani *madrassa* schools (pl. *madāris* in Urdu) are to be understood as either rooms associated with a mosque, or fully-fledged theological seminaries¹. Many of them offer lessons as well as accommodation for free to mainly poverty-stricken and underprivileged students². There are several reasons for poor families to choose *madāris* over public or private schools, mainly financial and social^{3 4 5}.

The overall number of Pakistani *madāris* has not always been clear. In 2002, the Ministry for Religious Affairs estimated about 10,000^{6 7 8}. 2015 saw 26,000 registered and, according to the Interior Ministry, 9,000 unregistered *madāris* operating⁹. *Madrassa* enrolment represents between 1 and 10 percent of overall scholarisation in the country¹⁰.

While Rahman states that sectarian conflict lessened after independence, the techniques of refutation (Urdu: *radd*) of other sects' divergent beliefs and rituals, taught by

¹ Kfir, 2012, 65

² See ICG, 2005, 1; Kfir, 2012, 66

³ Abbas, 2015, 1

⁴ Rahman, 2013, 1

⁵ see ICG, 2005, i

⁶ Shaikh, 2008, 600

⁷ ICG, 2005, 2

⁸ "P.W. Singer, however, gave the figure of 45,000 *madāris* as early as 2000 but quotes no source for this number" (Rahman, 2013, 1).

⁹ Craig, 2015, 1

¹⁰ Sajjad, 2013, 110, see Borchgrevink, 2011, 4-5

madāris, has been identified as a source of sectarian disagreement^{11 12}. Some 200,000 students graduate from a *madrassa* each year, most of whom “remain jobless”¹³. Those of the *madāris* entertaining *jihadi* links “send their students [on to militant] training”¹⁴.

Historical overview

General Zia-Ul-Haq came to power in 1977, adopting a policy of “re-Islamisation” which led to politicisation and radicalisation among the main sects of Pakistan^{15 16}. In the early 1980s, some *madāris* were chosen to “facilitate the conduit of military training and arms for the Afghan war”¹⁷. In the 1990s, “some [*madāris*] served as pipelines for ... insurgents in Indian-ruled Kashmir”^{18 19}.

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks sparking international debate, several Western institutions and organisations, Pakistani writers and scholars criticized *madāris* for their role in sectarian and *jihadist* violence^{20 21}. The debate evoking perceptions of “warfare training, terrorism” and an archaic mode of education initially led to some level of simplification^{22 23}. Later analyses speaking of a “*madrassa* myth” fail to fully rehabilitate religious seminaries²⁴. Some *madāris* do maintain historical links to militant groups^{25 26}. Moreover, later studies fall short of disproving that ideology, taught in *madāris*, is relevant to conflict observed in Pakistan^{27 28}.

¹¹ Iqbal & Raza, 2015, 29

¹² Rahman, 2013, 1

¹³ Ahmad, 2017, 1

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ Saleem, 2014, 107-109

¹⁶ Shaikh, 2008, 600

¹⁷ Reetz, 2011, 185-86

¹⁸ SISA, 2013, 12-14

¹⁹ Craig, 2015, 1

²⁰ see Sajjad, 2013, 105

²¹ The World Bank, the US Institute of Peace, and RAND Corporation, among others. The ICG, due to a calculation gone wrong, gave an incorrect figure of students enrolled in *madāris*. Though the error was subsequently corrected, some news outlets quoted the initial figure (see Borchgrevink, 2011, 3).

²² ICG, 2005, 1

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ see Sajjad, 2013, 108, 111

²⁵ Borchgrevink, 2011, 14

²⁶ McClure, 2009, 334

²⁷ see Fair, 2015, 29

²⁸ Sajjad, 2013, 110-111

Context of Radicalisation

Some *madāris*, chiefly those linked to “banned militant organisations”, serve as sanctuaries for prospective terrorists, even though terrorism as a concept is blatantly rejected, especially suicide attacks inside Pakistan²⁹. Despite disagreeing with the ideology of the *Afghan Taliban*, *madrassa* staff often expressed moral support for the armed movement³⁰.

According to officials, 2 to 3 percent of *madāris* play a role in radicalisation^{31 32}. Rana ascribes direct *jihadist* activity to 10 to 15 percent of *madāris*, and Nayyar does so with regard to 5 percent, adding that another 20 to 25 percent may provide logistical support to armed groups³³.

A domestic issue for Pakistan is the *madāris*' association with sectarian conflict, as each sect promotes their distinct view and interpretation of Islamic teachings and via religious seminaries, *khateeb*s delivering “fierce speeches”^{34 35}. Alternative perspectives are being refuted or ignored by the respective schools of thought, and often polarised and divisive sectarian identity is then transferred to society, which can eventually lead to violence³⁶.

Ali reviewed *madrassa* newsletters and other material, concluding that the seminaries often “claim victimisation of Muslims”³⁷. Some embark on misinformation campaigns, using “prejudicial sources”³⁸. Oftentimes, they slate a state of siege by detractors of Islam as well as the 'War against Terrorism' which Pakistan takes part in^{39 40}. Despite that, they disagree “with the conventional notion of terrorism”⁴¹.

²⁹ SISA, 2013, 10-11; Rana, 2009, 8

³⁰ Rana, 2009, 7

³¹ Craig, 2015, 1

³² However, scientific studies offer different estimates: among the *madrassas* Rana visited until 2009, 62 percent had “political affiliations”, 59 percent were linked to political parties and 18 percent with *jihadi* factions (Rana, 2009, 4).

³³ Craig, 2015, 1

³⁴ see SISA, 2013, 14-15

³⁵ Ramzan, 2015, 421

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ Ali, 2009, 4

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ Rahman, 2013, 1

⁴⁰ See Rana, 2009, 5

⁴¹ Rana, 2009, 5

Criticism of Madrassa Curricula

Madāris render their students “more susceptible to extremist groups”⁴². The curricula of religious seminaries are founded on the classical *Dars-i-Nizāmī*⁴³, but also teach the doctrines of their respective schools of thought, or sects⁴⁴. In modern times, the *Dars-i-Nizāmī* has been criticised for being “medieval, stagnant and, therefore, irrelevant to contemporary concerns”, failing to invite students to deal with contemporary issues and modern life⁴⁵. In turn, students left without practical skills are vulnerable to be radicalised by *jihadist* ideology^{46 47}.

Pakistani *madāris* stand accused of neglecting critical and contextual study of Islamic sources, and of conveying anti-Western ideas⁴⁸. Critiques of *madrassa* textbooks fall short of understanding the ideological factors which lead to radicalisation, as most books are written in Arabic, whereas the lectures, in *Urdu* or *Pashto*, might deviate and lead students to embrace a narrow or even militant worldview⁴⁹.

It has often been stated that Pakistani *madrassa* curricula, aside from the Islamic subject matter, are outdated⁵⁰. The government has responded by introducing reforms to strengthen “formal subjects such as English, Mathematics, Pakistan Studies/Social Studies, and General Science along[side] religious education”⁵¹. Efforts to curb *jihadi* as well as sectarian texts from the *madāris*’ syllabi have, as yet, yielded mixed success⁵². In addition, *radd* literature denigrating other schools of thought is still widely accessible⁵³.

⁴² FFI, 2009, 52-53

⁴³ “Arabic grammar and literature; logic; rhetoric and mathematics among the rational sciences (*maqulat*) and, among the religious sciences, the principles of jurisprudence, the *Qur’ān* and its commentaries, and the *Ḥadīth*. Some *madāris* also teach medicine and astronomy” (Rahman, 2013, 1).

⁴⁴ see Reetz, 2011, 185-86

⁴⁵ Rahman, 2013, 1

⁴⁶ see The Nation, 2016, 1

⁴⁷ “Considerable prestige is still attached to becoming a hafiz—knowing the [*Qur’ān*] by heart” (Dalrymple, 2005b, 1).

⁴⁸ see McClure, 2009, 337

⁴⁹ FFI, 2009, 3

⁵⁰ Dalrymple, 2005b, 1

⁵¹ Iqbal & Raza, 2015, 42

⁵² see Javaid, XY, 55-56

⁵³ Rahman, 2013, 1

Policy Implications

A number of analysts have criticized the *madrassa* discussion as being framed solely in a discourse of securitisation⁵⁴. General education ought to be improved instead of concentrating on the shortcomings of religious education⁵⁵. *Madāris*, like public and private schools and colleges, are to better prepare their students for the modern labour market⁵⁶. It must be recognised that a large segment of the Pakistani population remains illiterate and without tangible employment perspectives⁵⁷. But while poverty is at the base of many people's despair, militant ideology serves to transmit grievances into radical action. That is why the propagation of exclusivist views needs to be overcome⁵⁸. Specifically, the "distribution of hate material" and texts cultivating intolerance must be curbed⁵⁹. Rather than reflecting the status quo, *madrassa* syllabi should reflect the diversity and "pluralistic traditions" of Islam and include conflict resolution and civility, Ali has suggested⁶⁰.

Violence, hatred and controversies are to be curtailed in *madrassa* teaching, historical differences between sects should be respected. The Islamic principles of peace and moderation are to be promoted. The path is still long. Ahmad points out that most *madāris* themselves claimed "that the present system of *madrassa* education in Pakistan is adequate and does not need any changes"⁶¹.

Conclusion

The issue of *jihad* is a problem linked to many aspects of Pakistani reality and cannot be limited to *madāris*, although *jihadist* seminaries "play a supporting role" when it comes to recruitment of militants⁶². *Madāris* evoke a "sense of superiority" of their sects,

⁵⁴ see Borchgrevink, 2011, 5-6

⁵⁵ Sajjad, 2013, 111

⁵⁶ Dalrymple, 2005b, 1

⁵⁷ see Ali, 2009, 2

⁵⁸ *ibid*

⁵⁹ Hashim, 2014, 1

⁶⁰ Ali, 2009, 5

⁶¹ Ahmad, 2009, 5

⁶² ICG, 2005, 2-3

conveying extremist ideas alongside legitimate religious viewpoints in the process⁶³. This renders the “students vulnerable” to radicalism and violence⁶⁴.

Bibliography

Afzal, Madiha. "Are the Better Educated Less Likely to Support Militancy and Terrorism? Women Are. Evidence from a Public Opinion Survey in Pakistan." *cgdev.org*, June 2012. <http://bit.ly/2u0q6eJ>. 2017. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Afzal, Madiha. "Education and Attitudes in Pakistan. Understanding Perceptions of Terrorism." *United States Institute of Peace (USIP) Special Report*, April 2015. <http://bit.ly/2FKaSzT>. 2015. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Ahmad, Mumtaz. "Islamic Education in Pakistan: Second Year Report A Preliminary Draft." <http://religiondocbox.com>. <http://bit.ly/2GHHwiN>. undated. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Ahmad, Mumtaz. "Madrasa Reforms and Perspectives: Islamic Tertiary Education in Pakistan." *The National Bureau of Asian research (NBR) Project Report*, April 2009. <http://bit.ly/2DCUpaB>. 2009. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Ahmad, Naveed. "Unregulated Madrassas must be Tackled to Fight Extremism." *The Express Tribune*, 8 September 2017. <http://bit.ly/2G8E2rN>. 2017. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Ahmed, Dania. "Can fundamentalism in Pakistan be traced back to madrassas?" *The Express Tribune Blogs*, 8 July 2015. <http://bit.ly/2FVgPpz>. 2015. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Bahadur, Kalim. "Islamisation in Pakistan: A Case Study of Punjab." *ORF Observer Research Foundation Issue Brief no. 12 (October 2007)*. <http://bit.ly/2DF2hZg>. 2007. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Bajoria, Jayshree. "Pakistan's Education System and Links to Extremism." *cfr.org*, 7 October 2009. <http://on.cfr.org/2FMMY0b>. 2009. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Bandow, Doug. "The Problem of Pakistan: Teaching Intolerance And Violence." *Forbes*, 9 January 2012. <http://bit.ly/2DEvAez>. 2012. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Borchgrevink, Kaja. "Pakistan's Madrasas: Moderation or Militancy? The madrasa debate and the reform process." *NOREF Report*, June 2011. <http://bit.ly/2prjssb>. 2011. Accessed 07 March 2018.

⁶³ see SISA, 2013, 15-16

⁶⁴ *ibid*

Craig, Tim. "Pakistan is still trying to get a grip on its madrassa problem." *Washington Post*, 16 December 2015. <http://wapo.st/2lyk48h>. 2015. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Dalrymple, William. "Inside Islam's 'Terror Schools'." *New Statesman*, 28 March 2005. <http://bit.ly/2G5mpsJ>. 2005. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Fair, C. Christine. "Does Pakistan Have a Madrasah Problem? Insights from New Data." *ssrn.com*. 20 July 2015. <http://bit.ly/2u46zK8>. 2015. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Hashim, Asad. "Pakistan mulls tighter controls on madrassas." *Al Jazeera*, 21 April 2014. <http://bit.ly/2IBLM47>. 2014. Accessed 07 March 2018.

International Crisis Group (ICG). "Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military." *ICG Asia Report*, no. 36. <http://bit.ly/2pp3b7X>. As amended on 15 July 2005. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Iqbal, Abdul Rauf & Raza, Mz. Sobia. "Madrassa Reforms in Pakistan: A Historical Analysis." *ISSRA Papers*, 2015. <http://bit.ly/2G5SMaH>. 2015. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Javaid, Umbreen. "Religious Militant Extremism: Repercussions for Pakistan." *Journal of Political Studies*, 23 September 2009. <http://bit.ly/2DEuTlt>. 23 September 2009. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Jorgic, Drazen. "Army Chief Says Pakistan Should 'revisit' Islamic Madrassa Schools." *Reuters*, 7 December 2017. <http://reut.rs/2IzSjMq>. 2017. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Kfir, Isaac. "Islam in Post-9/11 Pakistan: The Role of Education in Heightening or Diminishing Pakistan's Security Dilemma." *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 16, no. 1, March 2012. <http://bit.ly/2IDFalp>. 2012. Accessed 07 March 2018.

McClure, Kevin R. "Madrasas and Pakistan's Education Agenda: Western Media Misrepresentation and Policy Recommendations." *International Journal of Educational Development* 29, 2009. <http://bit.ly/2HOwojr>. 2009. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Qadri, Mustafa. "Fixing Pakistan's Madrasas." *The Guardian*, 15 July 2009. <http://bit.ly/2pqif4u>. 2009. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Rahman, Tariq. "Madrassas: The Potential for Violence in Pakistan." *Centre for International and Strategic Analysis SISA Report*, 2 October 2013. <http://bit.ly/1f04Vtv>. 2013. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Ramzan, Muhammad. "Sectarian landscape, Madrasas and Militancy in Punjab." *Journal of Political Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2015). <http://bit.ly/2psaHOv>. 2015. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Rana, Muhammad Amir. "Mapping the Madrasa Mindset: Political Attitudes of Pakistani Madaris." *Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies 'Conflict and Peace Studies'*, vol. 2, no. 1. <http://bit.ly/2pollH4>. January-March 2009. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Reetz, Dietrich. "Migrants, Mujahedin, Madrassa Students: The Diversity of Transnational Islam in Pakistan." *South Asia-Chronicle*, no. 1/2011. <http://bit.ly/2poFXho>. 2011. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Reuters. "Pakistani Army Chief Slams Poor Education in Religious Schools." *www.easterneye.eu*, 15 December 2017. <http://bit.ly/2pll7Ar>. 2017. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Sajjad, Fatima. "Reforming Madrasa Education in Pakistan – Post-9/11 Perspectives." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, vol. 3, no. 1. <http://bit.ly/2HMDaWO>. Spring 2013. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Saleem, H Arshi. "Intrusion of Politics in Deobandi Madrassas in Pre and Post Independence India and Pakistan." Chapter 3. *hec.gov.pk*. <http://bit.ly/2poSmCZ>. 2014. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Shaikh, Farzana. "From Islamisation to Shariatisation: Cultural Transnationalism in Pakistan" *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 3, Developmental and Cultural Nationalisms, 2008. <http://bit.ly/2IE39B5>. 2008. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Siddique, Qandeel. "Weapons of mass instruction? A preliminary exploration of the link between madrassas in Pakistan and militancy." *Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI)*, 2009. <http://bit.ly/2pp62Oh>. 20 July 2009. Accessed 07 March 2018.

The Nation (Pakistan). "Under attack. Pakistani educational institutes are also breeding grounds for terrorism." *The Nation*, February 05, 2016. <http://bit.ly/2pow8A4>. 2016. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Warren, Nicole M. "Madrassa Education in Pakistan: Assisting the Taliban's Resurgence." *Salve Regina University Department of Political Science*, Fall 2009. <http://bit.ly/2GHTby7>. Accessed 07 March 2018.

Zaidi, Syed Manzar Abbas. "Madrassa Education in Pakistan: Controversies, Challenges and Prospects." *Centre for International and Strategic Analysis SISA Report* no. 3/2013. <http://bit.ly/1f04Vtv>. 2013. Accessed 07 March 2018.