Modernization of Madrassa Education in Bangladesh: A Strategy Paper

Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI)
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MODERNIZATION OF MADRASSA EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH: A STRATEGY PAPER

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Foreword

The threat of global terrorism was magnified by the deadly attacks of September 11th 2001. This resulted in many governments placing the madrassa education system under greater scrutiny. From an altered security perspective, many have considered madrassa education as a cause of concern, specifically in the South Asian countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan where the population is predominantly Muslim. These countries have been subjected to a number of violent attacks by Islamist militants. The essence of Islamist fundamentalism has been deemed, rightly or wrongly, to be rooted in madrassa education. As a result, madrassa education in Bangladesh is often alleged to promote religious militancy and stands stigmatized for its outdated and dysfunctional curriculum. The common history of Bangladesh and Pakistan elucidates madrassas as a colonial inheritance. It has been estimated that one-third of the secondary level enrollment is accounted for by these educational institutions in Bangladesh. Based on these socio-political circumstances and overall development policy, a project has been undertaken to conduct a study that will make policy recommendations on modernizing this sub-sector of education.

The Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) undertook a study in order to develop a strategy paper on modernization of the madrassa education system in Bangladesh. With this end in view, a survey was conducted covering the two streams of madrassa education, namely, Aliya and Qaumi, prevailing in our country. From both these categories of madrassas, 100 students were involved in primary data collection for this survey. In addition to this, desk research of relevant documents, case studies of madrassas, focused group discussion (FGDs) with students and key informant interviews (KIIs) of local leaders, national level experts and educationists were carried out. The survey revealed that Aliya students were more likely to be integrated with the mainstream education system. The problems with their curricula were brought out and the inadequacy of teaching staff was highlighted. And, the Aliya students evaluated their education as inferior to mainstream education. On the contrary, the students of Qaumi madrassas hold a negative perception about mainstream, secular education as also about the Aliya education system. A majority of Qaumi students expressed their plans to continue with their stream of education. However, as evident from the curriculum they follow, Qaumi students do not get exposed to modern education in terms of both knowledge and skills. Qaumi madrassas also do not lend themselves to any government regulatory framework, not even monitoring, exposing some of them to allegations about their views on religious extremism and violence as well as the financing of their obscurantist mode of education and activities. As such, the study strongly argues for modernization of madrassa education in Bangladesh and identifies a number of proposals that would set the parameters for a strategy to be implemented. An important finding of the study is that madrassas as a class of educational institutions, including those in the Qaumi category, are not necessarily a breeding ground of Islamist terrorism in Bangladesh. However, some of them individually may be susceptible to extremist ideological indoctrination and/or the lure of economic benefits.
This study was possible due to the dedication and sincere efforts of a team led by Abdur Rob Khan, Associate Professor in International Relations of North South University, Dhaka, who is an adviser to BEI on security issues. I would like to most sincerely thank the High Commission of Australia for their generous financial support towards the research project, including publication of this study. Finally, I would like to recognize the valuable contributions of the many participants, made by way of their participation in workshops and discussion sessions on the subject, towards the successful completion of this study.

Farooq Sobhan  
President  
Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI)
Abstract

In recent years, a good number of empirical studies have been undertaken mainly under the auspices of development partners at the institutional and country levels. Several NGOs, local and international, have also undertaken studies focusing on madrassas, Qaumi madrassas in particular. A number of scholarly papers have also been produced by scholars. A significant body of information and insights about the functioning of madrassas has been generated in the process. What is needed, for policy purposes, is to synthesize the findings and insights. The present study attempts to achieve this purpose. In addition, a good deal of primary data was also gathered from a field survey for this study.

Madrassas are popular educational institutions situated all over Bangladesh. They provide an avenue of educating children in rural and urban areas. From primary to post-graduate levels, there are about 37,000 madrassas in the country, with a total of 3,340,800 students and 2,30,732 teachers. However, Qaumi madrassas, in particular, are beset with problems, including having an outdated curriculum and madrassa graduates being unable to gain employment as easily as graduates of regular schools. Although this study did not come across any evidence of madrassa-militant group links, specific cases of linkages cannot be ruled out. That madrassa curriculum has inbuilt elements of radicalization is not borne out by any logic or facts. However, the linkages between madrassas and militant groups need to be examined separately.

The present study presents a seven-pronged strategy that includes: (a) strategy of integration and diversity to retain the uniqueness of madrassa education within the unified stream, as suggested in the recently promulgated national education policy of the Bangladesh government; (b) strategy of curriculum and pedagogy development; (c) strategy of capacity development; (d) strategy of competitive development through introduction of market elements for self-motivated reforms; (e) strategy of participative development; (f) strategy of inclusive development; and (g) strategy of dealing with the issue of militancy, as a separate security issue, not to be confused with the modernization of madrassas.
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Madrassas in Bangladesh can carry many negative meanings – they have the image of being backward, outdated and preaching extremist ideology to breed and train terrorists. These factors have made observers call for madrassas to be reformed, modernized and regulated by the Government.

Educational discourse in Bangladesh is characterized by two deficits: one that has to do with the madrassa curriculum, and the other, their social responsibility or political role. As far as the curriculum deficit is concerned, the main contention is that madrassas, mainly Qaumi madrassas, are holding on to outdated curriculum focused only on religious subjects, and therefore, unable to prepare students with adequate life skills and for the job market. Secondly, in the era of the post-9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, it is suspected that through the madrassa curriculum and out of ideological motivations, students are radicalized and trained in militant activities. On both these counts, modernization of madrassa education and bringing Qaumi madrassas under some regulatory framework have been considered an essential panacea to the malaise.

Against this backdrop, the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) undertook the present study with a view to drawing up a strategy paper as to how to modernize the madrassa sector in Bangladesh.

1.2 Objectives

As per the terms of reference (ToR) for the study, the objectives of the study can be divided into two parts: Research Objectives and Policy Objectives.

1.2.1 The Research Objectives include the following:

• to understand and map out the various forms of madrassa education, including Aliya and Qaumi;
• to review the curriculum of madrassa education – both Aliya and Qaumi;
• to assess the socio-economic backgrounds of teachers, students and alumni, and to assess the worldview of the madrassa students;
• to assess the relevance of recommendations of various education or madrassa reforms commissions;
• to find out the impediments in the way of implementing the recommendations of previous reforms commissions;
• to identify the lessons learnt from modernization initiatives in the country and region; and
• to identify the ways to modernize the madrassa education system.
The Policy Objectives of the Study are the following:
- to convince policy makers and the general mass that madrassa education in its current form cannot contribute to human resource development. Therefore, modernization of the madrassa curriculum will help address the problem; and
- to convince policy makers and the general mass the necessity to bring the Qaumi madrassas under government supervision.

1.3 Research Questions

The above objectives can be broken down into a series of research questions: What are the different types of Madrassas available in Bangladesh? What socio-economic group does each type of Madrassa cater to? What are the trends in curriculum, funding, management in different types of madrassas? How is the unregulated curricula of Qaumi madrassas affecting the socio-economic prospects of the students? What are the lessons learnt from previous madrassa and education reform measures undertaken by the Government? What are the lessons learnt and best practices of madrassa modernization schemes in other countries? What is the current level of ownership of different stakeholders in madrassa reform agenda? What are the differing perceptions of different stakeholders regarding madrassa reform? How do madrassa students and students of other stream perceive of each other? How to establish a more effective funding, management and regulatory mechanism for all madrassas?

1.4 Methodology

The study has been carried out by applying quantitative and qualitative methods and using secondary and primary information. Primary data has been collected through quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative techniques involved a sample survey of 100 madrassa students from both Aliya and Qaumi madrassas, with gender and urban-rural distribution. For this purpose, a structured questionnaire was used to collect information regarding motivation for madrassa education, socio-economic background, career prospects and plans, worldview and mutual perceptions and finally, views on the modernization of madrassas. Table 1 gives the distribution of sample madrassa students by type of madrassa and gender.

Before conducting the sample survey, a series of qualitative surveys were undertaken: key persons interview (KPI), madrassa-related individuals (MRI) and focused group discussion (FGD) of madrassa students. The qualitative survey was conducted at different cross-cutting levels – national and local, on the one hand, and policy-makers, experts, officials and local leaders, on the other. Type of questions asked varied across levels and functional areas. For example, national level policy makers and experts talked about broad

Table 1 : Distribution of Samples for Structured Interviews by Madrassa Type and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Madrassa Type</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aliya</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qaumi</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and strategic policies, while experts concentrated mainly on curriculum related issues. Local leaders deliberated on issues concerning local madrassas and their socio-economic surroundings. Case studies of 25 madrassas – 20 Aliya and 5 Qaumi were conducted by interviewing Madrassa Principals or Superintendents or Vice Principals or Assistant Teachers depending on availability. Apart from that, a number of madrassa-related individuals were interviewed to supplement the case-study data. Table 2 gives the total sample frame of the study including madrassa case studies, MRIs, KPIs and FGDs.

Table 2: Distribution of Sample Respondents for Qualitative Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Qualitative Survey</th>
<th>Aliya</th>
<th>Qaumi</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madrassa Case Study</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRI/Madrassa Functionaries</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KII of Local Leaders</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD of Madrassa Students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Level KII</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions may be raised about a lack of symmetry in gender and Aliya-Qaumi distribution. We visited mainly Kalaroa and Jhikargacha of Satkhira but unfortunately did not find many Qaumi madrassas in these locations. Secondly, the field visit coincided with the madrassa vacation and an extra effort was made to interview students. Thirdly, because the field officer was a male, it was almost impossible to talk to female madrassa students. However, it was helpful that we employed a female field officer in Dhaka.

Secondary data was collected mainly through consultation of official documents including education commission reports, madrassa education reforms reports, published materials and research reports. An extra effort was made to gather information on neighbouring countries like Pakistan and India. Websites were extensively browsed to access a variety of information from sources like newspapers, journals and research institutions.

1.5 Report Structure

The present chapter (Chapter 1) sets the objectives and outlines methodology of the study. Chapter 2 provides a historical overview of the evolution of madrassas in Bangladesh. Chapter 3 presents a typological descriptive profile of madrassas in Bangladesh. Chapter 4 deals with employment and social functions of madrassas, on the one hand, and socio-economic background of students and teachers, on the other. Chapter 5 presents perceptions and views about madrassa education in Bangladesh. Chapter 6 deals with madrassa reforms, in particular, initiatives and outcomes so far, and best practices in madrassa modernization in Pakistan, India, Malaysia and Indonesia. Chapter 7 provides the substance of the Report, namely, a strategy of madrassa modernization in Bangladesh. Finally, Chapter 8 presents the summary and conclusions of the Report.
Chapter 2

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF MADRASSA SYSTEM IN BANGLADESH

In Bangladesh, there are two types of madrassas – Aliya and Qaumi – whose curricula is substantially different, including their worldviews. A natural question therefore maybe: how did these divergent streams emerge in the Subcontinent, and for that matter, in Bangladesh? This historical review purports to shed some light about this question. This would possibly also clarify the divergent perceptions of society as well as the international community about these two types of madrassas.

2.1 Pre-British Period

*Dars* in Arabic means lessons. The word ‘Madrassa” is in fact a secular one, meaning ‘a place of learning’. Madrassa education at one time was the only form of education in the Muslim world, where both religious and secular education was imparted. In the case of South Asia, Islam spread through the preaching of *sufis* and dervishes who not only set up mosques, places of worship but also *khanka* and *maktabs*. Khankas were institutions for preaching and sermons while maktabs were centers for teaching of Islamic knowledge and rituals. Maktabs are the precursors of modern madrassas. In the course of time, madrassas were set up as places of learning and knowledge. Not only were the Quran and Hadith taught but madrassas were the centres for learning in science, mathematics, philosophy, and law influenced by Greek traditions, inherited by Persia and the Middle East, before Islam spread from these regions to India. A feature of this traditional Islamic education was its emphasis on the connection between science and humanities. In fact, madrassas were the key educational institutions not only for Muslims, but also for non-Muslims, and madrassas developed as a site for free thinking and reasoning.

As Muslim rule spread, many more madrassas were established in different parts of Bengal. On an average, there was one maktab or madrassa for every 400 persons. According to an account by the Indologist Max Mueller, there were as many as 80,000 madrassas in East Bengal in the early 18th century. These madrassas used to teach Arabic so that students could say their prayers and recite the Holy Quran and *waif* (daily prayer book) correctly. Arabic writing was only taught in the higher classes.

The education system under the rule of Akbar adopted an inclusive approach with the monarch favuring additional courses comprising of medicine, agriculture, geography, and even from texts from other languages and religions, such as Patanjali’s work in Sanskrit. The traditional science in this period was influenced by the ideas of Aristotle as well as Bhaskara, and Ibn Sina. The more conservative monarch, Aurangzeb, also favoured the teaching of subjects which could be applied to administration. It was under his patronage
that Molla Nizamuddin Firangi Mahal developed Dars-e-Nizami which has been widely followed by madrassas in the Subcontinent. The Mughals, in fact, adopted a liberal approach to sciences and as contact with Persia increased the more intolerant Ottoman school of *manqul* (revealed) education came to be gradually substituted by the more relaxed *maqul* (rational) school. ¹

In any case, during Muslim rule, pre-colonial India was straddled with innumerable madrassas which received support and patronage of the Muslim rulers. ² In pre-colonial India, an ‘alim’ or ulama had to know subjects such as fiqh, history, sciences and archery, to be an effective administrator or jurist. However, things began to change with the advent of the European powers.

### 2.2 Colonial Period

As Muslim rule declined, so did madrassas as institutions of learning. The focus of learning shifted to bare essentials like learning the Quran and Hadith. The main concern of the British colonial power was to institute an effective control over the whole of India which they took over administratively, in 1857, following the Sepoy Mutiny. Responses to the colonization of India, initially by the East India company in 1757, from the Muslim community were manifold. One response came from Sir Syed Ahmed, who was in favour of imparting modern education to the Muslims. He founded what came to be known as Aligarh Muslim University. But most of the Islamic community differed with him, in that modern education alone would lead the Muslims astray. The second response, therefore, was all round education for the Muslims, which included religious as well as rational education. Thus, the curriculum developed by Molla Nizamuddin became a curriculum for the Muslims that included Mathematics, Astronomy, Medicine, Logic, Geography, History, Chemistry as well as Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, Jurisprudence and Sufism. The curriculum later came to be known as Dars-e-Nizami, based on a modified version of which present Aliya Madrassas have been founded. The first madrassa based on Dars-e-Nizami was founded in Lucknow in 1906 with state patronage. This came to be known as Nadwatul Ulum, Lucknow. ³

The third response came from Shah Waliullah and his followers whose reform response to the drastic anti-Muslim measures by the East India Company was launched in post-1757 period. These Muslims wanted consolidation of the house of Islam. The basic idea was to create a class of imams, ulams, preachers, muftis who would hold Muslims to the basics. They founded Darul Ulum in Deoband in 1867. While Deoband accepted Dars-e-Nizami, burden shifted on to revealed knowledge than rational sciences. A second characteristic was their dependence on private funding rather than government patronage and independence of activities rather than state intervention.

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¹ See, Wikipedia, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_education_in_India
If we turn to British colonial initiatives regarding madrassa education, a shift was required to the English language, in place of Farsi (language of Persia) and Urdu. There was the need for a class of administrators conversant in British law, not Islamic scholarship and jurisprudence. Thus, the first initiative was reducing the madrassa curriculum to basics, and focus less on scholarship. For the initial years, for tactical reasons, they ostensibly started patronizing madrassa education. A select number of madrassas were brought under British control while the rest were allowed to decline. The Calcutta Aliya Madrassa was set up by the British in 1781, which was a change in the direction of madrassa education from an all-round education to a truncated one, with a focus on Muslim law and jurisprudence. The English language was introduced in the madrassa curriculum in 1826. In 1882, a number of committees were set up by the British. In 1907-08, the Earl Committee recommended further development of English language in madrassa system. In 1910, madrassa education was divided into two streams – old schemes and new schemes. The new scheme madrassa included in its curriculum English, Bengali, Mathematics along with Arabic studies. But important departure in the new scheme was that it made English compulsory instead of Arabic and Farsi. In 1946, the Moazzem Uddin Hossain Committee reorganized the madrassa education structure and laid the foundation of the present day Aliya madrassa stream in Bangladesh. The Moazzem Committee divided 16 years of madrassa education into five phases from *Ebtedayi* (primary) to the *Kamil* (post-graduate) level: four years of *Ebtedayi*; four years of *Dakhil* (secondary); four years of *Alim* (higher secondary); two years of *Fazil* (graduation) and two years of *Kamil* (masters). During the India-Pakistan Partition in 1947, the Calcutta Aliya Madrassa, with all its records, documents, valuable books and furniture, was transferred to Dhaka.

### 2.3 Pakistan Period

On Partition, the Calcutta Aliya Madrassa moved to Dhaka Islamic Intermediate College in Laxmibazar. In 1960, Aliya Madrassa moved to its permanent premise in Bakshibazar. Two other madrassas were already in existence – one in Chittagong, the other in Rajshahi. The Qaumi madrassas were already in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Madrassas – both Aliya and Qaumi - continued to be established under private initiative, in addition to limited public funding for Aliya madrassas. Another interesting development during the Pakistan period was that the new scheme madrassas introduced in 1915, with English as a medium of instruction, was conveniently dropped. Five education reform and/or reconstitution commissions were formed to look into the education system between 1947 and 1969, when Bangladesh was East Pakistan. After these efforts, the two Aliya systems remained although the gap between them narrowed through reforms in the Old Scheme. By the time of Bangladesh’ independence in 1971, the total number of madrassas was about 6,000, of which half were primary level *Ebtedayee* and about a thousand were secondary level *Dakhil*.

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2.4 Bangladesh Period

After the independance of Bangladesh in 1971, the two streams of madrassas were already in place. But significant transformations took place in both streams. Aliya madrassas are a unique system of Islamic religious education that has few parallels in the Muslim world, offering both religious and modern general education. They function under the Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board, an independent body funded by the government that is charged with establishing madrassas, assigning teachers, and formulating the curriculum. This system mandates teaching modern subjects like English, Bangla, Science, Social Studies, Mathematics, Geography, History, and a modified version of the Dars-i-Nizami system. It is structured, in the same way as it was during the colonial period, in five levels – Ebtidayee (primary), Dakhil (secondary), Alim (higher secondary), Fazil (graduate), and Kamil (post-graduate). Although these madrassas are mostly privately owned and run, they receive government support. The government of Bangladesh pays 80 per cent of the salaries of their teachers and administrators and a significant part of their development expenditure, provides scholarships and books, and assigns a substantial sum to the construction of additional private madrassas. The majority of graduates from Aliya madrassa systems pursue higher education or join the job market.

Qaumi madrassas are private non-governmental institutions which are, for the most part, affiliated to the Deobandi faith and teach the traditional Dars-e-Nizami system. Some well-known madrassas of this stream are those at Hathazari and Patiya in Chittagong, at Lalbagh and Jatrabari in Dhaka, at Baliya in Mymensingh and Jamiya Imdadiya at Kishoreganj. Before the government recognized the system in 2006, they had little or no association with the government, and were solely supported by religious endowments or by zakat, sadaqat, donations, and contributions from individuals or local and international Islamic organizations. These madrassas have been organized under a private institution called the Befaqul Madarisil Arabia of the Bangladesh Qaumi Madrassa Education Board, enjoying autonomy from the state. This has now become problematic as its financial independence has allowed the Ulema in Bangladesh to wield religious-political power. Furthermore, this has allowed the ulema to resist efforts by the state authorities to institute reforms in the madrassa system and bridge the differences between the traditional system of Islamic education and modern secular education. Concerns arise when the entire education system comes to be seen as a religious institution because of this wing which has a traditionalist hard line policy and is against any kind of modern thinking.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter briefly provided an outline of historical evolution of madrassas in Bangladesh. Madrassas in Bangladesh today had their origins with the process of British colonization of the Subcontinent – Aliya madrassa at the initiative of the British Raj in a bid to control the curriculum and administer the madrassas, and Qaumi madrassa as a
kind of resistance to colonial, and subsequent state, control. So colonial rule provided a kind of discontinuity in the madrassa system considering what existed in the pre-colonial period. The only point of continuity is the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum which was introduced during the Mughal era and survives today, largely in modified form. However, even Dars-e-Nizami failed to capture the flavour of vibrant Islamic scholarship and education of the period of Muslim renaissance from 9th to 13th century. Today, the Aliya system stands substantially reformed in terms of their secular curriculum. Yet much remains to be done to strengthen English, Science and Mathematic subjects, which are covered only nominally. But in terms of religious education, the system produces less competent religious scholarship compared to the Qaumi system. However, the Qaumi curriculum warrants closer scrutiny because what is taught in the name of philosophy and logic are extremely outdated. One also needs to recognize the fact that Darse-Nizami was formulated to meet the need of producing appropriate manpower for administrative system of the day based on Farsi and Urdu languages and administrative system of the Mughal era. Now there are different administrative system, language and skill requirements. So, if Qaumi proponents provide the argument of preparing students for Akhirat, or life hereafter, one can argue that this is an excuse to be less transparent.
Chapter 3

TYPES AND PROFILE OF MADRASSA EDUCATION
IN BANGLADESH

As mentioned, there are primarily two types of madrassas in Bangladesh – Aliya and Qaumi. Aliya madrassas are state supported madrassas with a modified Dars-e-Nizami curriculum with the inclusion of general education courses. Aliya madrassas are also known as mainstream madrassas. Rough equivalence has been established between general education and Aliya madrassas graduates, where both can compete for university admission and jobs.

The Qaumi madrassas, on the other hand, operate, outside state support and recognition, with donations and charities. As the degree of Qaumi madrassas is not recognized by the state, the scope of entry into general education and job markets is very limited.

Apart from these two types, we may identify some categories of pre-Ebtedayee or feeder type madrassas, the graduates of which may enter either Aliya or Qaumi stream. These include maktabs (mosque-based or independent informal neighbourhood religious institutions), Noorani madrassa (another pre-primary or feeder madrassa) and Hafizia/Furqania madrassa.

Then we have a substantial corpus of Ebtedayee (primary) madrassas mostly attached to junior secondary (Dakhil), Dakhil, Alim or Fazil/Kamil madrassas. But there are scores of independent Ebtedayee madrassas as well. Any reference to Ebtedayee madrassas would signify Aliya category but we must mention that Qaumi stream also has its version of Ebtedayee madrassas.

It is difficult to arrive at a neat typology of madrassas in Bangladesh because of the existence of several entities that do not fall in any type, nor is it possible to arrive at any precise estimate of these entities. In what follows, brief descriptive profiles of different categories of madrassa in Bangladesh are presented.

3.1 Pre-Ebtedayee or pre-Primary Categories of Madrassas

3.1.1 Maktab

One category of madrassas that does not fall either in Aliya or in Qaumi category is the maktabs, which are highly informal arrangements for imparting rudimentary religious education to children. Maktabs are usually part of mosques, and it is the mosque management committee that organizes maktab teachings to neighbourhood children, usually in the morning or noon. The mosque imams/muazzins impart basic religious
literacy (Qaeda) leading to learning to recite the Holy Quran and rituals of prayer. There are about 300,000 mosques in Bangladesh and almost each of them has this arrangement. In most cases, maktab education is free and is covered in the salary and benefits given to imam and **muazzin** for their main functions, that is organizing and leading prayers five times a day and related services. There is no formal degree but the ultimate qualifications that children attain is, learning to conversantly and fluently read the Holy Qur’an, the rules and practices of regular prayers, some Hadith and other aspects of religious practices. Usually, a child takes one to two years of schooling in maktabs before starting secular schooling or formal madrassa education.

### 3.1.2 Noorani Madrassa

A second category of semi-informal pre-primary madrassas is Noorani madrassas, usually taught by a single teacher imparting 4-6 years of education. The curriculum includes Arabic literacy, basics of Islam, Quran recitation, and selected Hadith, among other subjects. These madrassas are privately managed and funded, where students usually pay tuition fees/charges.

There is no reliable data on the number of Noorani madrassas in Bangladesh. According to a survey conducted by BANBEIS (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics) in 1993, there are 130,000 mosque adjacent maktabs and 60,000 Noorani/Furqania madrassas.7

### 3.1.3 Hafizia and Furqania Madrassa

The third category of pre-primary or semi-primary madrassas, usually attached to mosques, is known as Furqania/Hafizia, depending on whether the focus is memorizing the Quran to produce Hafiz or teaching proper recitation of the Quran to produce Qari. In one sense, both are terminal qualifications because a graduate of the Hafizia Madrassa, known as a Hafiz, can lead prayers as an Imam, and so can a Qari. However, a Hafiz or Qari needs more formal education to become a qualified priest for becoming permanently employed. To memorize the entire Quran without mistakes takes about 3 to 4 years. The curriculum, which is set by the Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board (BMEB), includes simple mathematics, Arabic and Bengali language.

Again, there is no reliable statistics about the number of Hafizia and Furqania madrassas in the country. At independence, there were more than 6000 Hafizia and Furqania madrassas.8

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6 Aam Para meaning the last Para or one-thirtieth segment of the Holy Quran.
8 See, Mujib Mehdi, ibid: 32
3.1.4 Ebtedayee Madrassa

The fourth category of madrassas, mainly belonging to the formal Aliya sector, is the Ebtedayee madrassas, but Qaumi ebtedayees will also be discussed in this paper. Aliya Ebtedayees are recognized and regulated by the Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board (BMEB). This means that madrassas set up under the aegis of local communities, local government or a national government will have to satisfy the preconditions as are also done by other strata like Dakhil, Alim, Fazil or Kamil madrassas.9

Again, reliable information on the number of Ebtedayee madrassas and their students is not readily available. According to BANBEIS, the number of Ebtedayee students attached to Dakhil, Alim, Fazil and Kamil madrassas is 1,363, 572. From other sources, the number of Ebtedayee madrassas has been estimated to be 9-10,000.10

3.1.5 Cadet Madrassa

Cadet Madrassa is a new emergent category of madrassa in the Aliya stream. The best way to describe a Cadet Madrassa is to characterize it as an English-medium Aliya madrassa styled after a kindergarten school. The reason they are called cadet madrassa is due to the type of cadet environment in terms of residential education, a somewhat regimented life, which includes some physical activities and the like.

3.2 Number and Trends in the Growth of Madrassas

While there are numerous anecdotal estimates about the number of madrassas and their growth, more so, in the case of Qaumi madrassas, the guesstimates are fuelled by the fact that the source of official educational data, that is BANBEIS always bears a 4-5-year lag in their updating of educational information. One proposition may be to refer to various sources and then come to some kind of estimate about the number of madrassas – Aliya and Qaumi, number of teachers and students with gender distribution, and if possible, indicate the trend of growth in madrassas. As of 2005, there were 9,000 Aliya madrassas and 15,000 listed Qaumi madrassas at the secondary and higher levels, totaling 24,000 secondary and higher level madrassas.11 What follows are category-wise estimates of madrassas, teachers and students.

3.2.1 Aliya Madrassa

As of 2004, there were 8,262 Dakhil (secondary), Alim (Higher Secondary), Fazil (Graduate) and Kamil (post-graduate) madrassas, which represented a 16% increase over 1998 and a 5% increase over 2002. Taking the number of independent (or stand alone) Ebtedayee (primary)12 madrasas for 2002, for which figures are available for all types,
the total number of Aliya madrassa stood at 14,605, as of 2002. In terms of levels, 72% of the madrassas are Dakhil, 14% are Alim and about 12% are Fazil. Kamil madrassas number only 156 which were 120 in 1998.\textsuperscript{13}

Total number of teachers in the Aliya madrassas, except the independent Ebtedayee madrassas, are 120,929, as of 2004, giving an average of 14.6 teachers per madrassa. There has been about 18% increase in the number of teachers over 1998. The highest increase between 1998 and 2004 in the number of teachers has been recorded in the Dakhil madrassas (20.7%), followed by Fazil madrassas (16.3%). As of 2002, total number of madrassa teachers including the stand alone Ebtedayee ones stood at 147,717, giving an average of 10 teachers per madrassa. While the teachers are predominantly male, about 4.5% of the teachers are female, as of 2002, and the proportion has increased at all levels between 1998-2002. Taking the female teachers in stand alone Ebtedayee madrassas, the proportion comes up to 5.8%. In general, one can argue that female madrassas and employment of female teachers in madrassas are a recent phenomenon. Secondly, a crowding out of women takes place in an otherwise male-dominated society with a huge reservoir of educated unemployed youths. It is, however, interesting that when the Government decided that 30% teaching positions in madrassas would be filled in by female teachers, the madrassa teachers’ association expressed concern that occupying that many teaching positions with females would lead to significant unemployment among existing male teachers.\textsuperscript{14}

The total number of students in Aliya madrassas, as of 2004, stood at 3.5 million giving an average of 433 students per madrassa. Between 1998 and 2004, there was an increase of 26% students at all levels. The majority of the students (65%) were in Dakhil madrassas, about one-third were in Alim and Fazil level madrassas while only 4-5% were in Kamil-level madrassas. Enrolment in Ebtedayee madrassas, as of 2002, stood at 1.2 million so that total student enrolment in Aliya madrassa system, as of 2002, stood at 2.3 million. Average student-teacher ratio was 30 for the period 2001-04, while it was 27 in 1998 and 29 during 1999-2000.\textsuperscript{15}

About one-tenth of the madrassas are for girls. Among the Dakhil madrassas, 13.2% are for girls and the percentage increased from 10.7% to 13.2% at Kamil levels. The proportion of madrassas dedicated for girls, of course, tapers off in higher-level madrassas.

The gender composition of madrassas presents some interesting features. It may be mentioned that there are exclusively female madrassas, in addition to mixed madrassas in Bangladesh. As of 2002, as much as 44.4% of the students enrolled in madrassas were female. Since 1998, there was an increase of 35.8%. The proportion of female students is higher in lower-level madrassas than in the higher-levels. Thus, the proportion of female students

\textsuperscript{13} See, BANBEIS, 2005
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid
students at Kamil madrassas was 12.7%, which went up to 32.6% at Fazil level, 40.7% at Alim level, about 50% at Dakhil level and 48.1% at Ebtedayee level.\footnote{16}

As far as the geographical distribution of madrassas is concerned, the majority of them are located in the rural areas. As of 2002, 93% of the Aliya madrassas were located in the rural areas with 7% being located in the urban areas. Between 1998 and 2002, rural madrassas grew at the rate of 10% while urban madrassas have grown at the rate of 20%. As much as 92% of teachers are rural-based. However, a relatively larger proportion of female teachers are urban-based, although geographical distribution of female students is the same as the overall students and, for that matter, the overall madrassas.

District-wise picture of the madrassas shows that largest concentration of madrassas has been in Rajshahi Division followed by Khulna Division, as of 1999. As a single district, Rangpur in northern area has the largest number of madrassas (783), followed by Barisal (736) in southern Bangladesh.

\subsection*{3.2.2 Qaumi Madrassas}

Media sources, which are mostly estimates, put the number of Qaumi madrassas in the country at 15,000. However, the Qaumi Madrassa Education Board puts the total number of Qaumi madrassas in the country at 4,000.\footnote{17} According to Ahmad, the total number of Qaumi madrassas in the country is 6,500 at the secondary, higher secondary and above, with about 1.5 million students and 130,000 teachers.\footnote{18} According to the General Secretary of the Association of Qaumi Madrassas, the total number of Qaumi madrassas registered with Befakul is 9,000, but there are many unregistered Qaumi madrassas as well. From these statistics, it can be concluded that the number of secondary and higher-level Qaumi madrassas is greater than that of Aliya madrassas. The following is the distribution of Qaumi madrassas by levels registered with the Qaumi Madrassa Board (Table 3).

It may be mentioned that there are several Qaumi madrassas for girls. In Dhaka, there are 2 such madrasas which award the Dawra degree to girls.\footnote{19} Dawra degree is the highest degree in a Qaumi madrassa, and this degree is equivalent to the Kamil degree in Aliya madrassas and Masters degree in universities. Students are required to go through sixteen years of study to obtain the Dawra degree.

The total number of teachers in Qaumi madrassas is said to number 80,000, which provides an average of 10 teachers per Madrassa, compared to 14.6 teachers in Aliya system. The total number of students is 2 million, compared to 3.5 million in the Aliya madrassas.\footnote{20} In Qaumi madrassas, there are 250,000 female students accounting for only 12.5% of the total, compared to 1.5 million female students in Aliya system.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnoteref{16} Ibid.
  \item \footnoteref{17} See, Sattar, op. cit.: 352
  \item \footnoteref{18} See, Mumtaz Ahmad, 2004:
  \item \footnoteref{19} See, Shah Abdul Hannan, “The Religious Education for Women in Bangladesh” in www.witness_pioneer.org//ReligiousEducationMuslimWomen.htm
  \item \footnoteref{20} See, Abdul Jabbar, Secretary General, Befaqul Madarisil Arabia, Dhaka.
\end{itemize}
Table 3: Distribution of Qaumi Madrassas by Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qaumi Level</th>
<th>Rough Equivalence</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Takhmilat</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fazilat</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanaria Ammah</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutawassitah</td>
<td>Lower Secondary</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebtedayee</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tahfizul Quran</td>
<td>Hafizia/Memorizing Quran</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>9,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Over the past ten years, there has been a 15% increase in students. We could not find out the distribution of female madrassas, but of the 21 female madrassas where there are masters programme under Dhaka Qaumi Madrassa Board, 11 were located in Dhaka.

According to another estimate, as of 2006, there were approximately 15,000 registered Qaumi madrassas in Bangladesh, with 200,000 teachers educating 4,000,000 students. The actual figures are unknown and it has been argued that if unregistered Qaumi madrassas are included, then it could put the total number of Bangladeshi madrassas as high as 64,000—suggesting that Qaumi madrassas outnumber their official Aliya counterparts (of which 25,201 existed in 2004).21

3.2.3 Total Number of Madrassas

As such, a rough estimate of the number of madrassas is as follows (Table 4)

Table 4: Number of Madrassas by Types:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stand alone ebtedayee madrassa</td>
<td>6,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aliya madrassa</td>
<td>7,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qaumi madrassa</td>
<td>8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hafizia/furqania madrassa</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>37,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore, it can be concluded that there are about 37,500 madrassas from primary to masters level in the country compared to about 78,000 primary, 16,500 secondary, 2,600 higher secondary and 58 university-level educational institutions in the secular stream. Of course, if one includes the maktabs, whose estimates range from 50,000 to 60,000, one easily comes to a figure close to 100,000.

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Mumtaz Ahmad provides a parallel estimate of madrassas in Bangladesh updated upto 2005:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5 : Profile of Madrassa Education in Bangladesh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Qaumi Madrassas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Government Funded (Aliya) Madrassas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Teachers in Qaumi Madrassas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Teachers in Aliya Madrassas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students in Qaumi Madrassas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students in Aliya Madrassas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Madrassas (Qaumi+Aliya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Students (Qaumi+Aliya)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mumtaz Ahmad, “Madrassa Education in Pakistan and Bangladesh”, Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2005: 107

Mumtaz Ahmad has elsewhere estimated the total number of dependents or clientele of the madrassa system, including 200,000 mosques, at 4.3 million.\(^2\)\(^2\) This point will be followed up in the context of employment of madrassa students later in the chapter.

There has been an attempt at comparing the temporal growth of madrassas and students with general education institutions and students. Utilizing BANBEIS data, it has been shown that there has been a 22.2% growth of madrassas against 9.7% growth of general educational institutions during 2001-2005.\(^2\)\(^3\) Compared to that during 1996-2001, madrassas grew at a rate of 17% while general educational institutions grew at a rate of 28%. As far as growth of teachers is concerned, a similar pattern was observed: 12% in general education and 17% in madrassas, during 2001-2005, compared to 13% in madrassas and 16% in general education, during 1996-2001. However, there is no explanation regarding the pattern of growth of students in both streams of education which shows that, during 1996-2001, there was a 33% growth of general students, and 58% madrassa students, compared to 10% madrassa students and 9% general students, during 2001-2005.\(^2\)\(^4\)

### 3.3 Curriculum of Madrassas in Bangladesh

#### 3.3.1 Aliya Madrassa Curriculum

According to the present syllabus of the Aliya Madrassa, in Classes 1 and 2, 300 marks are allotted for Arabic and 200 for Bengali and Mathematics. In Classes 3 and 4, 300 marks are for Religious Studies and 500 for General Studies. From Class 5 to 8, each class has 400 marks for religious studies and, in Class 5 only, 500 marks for general studies. In the other classes 600 marks are allocated for general education. At the Dakhil

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\(^{24}\) Ibid.
level, that is Class 9 and 10, there are 500 marks for religious studies and 500 for general education. At this level if a student has four options to take: Dakhil General, Dakhil Science, Dakhil Mujabbid and Dakhil Hifzul. If a student wants to study science, he has to take chemistry and physics instead of Islamic history and social science. There are also 100 marks for additional studies (4th subject) which includes agriculture, biology and higher mathematics.

The subjects of religious education in Aliya Madrassas are Quran, Hadith, Arabic literature, Fiqh, etc. The general education subjects include Bengali, English, Mathematics, Social Science, General Science, Islamic History, Geography, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Higher Mathematics and Agricultural Science.

At the Alim level, equivalent to higher secondary education, of the 1000 compulsory marks, 700 is allocated for religious studies and 300 for general education which includes Bengali, English, etc. At the Fazil level, equivalent to Bachelors Degree, of the 1100 marks, 600 is allotted to religious studies, 200 for Bengali and English and the remaining 300 for any one subject chosen from Economics, Political Science, Islamic History, Philosophy, English, Sociology or Social Welfare. Then at the Kamil level, the distribution of the 1000 allocated marks is such that 800 marks are for religion-related subjects and 200 for Islamic History.

Fazil (undergraduate) and Kamil (post-graduate) are the last two levels of Aliya stream of education. The Fazil course includes both 3-year Honours and 2-year Pass courses. For Pass course students, Kamil lasts for two years, while for Honours, it is one year. That means, the structure of general graduate studies in Bangladesh, in terms of 4 years Honours, and 1 year Masters, is yet to be introduced in Aliya madrassa education in the country. There are 1,000 Fazil madrassas and 141 Kamil madrassas in Bangladesh. Among the Kamil madrassas, three are completely state-owned.25

It should be pointed out that the curriculum contents of different strata of Aliya system are simply the picture given on paper. In actuality, most of the general courses are not offered. For example, Higher Mathematics at the Dakhil and Alim levels is hardly offered in most madrassas. Similarly, Economics, Political Science and Sociology are also not offered at the Fazil level. The other point is that there has been some degree of customization in general courses like Science that present topics like water, gravitation force more in religious perspective than in secular knowledge subjects.26 Thus, the knowledge base of students in Aliya madrassas and in general education institutions is diverse even on general course subjects.

Both Fazil and Kamil curricula place high emphasis on religious aspects in Arabic having practically no social science contents. Possibly, that is the reason, Fazil and Kamil degrees have not been recognized as bachelor and masters equivalent for jobs. A second

25 Mujib Mehdi, op. cit.: 33.
26 Mujib Mehdi gives a closer picture of this customization.
anomaly concerns conferment of degrees. Unlike the academic administration of general education where degrees at baccalaureate and masters are administered and conferred by universities, the Madrassa Education Board still retains the degree conferment authority, although the Islamic University in Kushtia was meant to undertake this task.

3.3.2 Qaumi Madrassa Curriculum

The Qaumi madrassa derives its name from its very nature because these madrassas are run by the community or the people (Qaum), as opposed to the state. The precursor of Qaumi madrassa in Bangladesh is the Darul Ulum Deoband in Uttar Pradesh, India founded in 1867. Hathazari Qaumi Madrassa is the first of this type to be set up in Bangladesh. Another characterization of these madrassas is Khwarijee madrassas, which means that they are outside Government control.

The curriculum, teaching method and examination of the Darul Ulum Deoband as developed in 1867 are still followed in Qaumi madrassas throughout the country. Of course, some changes have been made. During Pakistan time, the medium of instruction was Urdu, now this has been replaced by Bengali. The entire curriculum, like general education, spans 16 years.

In Qaumi madrassas, general education is imparted side by side with religious education from Class 1 to 8. Higher religious education is imparted from Class 9 onward. The religious education includes 24 subjects: (i) teaching Quran in a perfect manner; (ii) The rules for pure Quran teachings; (iii). Arabic language and literature; (iv) Arabic grammar; (v) Arabic grammar, Nahab; (vi). Balagat; (vii) Ilmul Aruj; (viii). Fiqah (Islamic law); (ix) Usul-e-Fiqah; (x). Tafsir (interpretation of the Quran); (xi) Usul-e-Tafsir (rules for Quran interpretation); (xii) Hadith; (xiii) Usul-e-Hadith; (xiv) Aqaid and Kalam; (xv) Akhlaq and Tasuf; (xvi) Faraiz (distribution of wealth); (xvii) Islamic history; (xviii) Islamic civic studies; (xix) Islamic political science; (xx) Islamic economics; (xxi) Islamic philosophy; (xxii) Ilmul Hayat; (xxiii) Greek philosophy; and, (xxiv) Mantiq (logic).27

From Class 1 to 8 the subjects of general education at the madrassa include (i) Bengali including grammar; (ii) Mathematics including Geometry; (iii) English including grammar; (iv) History; (v) General Science; (xvii). Persian including grammar; and, (xviii) Urdu including grammar. The religious studies for these classes include (i) Quran tilawat (recitation of the Quran); (ii) Tazbid; (iii) Fiqah; (iv) Akhlaq; (v) Aqaid; and (vi) Arabic language. From 1978, after the Qaumi Madrassa Board was formed, general education was added to religious education from Class1 to 8.

3.3.3 Cadet Madrassas

Cadet madrassas combine general education and madrassa education mainly within Aliya framework. They also have Quran Hifzul section from which Hafez graduates come out. Many parents who prefer modern education but, at the same time, prefer that their

27 See, Shafiq Rahman, op. cit.
children learn Quran and Hadith send their children to these Cadet madrassas. These madrassas have better educational environment, scientific teaching methods, and modern general curriculum in keeping with government policy; audio-visual aids and internets are used. These madrassas are privately financed and, therefore, are affordable only for the middle and upper middle-class parents.

The exact number of Cadet madrassas are not known. One estimate puts the total number of Cadet madrassas at 10, while another estimate puts their number at 12. However, in connection with the present study, when an individual count was made, the total figure of Cadet madrassas came to no less than 20, located mainly in Dhaka, but also in Chittagong, Sylhet, Mymensingh, Jamalpur, and Bogra. These include some of the notorious Cadet madrassas associated with the late Shayekh Abdur Rahman, the executed Jamaatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB) leader and reputed chain of Cadet madrassas under the aegis of the Tanjimul Ummah Foundation. The website of Tanjimul Foundation, which has 10 madrassas ranging from Hifzul madrassas, girls’ Cadet madrassas and general Cadet Madrassas in Dhaka, Narayanganj, Chittagong, Feni and Tangail, takes pride in the fact that students come in top positions in formal examinations and co-curriculum activities like international Quran recitations and hifz competitions.

Some scholars view the emergence of Cadet Madrassas as a market response to certain newer demands for madrassa education. As a continuation of migration of manpower to Middle East, Europe and North America, the demand is growing for madrassa-educated people in mosques and Islamic education centres in those countries. A question has also been raised whether market competition may induce reforms in the rather recalcitrant Qaumi madrassas. This is a point that will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

3.4 Management of Aliya Madrassa – Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board

3.4.1 Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board

All government, semi-government and private Aliya madrassas are under the Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board (BMEB), as per the Bangladesh Madrassa Education Ordinance 1978. The Board started functioning on June 4, 1979. BMEB was vested with the responsibility of organisation, regulation, supervision, control, development and improvement of Madrassa education in Bangladesh, in accordance with the provisions of this Ordinance. In more concrete terms, the Board is responsible for making grants for buildings and other academic and support facilities, examination administration and certification of all levels – Ebtedayee, Dakhil, Alim, Fazil and Kamil. Specialist jobs like curriculum development vests in officials with the highest qualification of Kamil but hardly any training and expertise in curriculum development. At the operational level,
BMEB is responsible for designing curricula, holding examinations, registering madrassas, contracting out textbook production, and distributing textbooks. Taking the total number of madrassas of different levels throughout the country, and the diverse activities as just cursorily mentioned here and the number of officials in a single board, the burden on the BMEB is simply stupendous. This point needs to be highlighted here because compared to this, there are eight general education Boards for six Divisions of the country, one technical and vocational education board, in addition to the fact that these Boards do not have to deal with graduate and post-graduate education. General graduate and post-graduate education in the country are controlled and managed by public universities.

The Government now covers 90% of the salary of the madrassas and, as with primary, secondary and higher secondary schools, there are reports of massive corruption in the registration of madrassas. BMEB has severe organizational and human capacity constraints, affecting its management of the madrassa subsector. BMEB has a small number of staff in its nine zonal offices under an Assistant Inspector to administer madrassa registration and Board examination matters. Moreover, huge staff shortages are impacting BMEB’s day-to-day activities regarding the oversight of Aliya madrassas.

### 3.4.2 Madrassa Management

At the madrassa level, the management vests in a Governing Body, as is the case with government or Management Committees, and non-government madrassas. The Chairman of the Board/Committee is the Deputy Commissioner (DC), if the madrassa is located in district headquarters, or Additional Deputy Commissioner or a distinguished person nominated by the DC. The members include representatives of teachers, guardians, founders and donors, in addition to persons nominated by the Chairman and the local Education department.

Duties of the Governing Body or Managing Committee include policy direction to the madrassa authority regarding administration, finance, budgeting, capital and infrastructure development. However, as per the Madrassa Ordinance, the Board or the Management Committee is not to interfere with the principal or the superintendent in the day-to-day administration of the Madrassa, or in purely academic matters which should be left to the principal or, as the case may be, superintendent and the teaching staff of the Madrassa. Similarly, the Board or the Management Committee is not to interfere with the admission of students into the Madrassa or with the promotion or detention of students or sending up of candidates for examinations to be held by the Board, which is to be left exclusively to the discretion of the principal or the superintendent.

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34 Ibid.
From the case studies of madrassas, the picture that emerges about management committee reflects the stipulated pattern, except that the total number of management committee members varies between 11 to 14 and there were representatives of the teachers and guardians. However, instead of the Deputy Commissioner or Additional Deputy Commissioner, the local Member of Parliament or local political leaders representing the MP make important decisions about the composition of the management committees and its functioning. Secondly, the role of the founders at times was observed to be very prominent.

3.4.3 Management and Administration of Qaumi Madrassas

Somewhat coincidental with Aliya madrasas, a board for governing Qaumi education was set up in 1978 outside government. The name of the board is Befaqul Madarisil Arabia Bangladesh. Prior to this Qaumi Madrassa Board, examinations were held independently and under the Patia Madrassa in Chittagong. Now the Qaumi Madrassas of the country’s north, south and Dhaka region hold their examinations under the Board. Currently, there are 300 madrasas in the country under this board at the Takmil (Masters degree) level; 200 at the Fazilat (Bachelors) level; 100 at the Sanaria Ammah (secondary) level; 2000 at the Mutawassitah (lower secondary) level; 3000 at the Ebtedayee (primary) level; 2000 for Tahfeezul Quran; and 30 at the level of Tazbid wal Qiraat (higher course for reading the Quran). All these madrasas follow the curriculum, rules and regulations of this Board. Takmil level is of two years with a 1000-mark examination at the end. Similarly, Fazilat and Sanaria Ullaiya (higher secondary) levels are of two years each with a 1000-mark examination at the end. A 1000-mark examination is also held at the end of Sanaria Ammah (secondary comprising of Class 9 and 10). The examinations for these four levels are held under the Board and the rest under the respective madrasas. A Qaumi Madrassa’s lower-level is until Class 8, that is Mutawassitah. Higher religious education begins from Class 9.

There is also a Qaumi madrassa board under the name of Ittehadul Madarisil Board affiliated with Chittagong’s Al-Jamiya Al-Islamiya Patia Madrassa. Almost all of Chittagong’s Qaumi madrasas are conducted under this Board.

The management of Qaumi madrasas is decentralised. There are seven boards for regulating the curriculum and examinations of the Qaumi madrasas. These are:

1. Dastrul Madaris Al-Islamia Al-Ahlia Bangladesh, Patia, Chittagong;
2. Religious Education Board, Habiganj;
3. Azad Deeni Edaraye Ta’aleem Bangladesh, Barcot, Sylhet;
4. Azad Deeni Edaraye Ta’aleem Bangladesh, Kanaighat, Sylhet;
5. Edaraye Ta’aleemia B’Baria, Brahman Baria;
6. Befaqul Madaris, Gauhardanga, Gopalganj; and
7. Befaqul Madarasil Arabia Bangladesh (BMAB), Dhaka.

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35 A Sattar, 2004, Madrassa Education in Bangladesh and Its Impact on Social Life (in Bengali), Dhaka: Islamic Foundation
Of these, BMAB, founded in 1978, is the largest, and aims to bring all the Qaumi madrassas in the country under a common curriculum and textbooks and conduct centralized examinations.\textsuperscript{36} BMAB carries out the following control and regulatory functions: (i) control, coordination and development of the curriculum of the madrassas; (ii) development and coordination of teaching methods; (iii) publication of course books for madrassas; (iv) teacher training; (v) inspection of madrassas; (vi) the conducting of centralized examinations and the distribution of certificates and scholarships; (vii) the auditing of accounts of the madrassas; (viii) promoting the cause of madrassa education; and (ix) administering the Mufti Board to resolve issues related to Islamic jurisprudence in the country (BMAB 2003:5).

Then there are some madrassas that are not run under any board at all. These include Hathazari Darul Ulum Mainul Madrassa, Azizun Ulum Babunagar, Ubaidiya Lanukul Nasirul Islam Nazirhat Madrassa, Darul Marif Bahaddarhat Madrassa, Lalkhan Bazar Darul Ulum Madrassa, Muzaharul Ulum Chattagram Madrassa and others. The Qaumi madrassas, being run in the country under no board at all but quite independently, have a different class set-up and follow the original Deoband lines absolutely. Here the children in the first few years learn Urdu and the next few years Farsi. The classes proceed as 1. Jamahat-e-Dahum; 2. Nahum; 3. Hastam; 4. Haptam; 5. Shasham; 6. Panjam; 7. Chaharam; 8. Chuam; 9. Duam; 10. Ula; and, 11. Title.

\section*{3.5 Funding of Madrassas}

\subsection*{3.5.1 Aliya Madrassa}

There are only five government Aliya madrassa which are wholly government funded and managed. Hence, an overwhelming proportion of Aliya madrassas is privately funded and managed, and generate funds from various sources. According to an Asian Development Bank report, about 15.5\% of the funds are from student fees, 2.0\% from property income, 5.0\% from public donations, and 78.0\% from the Government for salary support. However, another source claims that 92.7\% of the Aliya funding comes from the government in terms of salary support, 3.4\% comes from properties, 2.5\% from student fees and 1.4\% from contributions and donations. However, Ebtedayee sections of Dakhil madrassas only receive Tk 500 subvention whereas general formal education teachers receive Tk 3,500. Since salary subvention is dependent on the qualifications, most madrassa teachers do not qualify for similar subventions as their mainstream counterparts. Madrassa superintendents do not receive the same salaries as head teachers within the formal education system scale because they often do not have a bachelor of science degree in education.

At the field level, the madrassas that were selected for the case studies under the present study were yet to be enlisted as MPO (monthly pay order) by the Government. Therefore,

\textsuperscript{36} From the results book of the 2003 centralized examinations, it turns out that 635 qaumi madrasas participated in five grades and two subject-based examinations (BMAB 2003).
their status was as good as Qaumi madrassas in terms of donations from local community accounting for 60% of their income, about 10% coming from tuition fees, about 10-15% government contribution and about 5% from property income.

A point is often made about Aliya madrassas that they receive a disproportionate share of public spending on education in relation to their contribution to human development or income generation. For example, an article in *The Daily Star* captioned ‘Madrassas mushroom with state favour’ said, “Experts believe madrassas have negligible contributions in creating skilled human resources in the country, still they received on average 11.5 percent of the state education budget in the last few years.”\(^{37}\) However, in another study,\(^ {38}\) it was found that between 1990-91 and 2003-04 the percentage of budgetary allocations ranged between 8.1% and 11.5%. In fact, the percentage rose to 11.5% in 2000-01 and hovered around 11.5% in the subsequent years. Compared to this, the percentage of allocations for primary, secondary and college education, varied between 75.8% and 71.6% (2003-04); the fall being accounted for by a decline in allocation for primary education (from 44.7% to 34.2%) alone. Allocation for both secondary and college education marked increase from 21.1% to 23.3% and 10% to 14.1% respectively.\(^ {39}\) For 2002-03, per student allocation in primary education was Tk 1,127, for non-government secondary school, Tk 1,044 and for non-government madrassa (Dakhil to Kamil levels) it was Tk 1,339.\(^ {40}\)

### 3.5.2 Qaumi Madrassa

In keeping with the Deobandi tradition, Qaumi madrassas do not take any state assistance. They depend on community support and donations from individuals. Funds are collected through zakat, fitra, cattle hides of sacrificial animals during Eid-ul Azha, foodgrains during crop harvesting seasons. A significant addition in recent years has been donations by the Bangladeshi expatriate community, particularly those in Middle Eastern countries. Similarly, through expatriate Bangladeshis, some of the Middle Eastern NGOs were are also providing financial assistance in construction of mosques and madrassas.

Qaumi madrassas generate revenue through donations from individuals and local and international Islamic organizations; some have their own trusts, foundations and other income-generating resources. Others, such as *Iqra Bangladesh*, are dependent on students’ fees and donations by the community. After teachers’ salaries are paid, funds are often not available for non-salary quality inputs such as teaching aids and library

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\(^ {39}\) BANBEIS, 2003

\(^ {40}\) BANBEIS 2003 and Mercer et al.
books. Furthermore, madrassas usually have poor book-keeping and fund management skills, and therefore require skills for efficiency and transparency in managing funds.\textsuperscript{41}

There is a widely held assumption that some Qaumi madrassas receive external funds from the Middle East, but no data is available on the size, providers, or means of provision. In recent years, worldwide attention has focused on the dissemination of donations to Islamic charities and the export of conservative religious educational curricula by governments and citizens in the Persian Gulf. There has been concern over the spread of radical Islam through schools, universities and mosques that have received donations and curricular material from Persian Gulf governments, organizations, and citizens. These institutions exist around the world, including South, Central and Southeast Asia; the Middle East and North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa, Western Europe, and the United States. Some view the teaching of religious curricula informed by Islamic traditions common in the Gulf as threatening the existence of more moderate beliefs and practices in other parts of the Muslim world. However, some argue that a differentiation should be made between funding to support charitable projects, such as madrassa-building, and funding that has been channeled, overtly or implicitly, to support extremist teachings in these madrassas. Critics of Gulf states’ policies have alleged that Persian Gulf governments long permitted or encouraged fund raising by charitable Islamic groups and foundations linked to Al Qaeda. Several Gulf states have strengthened controls on the activities of charities engaged in overseas activities, including Madrassa-building and administration. Several Islamic charitable organizations based in Gulf states continue to provide assistance to educational projects across the Muslim world, and channels of responsibility between donors and recipients for curricular development and educational control are often unresolved or unclear.\textsuperscript{42}

### 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided a descriptive picture of different categories of madrassas, their number, curricula, management and funding. Two major types of madrassas in Bangladesh are Aliya and Qaumi, each having different types based on levels from Ebtedayee (primary) to post-graduate. Ebetdayees are mostly attached to higher levels but there are stand-alone Ebtedayees too. Apart from these two distinct categories, there are some pre-Ebtedayee feeder-type madrassas, where the graduates may move to either the Aliya or Qaumi stream. These include very rudimentary and informal maktabs, mostly attached to mosques, Noorani or foundational madrassas, and qualifying Hafizia madrassas, producing Hafiz who memorize the whole Quran, and Furqania madrassa producing Qaris, who master the art of recitation of the Quran. A newly emergent category of madrassas is the cadet madrassas in the Aliya sector, which is a combination

\textsuperscript{41} Asian Development Bank :2008: *People’s Republic of Bangladesh: Capacity Building for Madrassa Education, CDTA Project 39297

\textsuperscript{42} Christopher M. Blanchard, 2008: *Islamic Religious Schools, Madrasas: Background, CRS Report for Congress, Washington DC,
of English medium schools and Aliya madrassas. Their number is not very big but they are becoming more popular among the middle-class as well as rich parents.

A major problem in producing reliable estimates of madrassas is the lack of updated or even recent data and rather confusing nature of the data themselves. Based on one study, the number of stand alone Ebtedayee madrassas was 6,700, Aliya 7,000, Qaumi 8,000, and Hafizia/Furqania 15,000, so that the total comes to 37,000. The total number of students in Aliya has been estimated to be 3,340,800, and the total number of teachers to be 230,732. If we include the mosques and religious teachers in secular primary and secondary schools, there is a clientele population of 4.3 million. A significant development in recent years has been the growth of female madrassas in both Aliya and Qaumi streams.

A critical content analysis of the curriculum of madrassas shows that there is gulf of difference between the content of the curriculum and what is actually taught in the madrassas. Several rounds of customization and simplification make the syllabus rather impotent. The second observation about Qaumi curriculum is that it is very outdated.

Finally, Qaumi madrassas have, in recent years, been the beneficiaries of expatriate funding – from Bangladeshi individuals working abroad and from foreign Islamic NGOs. While the latter sources contribute funding for physical development of the madrassas, some allege that these also finance radicalization process and terrorist training. While these are reported in newspapers, it is very difficult to verify such allegations.
Chapter 4

Socio-Economic Perspectives on Madrassa Education

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the socio-economic perspectives of madrassa education in terms of (i) Socio-economic background of madrassa students and teachers; (ii) Perceptions about Curriculum and Learning; and (iii) Employment and social functions of madrassas. This is to obtain a better picture about the socioeconomic background of these stakeholders and also understand the socio-political dynamics between madrassa stakeholders, the local community and the political process in the local and national context.

4.1 Socioeconomic Background of Madrassa Students

It has been estimated that madrassas in South Asia (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) support about six million students. An overwhelming majority of these students come from poor families who cannot send their children to modern schools either because they are not within accessible distance or they are not affordable in terms of tuition, cost of books and related expenses. In the case of Qaumi madrassas, an overwhelming majority (82%) come from poor families of rural areas and small towns. Places such as Sylhet, Chittagong, Jamalpur, Tangail and some of the northern districts have been the traditional recruitment base for Qaumi madrassas. Students in Aliya madrassas, on the other hand, come from more diverse background including lower-middle class families. Students in madrassas usually come from the neighbourhood and adjoining villages. However, in well-reputed madrassas under both Aliya and Qaumi systems, students from far off places come and stay in the dormitories. There is a perception that children from relatively poorer, including destitute, families get admitted into Qaumi madrassas, while children from relatively better off families come to Aliya stream. The basis of this perception is that Qaumi madrassas do not charge poorer, wretched and orphan children and they subsume the expenses from contributions, donations (Zakat, Fitra and philanthropy). A significant proportion of Qaumi madrassas maintains dorms for orphans (orphanage). There is also a perception that dropouts from general stream educational institutions get admitted into Qaumi madrassas because of relatively easier admission procedures. On the other hand, Aliya madrassas charge students like general educational institutions.

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44 See, Ibid.
45 See, Mercer et al
For the purpose of the present study, the socioeconomic background of children from madrassas was explored. First, the picture obtained from the case study of 10 madrassas suggests that 80-90% of the students come from poor and lower middle-class families, while about 10% and 5% come from middle-class and upper middle-class families respectively. However, it should be mentioned that the concept of middle-class and upper middle-class is sensitive to urban-rural differentiation. Whom the respondents referred to as middle class, meaning solvent farmers or medium business-class, would possibly be considered as lower middle-class in an urban context. We have to keep the relativity of these concepts in mind in understanding the social stratification of the madrassa students.

Secondly, data was collected about parents’ occupation as an index of the students’ socioeconomic background, while conducting structured interviews of the students. The findings are presented in Table 6. From the table, it turns out that nearly one-third of the fathers of madrassa students – both Aliya and Qaumi – were farmers. However, what is also significant is that about 34% of the fathers of Aliya stream students and 29% of those of Qaumi streams were service holders. Among these service holders, 12 were teachers – 9 being parents of Aliya students and 3 parents of Qaumi students. In addition, seven parents of Aliya students were expatriate workers. This means that expatriate workers who have the means to send their children to better general education institutions are sending them to madrassas.

Table 6: Socioeconomic Background of Students by Madrassa Type and Father’s Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father’s Occupation</th>
<th>Aliya</th>
<th>Qaumi</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>18(27.7%)</td>
<td>10(28.6%)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Labourer</td>
<td>4(6.2%)</td>
<td>3(8.6%)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petty Trader</td>
<td>4(6.2%)</td>
<td>7(20%)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>13(20%)</td>
<td>2(5.7%)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport Worker</td>
<td>2(3.1%)</td>
<td>2(5.7%)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Holder</td>
<td>22(33.8%)</td>
<td>10(28.6%)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>2(3.1%)</td>
<td>1(2.8%)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>65 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>35(100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage of column totals.
Source: Structured Interviews of Madrassa Students, September 2010

From the interviews of stakeholders, it also transpired that the societal backgrounds of madrassa students were changing. By and large, the commonplace knowledge that poorer parents send their children to madrassas remains valid, but changes were taking place because many well-to-do families send their children to madrassas – more to Aliyas but to a lesser extent to Qaumis.
A related aspect: how many of the siblings in a family go for a madrassa education? From the structured interviews of the madrassa students, it turns out that nearly half the families sent all of their children (one out of one, two out of two, three out of three) to Aliya madrassas but the proportion was higher (nearly 50%) in the case of Qaumi madrassas (Table 7).

Table 7: Number of Madrassa Going Students in the Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. out of Total Siblings</th>
<th>Aliya</th>
<th>Qaumi</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/3+</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/3+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¾</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/5+</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Structured Interviews of Madrassa Students, September 2010

4.2 Student Perceptions about Curriculum

It is common knowledge that the curriculum in Aliya madrassas includes general education courses, whereas Qaumi madrassas include only limited general courses mainly upto the junior level. However, the question was still put to students as to whether their respective curriculum includes adequate general education courses (Table 8). Only one-fifth of Aliya students responded positive but 80% of Qaumi students replied that in the positive.

Table 8: Whether General Course included in Madrassa Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whether Enough</th>
<th>Aliya</th>
<th>Qaumi</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Structured Questionnaire Survey of Students, September 2010

Those who answered in the negative i.e, that the general education courses were not enough later gave various explanations to explain why that was the case. As may be seen in Table 9, the answer is varied indeed. More than half of the Aliya students talked about
inadequate coverage of Bengali and English, while the rest of the students from Aliya described deficiencies in teaching (19.2%). Nearly a quarter of the Aliya students answered, relating to their admissions in public universities where madrassa students are not considered for admissions in Arts and Social Sciences Department, because of less than 200 marks coverage of Bengali and English each.

Table 9: If General Courses Not Adequate, Reasons for being Inadequate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Inadequacy</th>
<th>Aliya</th>
<th>Qaumi</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate coverage of Bengali and English</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching deficiency</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate for University entry qualifications</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Structured Questionnaire Survey, September 2010.

*More than one response admitted.

4.3 Quality of Education and Learning in Madrassas

The quality of education is a function of the content of curriculum and quality of teachers including pedagogy. In their study on madrasa education, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha attempted to make a comprehensive assessment of the quality of education in madrassas in Bangladesh. While appreciating that the purpose of madrasa education is primarily biased toward understanding the relationship between human beings and the divine, the study took into cognizance that madrasa education should impart sufficient life skills to make the students employable. The first observation that the study makes concerns the competence of the Madrassa Education Board to fix an appropriate curriculum. The second detailed observation that the study makes concerns the kind of customization that curriculum materials on geography, science, mathematics, general knowledge do by introducing religious concepts and slants. Consequently, students may not expect to get an objective knowledge base in those disciplines to make them competitive with students from other streams. The study goes into the details of pedagogy through examples and comes to the conclusion: “The quality of education currently provided under the madrasa education system does not provide much scope for students to develop as modern human beings. A combination of factors including the conservative attitude of the authorities, low quality teaching aids, unskilled teachers, high levels of corruption, fundamentalist and backward looking policies ensures that a good teaching/learning environment does not exist within the Madrassa system.”

46 See, Muzib Mehdi, op. cit.: 51-58.
A recent World Bank study undertook a detailed investigation into the quality of education and learning in publicly funded secondary madrassa and private general secondary schools in urban and rural settings. The study appreciated some of the positive developments in Aliya madrassas. Following innovative reforms, the registered Aliya madrassas now offer co-education and follow state-approved curriculum where, along with Islamic Studies, students learn Mathematics, English, Science and other subjects to receive public funding. Female students constitute almost half of the enrolment in registered madrassas. Despite the increase in girls’ enrolment in secondary madrassas, the report finds a persistent gender gap in the quality of learning outcomes. Both the boys and girls scored lower in Mathematics and English tests than the students of publicly funded non-government schools. However, the performance of all rural schools in English and Mathematics is also low. Therefore, there is a need to improve the quality of learning outcomes across the sector. While madrassas have played an important role in Bangladesh in achieving gender parity in school enrollments, the report highlights that the challenge now is to enhance the quality of outcomes for girls in particular.

For the purposes of the present study, the quality of education was investigated in a sample survey of students and FGDs. As mentioned in the preceding section (Table 9), students deliberated on the inadequacy of general education courses and about one-fifth of them (19.2%) mentioned that the teaching deficiency was a major reason why general courses were not taught properly in madrassas. The picture, however, was quite different regarding Qaumi madrassas where 80% considered that general education courses were adequate, although it is common knowledge that general education courses, such as Bengali and Mathematics, are offered up to the 8th grade in Qaumi madrassas (Table 9). On further investigation, it was revealed that only a small percentage of the general education teachers had undergone teachers training, but that none of the teachers in religious subjects had any such training. In the FGDs, students pointed out that teachers did not take much interest in general education courses.

While one Alem argues that women do better than boys in madrassas, as they do mostly in general education, perhaps the World Bank study bears more credibility because, given the socio-economic settings of girls students, it is more likely they will lag behind boys.

In this report, reference has been made to teachers training. Most Aliya madrassa teachers are not well-trained. According to a BANBEIS survey, they possess lower qualifications than their general formal schoolteacher counterparts. About 25% of madrassa teachers have higher secondary certificates or lesser qualifications, and 26.5%

48 See, Mohammad Niaz Asadullah, Nazmul Chaudhury and Syed Rashed Al-Zayed Josh, Secondary School Madrasas in Bangladesh: Incidence, Quality and Implications for Reforms, Human development section, South Asia Region, World Bank, March 2009
49 Ibid.
50 BANBEIS, 2006, Post-Primary Education Survey, 2005
have undergraduate degrees. In the general formal education system, 72.5% of teachers have higher secondary certificates, and 71.9% have undergraduate degrees. Further, training opportunities for madrassa teachers are rare. The Bangladesh Madrassa Teachers Training Institute conducts about 3 weeks of short training courses with its limited capacity, and only about 10%–14% of madrassa teachers receive this training. Madrassa students’ performance in comparison with that of general formal education students, quality inputs that madrassas receive in relation to those of general formal education, madrassas’ contributions within the general education system, and improvements required to strengthen madrassa students’ learning outcomes must be assessed.

4.4 Perceptions about Education System and Career

A pertinent question is, “Why do parents send their children to madrassas, and not to secular schools or educational institutions?” From available studies, it appears that many parents prefer a religious education for their children on spiritual and moral grounds. They believe that Islamic schooling will reaffirm, strengthen and preserve their children’s Islamic faith and practices which are perceived under increasing threat because of the rise of secular culture and the penetration of alien values. Because of these preferences, many parents supplement the general education of their children with at least part time religious education at pre-primary institutions or maktabs. Many, however, appreciate the value of general education but the very poor in rural areas just cannot afford the out-of-pocket expenses for uniforms or books which “free” secular education entails. On the other hand, in their opinion, madrassa education up to Dakhil (secondary) level can bring their male children a job in a mosque or at a primary madrassa. This will also bring them respect within the community.

The above question was put to the madrassa students slightly differently: why are you undertaking a madrassa education? The burden of the question was on the motivating factor and to check whose decision it was to undertake this type of education. The responses are summarized in Table 10. As expected, there were two dominant factors - the religious factor and desire of the parents which also centred around religious reasons.

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51 Ibid.
Table 10: Reasons for Taking Madrassa Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Aliya</th>
<th>Qaumi</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious/Spiritual Reasons</td>
<td>15(23.1%)</td>
<td>17(48.6%)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be a Member of Ideal Society of Pious People</td>
<td>14(21.5%)</td>
<td>1(2.8%)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ desire</td>
<td>13(20%)</td>
<td>4(11.4%)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Pressure/Pressure from Village Elders</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3(8.6%)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn Religion properly/to become a Maulana/Alem</td>
<td>20(30.1%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost factor – education is free in Madrassa</td>
<td>1(1.5%)</td>
<td>2(5.7%)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-interest in Religious Education</td>
<td>1(1.5%)</td>
<td>8(22.9%)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>65(100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Structured Interviews of Madrassa Students. Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage of column totals.

Again, the lack of physical access to a secular school can also act as a factor, in rural areas, for parents to send children to madrassas. In case studies of madrassas, it was observed that the Ebtedayee section of the Alim madrassa had a relatively low number of students compared to other madrassas. The reason for this was due to the existence of a government primary school in close proximity which caused many parents to send their children to such a school. However, many rich parents in both rural and urban areas, where secular schools are easily accessible, send their children to madrassas. The incorporation of a secular curriculum in Aliya madrassas motivates parents to send their children there for the dual purpose of giving them a religious grounding and the prospect of a job in a school, with the additional possibility of transferring to a secular undergraduate and post-graduate institution. By the same token, some Aliya madrassas, mainly in urban areas, provide technical training in computers, entrepreneurial business management and trade skills so that, given the quality of the state schools, these madrassas serve as a viable alternative to the secular education system.

Parents and students have various standards of evaluation when deciding whether to send their children to an Aliya or Qaumi madrassa. Some parents dislike the fact that the Qaumi system is dependent financially on charities, in the collection of which students are also used. They dislike the fact that their children are sent from door to door requesting for funding in order to be able to carry on with their studies. On the other

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54 This refers to the case study of Reziatala Alim Madrassa, Jhikargacha, Jessore.
55 USAID, 2003: 15
hand, there is a common perception—and justifiably so—that from the point of view of
religion, the Qaumi system provides better and ‘original’ education, whereas the religious
value of the Aliya system has become diluted by the introduction of secular courses. In
fact, many madrassa graduates from Bangladesh find jobs in Middle Eastern mosques
and maktabs, where most of them have graduated from the Qaumi system. The Qaumi
system therefore has a competitive edge that is favoured by many parents in Bangladesh.
The mutual perception of the students about the Aliya and Qaumi systems was explored
during the structured interviews and the results are presented in Table 11.

The perceptions, as expected, were more polarized among the Qaumi students, 80% of
whom thought that Aliya curriculum has deviated and included general education
courses. Among the Aliya students, 46% looked at the two streams as a kind of division
of labour, where Aliyas were biased toward worldly attainments and Qaumis focused on
the life hereafter. About one-third of Aliya students, however, argued that learning of life
skills is missing in the Qaumi system.

Table 11: Perception about the Other Stream of Madrassa Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions</th>
<th>Life Skills Training Missing</th>
<th>Division of Labour between Religion and Worldly Life</th>
<th>Perverted Education, Attracted by Worldly Life</th>
<th>Ultra-conservative Education</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aliya about Qaumi</td>
<td>21(32.1%)</td>
<td>30(46%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3(4.6%)</td>
<td>8(12.4%)</td>
<td>65(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qaumi About Aliya</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6(17.1%)</td>
<td>28(80%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1(2.9%)</td>
<td>35(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Structured Interviews of Sample Madrassa Students, September 2010. Figures in the
parentheses indicate percentage of row totals.

The perceptions of the madrassa students about general education system was also
explored. The findings are presented in Table 12. About half of the Aliya madrassa
students commented “good/ok” about general education; about one-tenth made more than
approving comments, “appropriate for present reality’, but then nearly one-third
responded that general education was incomplete, because the subject of religion was
largely missing. As far as perceptions of the Qaumi stream students were concerned, the
absence of religion in general education was the opinion of about 43% students, followed
by the perception of “incomplete education” held by 29% students. Furthermore,
seventeen percent Qaumi students believed that general education was immoral.

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56 As mentioned earlier, the Qaumi system originated as a backlash to the secularization of the Calcutta Aliya
Madrasa curriculum.
Madrassa students were asked about their future career plans in relation to the ongoing level of studies. While nearly one-fourth of the Aliya students said they would continue with the ongoing studies, 74% of them said they might switch over to general education (Table 13). An overwhelming majority of the Qaumi madrassa students said they would continue with their present education. Interestingly, 3 Qaumi students responded that they might switch over to general education, while one said he might take a job.

Table 12: Perception of Madrassa Education about General Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions</th>
<th>Aliya</th>
<th>Qaumi</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate for Present Reality</td>
<td>6(9.2%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good/Ok</td>
<td>33(50.8%)</td>
<td>3(8.6%)</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Bad but Religion Missing</td>
<td>20(30.8%)</td>
<td>15(42.8%)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete, Madrassa Education Better</td>
<td>4(6.1%)</td>
<td>10(28.6%)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immoral, does not Ensure Akhirat (Hereafter)</td>
<td>2(3.1%)</td>
<td>6(17.1%)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65(100%)</td>
<td>35(100%)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Structured Interviews of Madrassa Students, September 2010. Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage of column totals.

Although it is rather uncommon that Qaumi madrassa students switch to general education, sometimes they do even though they have to start the general education career from a much lower level than the apparent or nominal equivalence would suggest. Taking up a job in mosque or Maktab/Noorani/Furqania madrassa is not uncommon at all.

Table 13: Plan for Higher Education after Passing Out from the Present Institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan of Higher Education</th>
<th>Aliya</th>
<th>Qaumi</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continue with Madrassa Education</td>
<td>15(23.1%)</td>
<td>30(85.7%)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May Shift to General Education</td>
<td>48(73.9%)</td>
<td>3(8.6%)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take up a Job</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1(2.9%)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not decided/Depends on Parents</td>
<td>2(3.1%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65(100%)</td>
<td>35(100%)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Structured Interviews of Madrassa Students, September 2010. Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage of column totals.
4.5 Societal Perceptions of Madrassa Education

The students were asked as to why there were pervasive negative perceptions of the society towards madrassa education. The responses were varied providing interesting self-perception as presented in Table 14.

Table 14: Causes of Prevailing Negative Perceptions about Madrassa Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes of Negative Perceptions</th>
<th>Aliya</th>
<th>Qaumi</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Correct Understanding about Islam and Madrasas</td>
<td>18(27.7%)</td>
<td>17(48.6%)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Credibility of Graduates in Worldly life and Job Market</td>
<td>12(18.5%)</td>
<td>5(14.3%)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Calibre Students Go to Madrassas</td>
<td>10(15.4%)</td>
<td>2(5.7%)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Negligence toward Madrasas forms Opinion</td>
<td>8(12.3%)</td>
<td>3(8.6%)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madrassas are Source of Radicalism</td>
<td>4(6.2%)</td>
<td>2(5.8%)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct/Conspiracy/Media Hype/Muslims suffer humiliation in the path of Allah</td>
<td>6(9.2%)</td>
<td>3(8.6%)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only poor people get admitted into Madrassas</td>
<td>4(6.2%)</td>
<td>2(5.8%)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not Know</td>
<td>3(4.6%)</td>
<td>1(2.9%)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65(100%)</td>
<td>35(100%)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Structured Interviews, September 2011. Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage of column total.

One interesting pattern about the responses about society’s negative perception is some degree of symmetry between Aliya and Qaumi students’ responses. This was rather natural because both the streams are on the defensive in the face of society’s perceptions. In any case, by way of explaining the causes of negative image, the major response from both Aliya (27.7%) and Qaumi (48.6%) was lack of understanding about Islam and madrassa in the society at large. Poor credibility of the madrassa students in life skills and job market was the second important explanation of the madrassa students of both streams – Aliya (18.3%) and Qaumi (14.5%). The respondents also argued that as madrassas were a less priority area to the Government, the society’s opinion was also largely shaped by the Government’s disposition. Thus, 14.3% of the Aliya students and 8.5% of the Qaumi students offered this explanation. Some argued that as less caliber students come to madrassas, the society’s valuation of the students also gets coloured. By way of giving an explanation for lack of knowledge, a good percentage of the respondents (9.2% Aliya and 8.6% Qaumi) argued that the negative perception was due to social and political construction and media hype. Even some argued that humiliation and suffering were only natural in the path of Allah. Likewise, poverty also was believed to be a reason behind the negative stereotypes.

The question that was put to the students at this point was how to get out of this stereotype? Answers varied widely compared to the explanations of negative perceptions.
The burden of suggestions of the Aliya students was on upgrading the quality of education with improved curriculum (22.9%), attracting better teachers and students (13.1%) and garnering government support (19.7%). Other important responses from the Aliya students were propagation of Islam among elites and masses (16.5%), change of attitude (9.8%) and rooting out militancy from the country (9.8%). The Qaumi students focused on propagation of Islam (44.2%), change of attitude (29.4%) and rooting out militancy (5.9%).

Table 15: How to Remove the Negative Perceptions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of Removing Negative Perceptions</th>
<th>Aliya</th>
<th>Qaumi</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Propagating Islam/Publicise the Peaceful nature of Islam</td>
<td>10(16.5%)</td>
<td>15(44.2%)</td>
<td>25(26.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government to Actively Support and Promote Madrassa Education</td>
<td>12(19.7%)</td>
<td>3(8.8%)</td>
<td>15(15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of Attitude</td>
<td>6(9.8%)</td>
<td>10(29.4%)</td>
<td>16(16.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attract Better Teachers and Students</td>
<td>8(13.1%)</td>
<td>1(2.9%)</td>
<td>9(9.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce Quality Education and Upgrade Curriculum</td>
<td>14(22.9%)</td>
<td>1(2.9%)</td>
<td>15(15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Behave Responsibly</td>
<td>5(8.2%)</td>
<td>2(5.9%)</td>
<td>7(7.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Out Militancy from the Country</td>
<td>6(9.8%)</td>
<td>2(5.9%)</td>
<td>8(8.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61*(100%)</td>
<td>34*(100%)</td>
<td>95(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 4 & 1 Not Applicable respectively, these respondents said they did not have an answer to the earlier question. Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage of column total.

Source: Structured Interviews, September 2010

From this pen-picture on self-perception and perceptions about the society, social stereotypes, quality of education and issue of government support emerge clearly some important issues that need to be highlighted. However, quality of education meant different things to different streams of madrassa education. For the Aliya stream, quality entails adequate emphasis on English and Bengali languages and quality of teaching. But the Qaumi students feel that there is not much of a problem with quality in their madrassas, excepting introduction of some general subjects at the primary and junior levels.

4.6 Employment Prospects of Madrassa Graduates

4.6.1 Aliya Graduates

Before discussing about employability of Aliya madrassa students, the question of equivalence of Aliya graduates may be taken up since this is currently a topical issue of admissions into major public universities. Whether this is reopening a settled issue or an attempt at improving the educational standard of madrassa education remains to be seen. While there has been notional equivalence like Dakhil equivalent to SSC, Alim equivalent to HSC, Fazil equivalent to Graduate and Kamil equivalent to Masters degree,
the formal recognition did not come before 1985. In 1985, Dakhil was given recognition as secondary level and Alim was recognized equivalent to higher secondary (HSC) level in 1987. With Alim passed, students could qualify to compete for admission into universities, even into medical colleges. Fazil and Kamil degrees have not been given formal recognition yet. In 1995, a government circular said that a Kamil degree holder would be eligible for the post of Madrassa provost (Superintendent) and would be entitled to the salary of a Masters degree holder. This was considered as an indirect recognition of Kamil as Master degree holder. The circular opened further scope by saying that a Kamil degree holder would be able to join as Assistant Teacher in a Secondary School or a Dakhil level madrassa. For Fazil degree, a reforms committee was formed in 2002 that submitted its report to the then Prime Minister. The Government wanted to bring Fazil and Kamil madrassa education under National University and, to this effect, decided to amend the Bangladesh Madrassa Education Act 1978 and Bangladesh Islamic University Act 1980 in order to modernize madrassa education. It seems the decision is yet to be implemented.

While the matter has not been formally resolved, a new controversy has come up in recent years regarding the equivalence of Alim degree. While a good number of Alim students got the opportunity of competing with general education HSC students for admission into public universities including Dhaka university, recently, several departments in Dhaka University and Jahangir Nagar University have slapped a bar on madrassa-passed Alim students on the ground that they have not completed, as have the general education students, 200 marks each in Bengali and English. Incidentally, in that year Aliya madrassa students occupied top 20 positions in the admission tests in Jahangir Nagar University. It may be mentioned that Aliya madrassa students complete only 100 marks in Bengali and 100 marks in English at the Dakhil and Alim levels, whereas their counterparts in general education take 200 marks courses in Bengali and English each. The matter went to the High Court and then Supreme Court which recently quashed public university bar on madrassa students. But reports suggest that certain departments in Dhaka University are still unwilling to admit madrassa students. Recently, Comilla University has also followed suit.

Now what kinds of jobs are taken up by Aliya graduates? What kinds of jobs are there in the religious sector and how big it is?

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57  See, Shafiq Rahman, op. cit.
58   The Supreme Court stayed for six weeks the High Court order that had halted the effectiveness of precondition restricting Madrassa students to appear for ‘Kha’ and ‘Gha’ units admission tests of Dhaka University. The DU authorities on September 6, 2009 imposed the precondition for the Madrassa students, who have not appeared in Bengali and English for 100 marks each at the HSC level, to sit for the ‘Kha’ and ‘Gha’ units’ admission tests of the university. Following a the writ petition jointly filed by three Madrassa students, the HC on November 11, 2010 stayed the DU authorities’ decision and also issued a rule upon the authorities to explain why the decision should not be declared illegal. The university authorities then filed a leave-to-appeal petition with the SC against the HC stay order. See, The Daily Star, 01 December 2010.
The religious education sector in Bangladesh consists of teaching and other staff positions in about 37,500 madrassas and another 50,000 maktabs. There are 250,000 to 300,000 mosques in the country and each of them requires at least two employees - the Imam (the head cleric) and a muazzin (one who calls out for prayer). In addition, a khadem is needed to service the premises and facilities in most urban mosques. About 78,000 secular primary schools and 16,500 secondary schools in the country need at least one Islamic religious teacher each. So, by a rough count, the religious sector consists of about 350,000 teaching positions, about 500,000 positions in mosques and about 100,000 positions in secular educational institutions giving a total of about 950,000 positions—almost equal to the number of public sector employees in the country. About 100,000 positions are there for Qazis (marriage registrars) who register marriage and divorce. Mumtaz Ahmad has come to a much higher estimate at about 4.3 million jobs in the religious sector.  

Of course, we have to keep in mind that the Aliya graduates compete with Qaumi graduates in the religious sector, though they have substantial edge over the Qaumi graduates in formal jobs.  

Then come the general public and private sectors. Aliya madrassas teach the same subjects as those taught in public schools. Graduates acquire skills and competence comparable to those of public school graduates which qualify them to compete in the general labour market as well as in the religious sector. Mumtaz Ahmad (2004) states that about 32 percent of university teachers in Bangladesh have a madrassa background. In our study, we could identify jobs in banks, NGOs, private companies, even government jobs like Government College teachers, jawans (soldiers) in the army where Aliya madrassa graduates have successfully competed. During our case studies, it was witnessed how Muratikhola Dakhil Madrassa in Kolaroa of Jessore took pride of their three graduates who were teaching in government colleges.  

4.6.2 Employment of Qaumi Madrassa Graduates  
The scope of employment for Qaumi madrassa graduates is extremely limited, mainly because of the curriculum and non-recognition by the Government. Private sector employers also are not that eager to employ Qaumi madrassa graduates. For example, secondary schools employ at least one Islamic religious teacher and Qaumi graduates are eligible for the jobs. However, school authorities, whether government or private, prefer Aliya graduates for their degree is recognized by the government. Qaumi graduates normally are employed as Khatibs, Imams, Muazzins of mosques, teachers in maktabs and Qaumi madrassas. Because of the focus of Qaumi madrassas on Quran and Hadith teaching, the Qaumi graduates excel in religious education compared to Aliya graduates and, that is why, Qaumi graduates are preferred in neighbourhood and local community.
mosques. But mosques and prayers places within public and private institutions prefer Aliya graduates as they have formal recognized degrees.

Needless to point out, the Qaumi graduates are eligible for lower end jobs in the locality or elsewhere which an Alia or general graduate may not take up. Naturally, these are low paid jobs requiring no skill but the plus side, under the circumstances, is that the Qaumi graduates do perhaps remain under-employed but not unemployed. During interviews and FGDs, the Qaumi graduates did not seem to be unhappy about this situation.

However, during field work for the study we could trace former Qaumi students who shifted to Aliya education and were now holding important positions. For example, a student of Khatbaria Furqania Madrassa has shifted to Aliya stream. Another graduate of Bakhra Jamia Qurania Madrassa is now a teacher in Islamic University, Kushtia.

4.7 Conclusion
This chapter, informed mainly by primary data, provides socioeconomic perspectives on the background of madrassa students, the social dynamics between madrassa stakeholders and local communities, and employability of madrassa graduates. The key findings of this Chapter may be summarized as follows:

- The traditional notion is that poor parents send their children to madrassas to avail low cost education. They have also religious motivation in sending their wards to madrassas. The picture still holds but increasing numbers of relatively well-off families are also sending children to madrassas.

- Regarding curriculum, Aliya students feel that language coverage is inadequate and teaching quality is poor. However, the assessment of the present study is that such a perception about curriculum is informed by the ongoing crisis of admission of madrassa students in selected departments of selected public universities, such as Dhaka and Jahangir Nagar Universities. Overall, students’ perceptions about curriculum in both Aliya and Qaumi madrassas warrant deeper engagement and dialogue, because recent studies by the World Bank and an NGO have brought out significant lacuna in the quality of education and teaching.

- Societal negative stereotypes about madrassas reflect overall poor quality of education, teaching, inadequate Government support for the madrassa sector and lack of proper appreciation of the society about madrassas.

- There exists a wide gap in mutual perceptions between Aliya students and Qaumi students, and between madrassa students and general education students.

- Significant rigidity and reticence persist among madrassa students – more among the Qaumi students – about the curriculum and teaching quality.
- Madrassas provide valuable service to the society by providing a significant avenue of education of children and making them literate and ‘educated’. However, the net worth of that education from human resource development point of view is rather low. The overall employability of madrassa graduates is lower compared to general education graduates. The picture for Qaumi graduates is far bleaker but they remain satisfied with lower end jobs in the religious sector and in neighbourhoods.

- If anything, this study brings out the need for more engagement and dialogue with students and other stakeholders to drive home the inadequacies and lacunae in the quality of education.
Chapter 5

MADRASSA AND MILITANCY LINKS: MYTHS AND REALITY

In the past decade, a good number of studies have been commissioned by development partners and the implicit or explicit focus of almost all of those studies has been understanding madrassa-militancy links. Side by side, there have been academic studies as well. The present chapter explores the nature of the linkages and the perceptions around them.

5.1 What All Have Been Said about Positive Madrassa Militancy Links?

The focus of the madrassa-militancy debate centres on Qaumi madrassas, not so much on Aliya madrassas. Aliya madrassas are registered with the Government, regulated by the Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board (BMEB) and they have undertaken modernization of curriculum in terms of introduction of general education courses upto higher secondary levels. On the other hand, Qaumi madrassas have resisted any attempt at registration and regulation by the Government. The curriculum Qaumi madrassas are offering are three to four hundred years old, without much change. The events of 9/11 in the USA and the subsequent counter-terrorist measures have focused attention on Qaumi madrassas as many of the terrorists reportedly had their education and training in Qaumi or unregulated madrassas. Common Western perceptions about Qaumi madrassas are that they are fundamentalist and militant in approach teaching Jihad among the students. A lot has been written in the Western media about madrassas as breeding ground of terrorism.62 Many commentators have claimed that madrassas, especially Qaumi ones, teach jihad literature and that their curricula are intended to produce Islamic warriors. It has also been suggested that there is an inherent relationship between what is taught in the madrassas and Islamic extremism or radicalism.

Such a perception widely prevails in the terrorism discourse in Bangladesh as well. Frequent arrests, seizure of arms, books, CDs in different parts of the country, recruitment, training of militants in deep jungles of CHT and Teknaf are often reported in the media. Reports that the militants develop international linkages also appear in the press.63 Seizure of unauthorized arms and inciting literature from madrassas is also reported.64 Local media has published reports on links between financing from the Middle East-based Islamic NGOs and the Qaumi madrassas in Bangladesh, especially in

62 One can refer to Jessica Stern’s article in Foreign Affairs, Jeffrey Goldberg’s article in the New York Times, besides dozens of columns in newspapers. See, Mumtaz Ahmad, “Madrassa Education in Pakistan and Bangladesh”, APCSS, 2005.


southeastern parts of the country where alleged militant training goes on. The names of Al-Haramine Islamic Foundation (Saudi Arabia), Welfare Association (UAE), Darul Ansar Al-Khairia (Dubai), Daultul Kuwait (Dubai), and Daultul Bahrain (Dubai) often come up. These NGOs do not have offices in Bangladesh but a number of local madrassa teachers and ulama act as their agents to bring financial aid for the rehabilitation of and educational assistance to the Rohingya refugees, it is reported. However, while some of the madrassas may have been used for militant activities, it is difficult to verify these stories, even though the Government has in recent months made a number of raids on several Qaumi madrassas following reported connections with the activities of Islamist extremists.

There is little doubt that madrassas, particularly Qaumi madrassas, receive funds from Islamic NGOs operating in and out of the Middle East, although there is no way of proving this since accurate accounts are not available. On the other hand, while these funds may be used to promote different Islamic ideologies, there is little or no hard evidence to link such funds with militant or terrorist activities based in or channeled through madrassas.

According to one report a few years back, intelligence agencies marked 323 Qaumi madrassas believed to be involved in militant training. Newspaper reports on some specific incidents possibly gave credence to the above perceptions. One is the unearthing of the Green Crescent Madrassa activities in Bhola where suspicious activities, including training in arms, went on under the camouflage of a madrassa. The Hathazari Madrassa, with impeccable Deobandi credentials and reckoned as one of the top ten Qaumi madrassas in the subcontinent, came to limelight in 2004 when it was reported that some of its graduates participated in Afghan war in the 1980s. In February 2010, 40 students of the madrassa were arrested when they engaged in clashes with the police while staging protests under the banner ‘Hefazat-e-Islam’ against government’s attempts at secularization of education. Many of the arrested Jamatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) members had proven links with madrassas. For example, Dr. Mohammad Assadullah Ghalib received funds from the Kuwait-based Revival of Islamic Heritage Society for mosques and madrassas.

Another empirical study that mentions about militancy links with Qaumi madrassas is Madrassa Education: An Observation prepared under the aegis of Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS), 2003. The BNPS mainly compiled newspaper reports about militant activities involving madrassas. Secondly, it made a content analysis of the Qaumi madrassa curriculum to show that even general subjects like Geography, Science, and

66 Full name: Al-Jamiatul Ahlia Darul Ulum Muinul Islam, founded in 1901, popularly known as Baro Madrassa, the Big Madrassa.
68 See, Supriya Singh, “Recognizing Qaumi madrassas in Bangladesh: Boon or Bane?” Article No. 2114, 16 September 2006.
History have been Islamised so much so that a student learns practically nothing from these general subjects other than the Islamic version.

In another study, based on limited field study, Mercer et al argue that the picture is at best confusing. While funds do come to some of the Qaumi madrassas from foreign NGOs, it cannot be ascertained how this fund is used.\(^{69}\)

From newspaper reports, however, it would appear that madrassas were not the primary source of the so-called religious terrorists. In fact, a large number of apprehended terrorists were found to have background in general education and they came from financially solvent families.\(^{70}\)

### 5.2 Counter Discourses on Madrassa-Militancy Links

Mumtaz Ahmad, a Professor of Political Science at Hampton College, USA, has been consistently researching and writing on madrassa issue. In 2007-2008, he conducted extensive field studies in different parts of Bangladesh and interviewed madrassa functionaries of both streams focusing on the political issues. The results of the survey – both qualitative and quantitative – have been published under the title, *Views from Madrassa: Islamic Education in Bangladesh*, NBR Project Report, National Bureau of Asia Research, April 2009.

The arguments put forward by Mumtaz Ahmad regarding the suggested nexus may be mentioned. The first point he makes is the wrong correlation between madrassa curriculum, developed about 300 years ago by Mullah Nizamuddin Firangi Mahali, and militancy that started in the late 1990s, in a big way since 9/11. No militancy could be detected before 9/11 in the Qaumi madrassas. On the other hand, the essential correlation between militancy and the Afghan war of the 1980s and then post-9/11 Afghan war is missed out.\(^{71}\) Mumtaz pursued the case of involvement of Hathazari madrassa students in Afghan war with Maulana Shafiq Ahmed, the Head (Baro Huzur) of the Madrassa. Maulana Shafiq Ahmed admitted the issue but categorically said that the madrassa had no links with militancy. He mentioned that law enforcement agencies visited the madrassa several times to follow up but found nothing incriminating.\(^{72}\)

Secondly, the Qaumi curriculum, pedagogy and the madrassa products are the most pacifist in orientation. Qaumi teachers and students have totally different worldview. If the degree of politicization of Aliya and Qaumi madrassas is compared, Aliya students and faculty would be more politicized due to more Jamaat and Islamic Chhatra Shibir influence in Aliya. Qaumi students are less politically involved. Unlike Aliya where Jamaat’s hold is near monopoly, Qaumi has multiple influences of BNP, Awami League, and Islami Oikkya Jote.

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\(^{69}\) Mercer *et al.*, 2005.


\(^{71}\) See, Mumtaz Ahmad, 2005.

\(^{72}\) Mumtaz Ahmad, op. cit.
The World Bank conducted a survey entitled *Secondary School Madrassahs in Bangladesh: Incidence, Quality, and Implications for Reform*; its report was drafted by Niaz Asadullah and Nazmul Chaudhury and released in March 2009. Brushing aside a finding of an international survey that claimed recruitment of madrassa graduates in Bangladesh army, the World Bank report said the finding was unfounded as the source of the data of the study was unknown.\textsuperscript{73}

Recently, *Probe* News Magazine published a detailed interview of Maulana Muhiuddin Khan, Senior Vice President of Islami Oikkyo Jote and Editor of monthly Madina, regarding the nature and trends of Islami politics in the country.\textsuperscript{74} At one point, the following conversation went on:

Q: There is a lot of controversy at home and abroad about Qaumi madrassas. What would you say about the allegation that militancy training is imparted at these madrassas?

A: I personally never studied at Qaumi madrassa. I was a student of an Aliya madrassa. But I do admire Qaumi madrassas because they positively uphold and serve true Islam. I do not see any place in the education system for terrorism and terrorists. Why would they take up terrorism? They would have to have an objective.

Q: Some JMB members have been apprehended from the Qaumi madrassas. They admitted that they studied at Qaumi madrassas.

A: JMB has no connection with Qaumi madrassas. It could be that some Qaumi madrassa dropouts were unemployed and recruited as JMB members.\textsuperscript{75}

The interview above and the findings of Mumtaz Ahmed about the common denominators among the arrested militants raise a very important point: are the antecedents of the arrested militants in the public domain? Do we know what percentage had general education background, what percentage Aliya background and what percentage Qaumi background? We do not know about the confessions that the arrested and, for that matter, the executed JMB leaders made to intelligence agencies. A newspaper report said, only 19% of the arrested had madrassa background.\textsuperscript{76}

One should note the interesting twist in terrorism discourse in Bangladesh in mid-2010 following the arrest of JMB Chief Maulana Saidur Rahman on 26 May 2010. So long public discourse was dominated by the understanding that Jamaat was not involved in militancy in the country and the arrested/executed JMB leaders or HUJI-B leaders had no

\textsuperscript{73} See, “Qoumi madrassahs doing good jobs” says WB study”, *New Age*, May 9, 2009


\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{76} See, Shahedul Anam Khan in Farooq Sobhan (ed.), *Countering Terrorism in Bangladesh*, Dhaka, University Press Limited, 2009.
links with Jamaat. Maulana Saidur Rahman’s arrest led to a change of the story that the JMB leaders had active connection with Jamaat. 77

However, more focused investigation regarding the links of Aliya or Qaumi madrassas with militancy need to be undertaken.

5.3 Responses and Perceptions of the Madrassa Stakeholders about Militancy

Reproduced below verbatim are the perceptions and counter-arguments of the madrassa teachers, office bearers and local leaders about the views on madrassa-militancy linkages which were obtained from a qualitative survey by way of key informant interviews (KII) and madrassa related interviews (MRI) in connection with the present study.

- This (perception) is imposed or created, purposeful and demoting. A good number of terrorists underwent general education like physics, aeronautics, but do we term general education as producing terrorists?
- Some interested quarters are spreading this mischief taking advantage of the poor powerless fellows;
- This is foreign conspiracy, madrassas cannot produce terrorists;
- This is motivated propaganda;
- Not in Aliya. People point their fingers towards Qaumi madrassas. Government should increase surveillance;
- Where in Qaumi as well as in Aliya syllabus one gets the smell of militancy? They should have clear understanding of the contents of the curriculum.
- Some Qaimis might be suspect but blame should not be laid at the doorstep of every single Qaumi madrassa;
- This is motivated. Why don’t they blame general education as well?
- Some derailed youths do this in the name of Quran. But neither the Qaumi nor the Aliya madrassas are responsible for this.
- Some quarters use poor youths, some of them from madrassas;
- These are baseless allegations making a scapegoat of the madrassas;
- Madrassa education neither produces nor approves of militancy;
- I have not seen anything like this in madrassas, and there is nothing like militants in our madrassas;
- We should not forget that general education institutions create maastans.

77 Such connections were reported even earlier. For example, “Jamaat men on Satkhira JMB list”, The Daily Star, 04 December 2005. Then, after the arrest of top Jamaat leaders following the arrest of JMB leader Maulana Saidur, “Probe focuses on Jamaat’s JMB links”, The Daily Star, 04 July 2010. Earlier, Islamabad-based International Crisis Group (ICG) report entitled, “The Threat from Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh”, Asia Report, No. 187 mentions Jamaat’s student wing, Islamic Chhatra Shibir, as one of the sources of JMB recruitment.
5.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is not to induce complacency among the civil society, the donors and policy making communities by assuring that madrassa-militancy links are tenuous at best. Specific madrassas may have been involved in radicalization and terrorist activities. But the point this report intends to make rather categorically is that Qaumi madrassas curriculum or pedagogy per se do not propagate militancy. Inherently, they are peace loving, and the products of Qaumi madrassas have a sound moral and ethical foundation. Madrassas are methodical, legalist, rather than revolutionary and fundamentalist. In fact, a closer look at the curriculum for Hadith and, for that matter, Fiqh, would confirm that there are no chapters on Jihad. This point needs to be kept in mind when putting the blame on Qaumi madrassas that they breed militancy.78

One should hasten to add that militancy and terrorism is a reality and some madrassas have nexus with it as have many other elements including some prominent rightist political parties. Militancy nexus has also been found in products of Alia madrassas. Question is, how to deal with this phenomenon? What would be the contents of modernization approach to deal with this menace? As these two questions bring us to the central theme of this report, suffice it to say for the moment that the two need to be dealt with separately. Militancy is a security concern and it should be dealt with that way. If a particular madrassa is under suspicion on reasonable ground, any security step against it will not raise objection. For example, many criminals take shelter in tabligh Jamaats and many have been nabbed as well. But neither the law enforcement agencies nor members of the civil society have blamed, and rightly so, the Tabligh Jamaat movement. The tablighi stakeholders have not raised objections if any security raids have been made and the raids have been precise and targeted.

As far as Qaumi madrassa and militancy nexus is concerned, it seems the impression being created is that all Qaumi madrassas are terror factories and, therefore, they must undergo reforms through registration, regulation, and modernization of their curriculum. The second concluding remark here is: Madrassa modernization, including Aliya madrassas, should be deliberated and planned on its own merit, not for rooting out militancy. Thirdly, madrassa modernization or reforms should be part of modernization of education sector as a whole. Much remains to be desired in terms of overall curriculum, pedagogy and teachers’ competency. Now that the education policy has been passed in Parliament, considerable efforts should be devoted to implementation of the policies including madrassa modernization.

78 See, Tiffany Ellis, “Madrasas in Bangladesh”, New Delhi: IPCS Special Report No. 47, August 2007
Chapter 6

MADRASSA REFORM IN BANGLADESH: INITIATIVES AND OUTCOMES

The two streams of madrassa education had divergent trajectories of development. In what follows, modernization or reform initiatives of Aliya and Qaumi madrassas, along with outcomes of initiatives, are discussed. To derive insights, lessons learned from best practices, reform strategies of neighbouring countries, e.g. Pakistan and India, will be reviewed. To begin with, national policies in educational development, including madrassa development, are reviewed. The outcomes of different Education Commissions and reform initiatives are also reviewed.

6.1 Government Priority and Policy

The Government aims to modernize and mainstream madrassa education as an expressed policy objective. This is reflected in the Government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 4, as madrassas mainly serve the country’s poor and rural children and lag behind formal general education in teaching and learning quality. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper provides strategic directions for all sectors to maximize overall social gains, including accelerated poverty reduction and achievement of Millennium Development Goals. The country has also committed to the Education For All Principles, contextualized these goals for Bangladesh, and undertaken various measures to improve access to primary and secondary education. The Government has also committed itself to bringing all Qaumi madrassas and Boards under a regulatory framework and has initiated dialogues with their leadership since 2005. The Qaumi madrassa leadership met the policy makers of the former BNP Government and the present AL Government on a number of occasions in the context of their commitment to countering terrorism in Bangladesh and recognition of Qaumi madrassa degrees by the Government.

6.2 Reforms in the Madrassa System

6.2.1 Aliya Madrassa

As mentioned, Aliya madrassa was set up in the Subcontinent by the British colonial government in 1781. They also set up a Madrasaa Education Board in Bengal. For modernizing madrassa education, a Committee, known as Moula Box Committee, recommended, among others, setting up of an Arabic University. Since the independence of Pakistan in 1947, several steps were taken for modernizing Madrassa education. Bengali, Mathematics, English, Social Science, and General Science were made compulsory. The first major attempt by the state to reorganize the madrassa education in post-independence Bangladesh was made in 1972 when Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman appointed a “Commission on National Education” under the chairmanship of Dr.
Muhammad Qudrat-e-Khuda. The Commission nominated a special committee on religious education to suggest reforms in the madrassas. Given the history of Liberation War, the overall perceptions towards the madrassa system were not very positive and there were opinions in favour of abolishing it.\textsuperscript{79} The Commission, however, did not take note of the political aspects of the madrassa education and lashed heavily on the outdated and reactionary nature of its curriculum. The Commission contended, “Madrassa education needs radical change and is to be reconstituted according to the demands of the modern age.” The main thrust of the Commission’s recommendation was to gradually integrate madrassa education with the general education stream and bring all education under the state control. What prevented the Awami League government from implementing the Qudrat-e-Khuda Commission report on madrassa education was the opposition not only from the traditional religious sectors but also from the modern educated elites. When the Commission sent the questionnaire to elicit public opinion on madrassa education, 75\% of the respondents among the modern educated elite favoured religious education and about 90\% wanted to retain madrassa education in some form.\textsuperscript{80}

The Kudrat-e-Khuda Commission also recommended extension of universal schooling including madrassa education upto 8\textsuperscript{th} grade in line with the UNESCO requirement of 14 years of universal school. It is only in 2010 that Bangladesh has extended universal and compulsory primary schooling upto Class VIII.

As mentioned, a Madrassa Education Board was formed in 1978 under the Ordinance for the Modernization of Madrassa Education. The Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board (BMEB) started functioning from 1979. The Ordinance was comprehensive and the resultant BMEB became all encompassing ranging from registration, administration, management, academic affairs as well as degree giving. One very important step that BMEB took was introduction of general courses in the curriculum of the Aliya madrassas. In 1978, humanities and science subjects were included at the Alim level and in 1980 the Alim degree was given the equivalence of H.S.C level.\textsuperscript{81} In 1985, Dakhil degree was given the equivalence of SSC level. The equivalence of Fazil and Kamil to graduate and post-graduate degrees is yet to be established due to curriculum deficits.

6.2.2 Government Incentives for Teachers and Students

In the 1990s, Bangladesh Government introduced a number of substantial policy incentives for the Aliya madarssas as part of its policy for the overall primary, secondary and higher secondary education system of the country. One was subvention of teachers’ salary upto 80\% that became 90\% later on. The madrassas in the private sector, like other categories of educational institutions, have to register themselves with the government under a programme, known as monthly payment order (MPO), under which government

\textsuperscript{79} Mumtaz Ahmad, “Islam, State and Society in Bangladesh” in John L. Esposito et al, Asian Islam in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007

\textsuperscript{80} Talukder Maniruzzaman quoted in Ibid.

\textsuperscript{81} See, website of Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board, www.bmeb.gov.bd.
sends the salary of registered teachers to specified banks every month. This was a substantial benefit for the educational institutions in the private sector including madrassas. It has been assessed that there has been a substantial growth of madrassas in the country following MPO system. It is believed that new madrassas have emerged and, at the same time, about 31.5% of the registered Aliya madrassas, as of 2003, were ‘converts’ meaning madrassas “from old madrassas that previously imparted traditional and exclusively religious education”, e.g. Qaumi system. This is a significant finding and it needs to be flagged for follow up. The present study tried to ascertain this fact with the BMEB but, according to BMEB, the two streams have so divergent curricula that there is no scope for such a conversion. The Field Officer of this study recontacted some of his respondents and could not get confirmation of this point. One needs to take note of the fact that the authors under reference came to the conclusion about conversion on the basis of statistical discrepancies, not on empirical verification. It is quite possible that some madrassas at pre-primary levels, like Noorani, Furqania, Hafizia which have rather dual character, may have switched to Aliya system by upgrading them to formal primary and/or secondary madrassas. This needs further investigation.

A second incentive introduced by GoB in 1993 was Food for Education (FFE) that also led to increase in enrolment and retention. The policy later changed to cash subsidy.

For female enrolment, most important has been female stipend for closing male-female gap in enrolment. This also has been a successful intervention. Other policy interventions include supply of text books that has been extended to madrassas in 2010.

6.2.3  Qaumi Perspectives on Reforms

Qaumi madrassas are agreeable to the idea of reforms in curriculum but without diluting the thrust of religious focus. For example, in an interview, Maulana Abdul Jabbar, Secretary General of Befakul Madarisil Arabia (Qaumi Madrassa Board) said, “We want all general subjects to be included in the syllabus alongside religious studies up to Class VII. Then up to Class X, religious studies will be accompanied by Bengali as a subject. Then in higher studies we want to specialize.” Regarding the possibility of the two streams merging into one, he pointed out the wide divergence in worldviews: “Aliya madrasa wants an education system parallel to existing general system of education in the country. But we want higher studies in religious education, specialization in religious matters. So, for the moment, we cannot have a merger”.

Mumtaz Ahmad records a number of changes that have been introduced in the Qaumi stream in recent decades. These include:

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83 See, Shafiq Rahman, op. cit.
84 Ibid.
85 See, Mumtaz Ahmad, “Madrassa Education in Pakistan and Bangladesh”, APCSS, Honolulu, 2005.
a. Bangla has replaced Urdu as a medium of instruction paving the way to emergence of indigenous Islamic scholarship;
b. While Bangla was not taught at any level before independence, it is now a compulsory language upto secondary level (Marhala-i-Sanvia);
c. Subjects such as politics, economics, and history of Islam in the Sub-Continent upto the establishment of Bangladesh have been included;
d. English has been made a compulsory subject at primary level and in many newer madrassas; English education facilities are available;
e. All subjects of general primary education have been introduced at Ebtedayee level so that primary education in the country, along with Aliya stream, looked now integrated;
f. Comparative religion has been added in the curriculum;
g. Bureaucratization and standardization of admission procedures, including use of PCs, have been introduced in many large Qaumi madrassas;
h. Standardization of curriculum and examination systems under the leadership of Befakul Madarisil Arabia, which has 1500 madrassas, and Anjuman Ittehadul Madaris, which has 500 madrassas, have been introduced;86
i. Newer and more diversified sources of funding like expatriate communities in the Middle East, Europe and North America are contributing to development of physical infrastructure and teaching facilities.

The World Bank study, 2009 also mentions about some degree of changes that have occurred in Qaumi madrassas. The report said, “Unlike traditional madrassas in Pakistan, traditional madrassas in Bangladesh seem to have undergone some structural changes even in the absence of any state intervention. Some have started to admit girls in recent years in addition to undertaking some modernization of the curriculum”. The report further says: “Qaumi madrassas in Bangladesh are also becoming increasingly feminised…. Seventy-four per cent of our sample Qaumis are all-male institutions while only a mere 9.5 per cent are coeducational…. In all of our coeducational Qaumi madrassas, however, boys and girls have separate classrooms87”.

6.3 The New Education Policy 2010

Since the independence of Bangladesh eight education commissions and committees were formed to reform education, including madrassa education, but implementation records of their recommendations leave much to be desired. It would be pertinent here to review the key aspects of the recently announced education policy based on the Professor Kabir Chowdhury Education Commission. The salients of Education Policy 201088 are:

86 Like the 10 general education boards which harmonize and synchronize examination, evaluation and results publication, a similar trend was observed in the case of Befakul in 2010.
87 Quoted in The New Age, 04 May 2009.
• Unified curriculum for general, madrassa, vocational education up to secondary level;
• Compulsory primary education from Class I to VIII;
• Secondary level from Class IX to XII;
• Religion, ethics education for all faiths up to secondary level;
• Permanent Education Commission to be formed.

The Policy seeks to bring all students of the country, irrespective of their religions, genders, physical limitations, socioeconomic and geographic locations, under one system. While the overall tenor of education policy purported to be non-communal, compulsory subjects on religion and ethics for students up to Class VII will be there. However, the word ‘secular’ was dropped from the draft to make it acceptable to all segments of the society.89

At the secondary level, from Class IX to XII, a uniform curriculum and syllabus will be followed for general, madrassa and vocational levels. The compulsory subjects are: Bangla, English, Mathematics, Bangladesh Studies, Paribesh Parichiti (Introduction to Environmental Studies), Information Technology, and Science.

About Qaumi madrassas, the policy guidelines advised the stakeholders to form a commission and determine what they want to introduce in their curriculum and syllabus. However, all educational institutions in the country, it said, have to register with the government to gain legality.90

In a policy statement, the Education Minister said that Government had taken specific policies to modernize the madrassa education system. He said, “We want the madrassa students to become learned Alems/Ulama (Islamic scholars) and study science and technology so that they could also hold prestigious positions in the society.” 91 The stipulated policies included setting up of a separate directorate for madrassa education to facilitate better regulatory mechanism. 92

6.4 Outcomes and Lessons Learned from the Reform Programmes

Masooda Bano looked at state-sponsored madrassa reforms in Bangladesh in the following way 93.

• Co-existence of Aliya and Qaumi madrassas presents a case of diversity in madrassa education performing somewhat different purposes. Aliya graduates prepare to compete for modern jobs with secular educated jobs, but the added point is their religious education. The Qaumi system, on the other hand, by virtue of their focus on

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93 See, Masooda Bano, Allowing Diversity: State-Madrassa Relations in Bangladesh, RaD in Religions, Birmingham University, 2007.
religious education in exclusion of secular subjects, retains their leadership over religious issues. The Lalbagh Qaumi Madrasa and Hathazari Madrassa remain as reference points on Sharia and jurisprudence.

- However, the madrassa reform programme in Aliya should not be seen as a model for a more liberal interpretation of Islam, which is the focus of many current reform efforts. Rather it is a good approach to making madrassas an effective tool for promoting education in conservative societies, where there is a clear demand for combining.

- Reforms must recognize the functions of madrassas in educating future religious teachers and providing interpretations of the religious texts, as well as meeting parental demand for education with a significant religious content.

Masooda Bano’s argument makes it clear that expectations from reforms should be made explicit and clear.

If the intention is to bring out the lessons learnt, possibly the introduction of secular curricula was a major success. The Aliya madrassas accepted the modern curriculum more or less voluntarily. Secondly, holistic or integrative view of education as a whole – both general and religious education - and extending innovations and policies in general education to madrassa education brought positive results in enrolment of girls. Another lesson learnt would be a negative one – very poor and lax implementation regime in education. For example, the policy of 8-year primary education and integrative madrassa education were recommendations made in the first Education Commission in 1974 but those remained without implementation for so long. Third, when BMEB was instituted through 1978 Ordinance perhaps it was fine for the sector. Now that the number of madrassas and students has gone up, a single all-purpose Board cannot possibly do any justice to the sector. Creation of a separate Directorate for madrassa education would be a substitute for more Boards and other bodies for curriculum development.

The fourth point concerns the Qaumi madrassas. Government’s problem with Qaumi stakeholders seems to be due to lack of dialogue and interactions. The New Education Policy 2010 warrants for the Government to pursue more vigorous engagement with Qaumi madrassas which are unwilling to introduce secular subjects and welcome government control. However, they are agreeable to introduce secular subjects at the primary level. In fact, many have already done that, with some of them having introduced modern teaching aid, computers, etc. Many of the self-driven changes seem to be driven by market forces, including drive for capturing new market opportunities. They have been asking the Government for recognition of Dawra Hadith (which they consider as equivalent to Masters level). It may also be mentioned that in August 2006, the then Government agreed in principle to recognize Qaumi Dawra degree as Masters. This can serve as a good ground for engaging the Qaumi madrassas to introduce reforms, if not state sponsored, at least market driven ones.
6.5 Experiences of Madrasa Reforms in Neighbouring Countries

It is proposed here to briefly review madrasa modernization experiences in other countries of South Asia, namely, Pakistan and India, to get best practices and ‘lessons learnt’ insights.

6.5.1 Pakistan

Reforms and changes in madrasa curriculum in any country depend on how the direct stakeholders in madrasa perceive certain external stimuli. This has been true about Pakistan. It would be pertinent to have an understanding of the kind of reforms or modernization efforts undertaken in Pakistan and assess how the madrasas have responded to those changes. Based on such an assessment, it would be possible for us to single out the best practices.

It is known that in Pakistan madrasas are doctrinally oriented: there are four types of madrassas – Deobandi, Barelvi, Ahle Hadith and Shiite. There are 11000-12000 madrasas with a total of about 1.7 million students. Each category has its own association or board. They have been autonomous and operating independent of each other. However, in times of any external pressure, they joined hands and formulated cooperative responses.

The first set of external stimuli to Pakistani madrasas was the military regime of General Ayub Khan, which was known for its modernizing outlook. The modernizing policies posed a challenge to the tradition-bound Ulama community as the state tended to marginalize their role. Different categories of madrasas came forward to face the challenge by self-reforming the curriculum by way of including both religious and secular subjects. One facilitating factor was the flourishing Pakistan economy in the 1960s so that the madrasas could get funding from newly emergent bourgeois class, traders and business people. The Ulama community reestablished their relevance in Pakistan’s body politic.

In the 1970s, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto tried to control the madrasas. The Ulama community resisted the move to register the madrasas under an Ordinance in 1976. Since then, the Ulama community did not have to look back, as President Zia Ul-Haq Islamized the state of Pakistan and the Ulama community had a direct role in it. The madrasas also got state support and funding. A turning point in madrasas’ role in politics and international affairs, however, came with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that led to an influx of refugees into Pakistan, resistance movement by Afghan Mujahideen (later they came to be known as Talibans), and organization of assistance, training, arms and logistics to the Mujahideen in Pakistan with US support. That provided the backdrop of madrassa-militancy links.

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A brake to the trend was applied after General Pervez Musharraf came to power. In August 2001, just about a month before fateful 9/11, the Government promulgated an ordinance, The Pakistan Madrasa Education (Establishment, Affiliation of Model Deeni Madaris Board) Ordinance 2001. The major components of the Ordinance were: establishment of model madarassas, uniformity of standard (with general education), registration, regulation, standardization and uniformity of curriculum, specialization in madrassa education, training facilities for modern disciplines like science and others, employability of madrassa graduates, recognition of degrees and regulating examinations. While three model madrassas were set up in Rawalpindi, Karachi and Sukkur, the existing madrassas refused to register in fear of loss of autonomy and some agreed to register under the 1860 Cooperative Societies Act as the last Ordinance required information on income.

As 9/11 had already taken place, the Government went for a second Ordinance, Deeni Madaris (Voluntary Registration and Regulation) Ordinance 2002 that stipulated, among others, voluntary registration, provincial madrassa boards and banning of foreign students. To give incentives and modernize madrassas, the government allocated a sum of $100 million for five years to subven...
push madrassas to self-induced actions. Secondly, the sticking point in registration turned out to be income data about which they are very protective. They are prepared to be registered under ‘innocuous’ legal framework. Thirdly, more than finance, the madrassas are conservative about curriculum change and intervention in their autonomy.97

6.5.2 India

India has the second largest Muslim population in South Asia. The total number of madrassas in India has been estimated at 30,000-40,000.98 The political context of reforms of madrassas in India is also the same as in Pakistan and Bangladesh, although the major difference with Bangladesh is that Dhaka initiated reform measures well before the present global intervening factors, that is, ongoing global war on terror that mainly pushed for madrassa reforms in India and Pakistan. Indian Government started modernizing madrassas by introducing secular subjects and improving physical and other facilities including covering salaries of teachers.99 Recently, the Indian Human Resources Development Ministry proposed for a Central Madrassa Board to regulate madrassas, financial incentives for registration, equivalence with general education.

In the mean time, the West Bengal and Kerala governments have been able to bring about significant reforms in the madrassa sector by modernizing the curriculum and closing the gap in curricula between general education and madrassa education. About 7000 non-Muslim students are getting education in West Bengal madrassas.

Muslim students and they should be left to themselves pursuing their religious education without interference. The government instead should concentrate on reforming and investing in the overall education sector so that even Muslim community would benefit. Darul Ulum Deoband falls into this category. But other Ulama welcomed the measures because, without integrating with modern technology and education, there was no other. However, reactions from the madrassas and Ulama community have been mixed. A section of the Ulama community has said that madrassas account for only 4% of the way the minorities could prosper. The Jamia Milia Islamia and Aligarh University fall into this category. The Union Government of India proposed establishment of a Central Madrassa Board, known as Markazi Madrassa Board, for regulating and monitoring the madrassas in the country.

This has evoked protests from Ulama community on the ground that this will be tantamount to meddling in the affairs of madrassas. Rather the Union government should focus on overall education of the minority community rather than only on madrassas. Maulana Madani, leader of Jamiat-e-Ulama Hind and MP, said, “This is incomprehensible that the government shows no interest in educating Muslim students in general, nor does offer any incentive for it.” He told that JUH had sought government assistance for starting ten thousand primary schools but the request was put aside.”

97 See, “RaD, Islamic Education, the State and Madrassa Reform: Lesson from South Asia and Nigeria”, Policy Brief 6, 2010.
98 See, Yogind Sikund, Bastions of Believers: Madrassa and Islamic Education in India,
99 See, RaD Policy Brief 6, op. cit.
“Neither the government has any interest in restoring minority character of Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University”, Maulana Madani said, “Nor in opening separate educational institutions for Muslim minority.” Instead all this ho-hum and visible vigorous government activity sends wrong signal to communal elements who find fault with the government for spoonerism towards Muslim minority.\textsuperscript{100} Maulana Madani also complained that permission is denied to open contemporary educational institutions for Muslim students in XI and XII classes, although JUH has tried several times for it. He told, “When permission is sought to open such minority educational institutions, an affidavit is required to pledge that no government assistance shall be asked during entire life of the institution.” The Muslim Qaumi Muhaj (MQM), encompassing the Qaumi madrassas, is giving the same reaction as the response of the mainstream madrassa stakeholders.

6.6 Conclusion

Madrassas in South Asia are colonial inheritance. However, different types of madrassa have emerged in three countries of South Asia – Bangladesh, India and Pakistan – reflecting sectarian, theological, and ideological differences. The three countries have in the meantime evolved different political architecture. The experiences and outcomes of madrassa reforms have been different in these countries. On a comparative basis, however, reforms have been more successful in Bangladesh than in the other two countries.

After independence, pressure for reforms in the madrassas of Bangladesh was intense. The newly constituted Education Commission recommended introduction of secular subjects in madrassas. The Government started the process that was expedited through constituting the Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board. Later on different measures like Food for Education, Girls’ Scholarship and Subvention of upto 90% of teachers’ and staff salary introduced in general education institutions were extended to madrassas. This led to rapid increase of enrolment of girls in madrassas. However, only the Aliya madrassas were the beneficiaries of the reforms. Qaumi madrassas resisted any kind of curriculum change or regulatory interventions. However, it must be admitted that Qaumi madrassas, on their own, have introduced some changes in curriculum and pedagogy. They also now realize the need for Government recognition of their degrees.

In the context of Pakistan, however, madrassas reacted strongly to attempts to bring them under any kind of regulatory mechanism. They were financially well-off through developing linkages with business community and expatriate community. Only a fraction of about 40,000 madrassas registered under the last Ordinance enacted by General Pervez Musharraf in 2005 despite the threat of closure in case of noncompliance.

\textsuperscript{100} See, http://www.twocircles.net/2009oct03/maulana_mahmood_madani_opposes_proposed_central_madrasa_board.html
Outcome of reform measures in India was mixed because of different political culture and largely minority status of the Muslims. Here also, the large madrassas resisted attempt at regulation.

The key experience that comes out from South Asian experiences is that any kind of force and interventionist measures are not successful. Comprehensive measures evidently aimed at improvement of educational standard are acceptable to the madrassa community. Similarly, measures that increase the employability have greater probability of success. Finally, market forces may also lead to self-motivated reforms. The Indian and Pakistani experiences, however, present a contrasting picture – modality of reforms – Pakistan trying to impose and India trying to engage in dialogue and consultation. This, perhaps, leaves a lesson for Bangladesh.
Chapter 7

TOWARDS A ‘STRATEGY’ OF MODERNIZATION OF MADRASSA EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

7.1 Modernization or Reforms - What are we Talking About?

Modernity and modernization has become a contested term philosophically as well as contextually. Modernization in the context of madrassas is reminiscent of the advent of the colonial era and, in the name of modernization, a unified stream of madrassas became bifurcated. The legacy continues today. The madrassa stakeholders in general and the Qaumi stream in particular have developed a habit of resistance to modernization. Historically, it has been found that not everything modern will be functional. On the other hand, anything dysfunctional needs reforms.

In the context of field study for the study, we discussed the question of modernization of madrassas with different stakeholders as well as with the students during structured interviews. There was an interesting point of convergence about what modernization meant to them. Modernization to them was development or upgradation of infrastructural facilities that included building, class room facilities, etc. To the students, it also meant capacity building in terms of teacher training. At the formal level, students were asked if they heard about modernization of madrassas, and if so, what they heard about it. Finally, they were asked to give their opinion on how to bring about modernization of madrassas. The results are presented in Tables 16 and 17.

Table 16: Heard about Madrassa Modernization?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Have You Heard?</th>
<th>Aliya</th>
<th>Qaumi</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bengali/English Marks to be Raised to 200 Each</td>
<td>10(15.4%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and Teaching Facilities</td>
<td>25(38.5%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion of General Courses</td>
<td>12(18.4%)</td>
<td>20(57.1%)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heard but Not Know Details</td>
<td>10(15.4%)</td>
<td>5(14.3%)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Hear At All</td>
<td>8(12.4%)</td>
<td>10(28.6%)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65(100%)</td>
<td>35(100%)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Structured Interviews, September 2010. Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage of column totals.

Sample students of both streams were asked if they had heard about madrassa modernization, if so, what had they heard? About 39% of the Aliya madrassa students said they heard about physical development and modernization of teaching facilities.
More than 40%, however, meant curriculum related change of which 18.4% heard about inclusion of more courses, while 15.4% heard about upgrading Bengali and English courses to 200 marks each. More than one fourth of the students, however, either have heard but do not know details or have not heard at all about modernization,

Viewpoints of the Qaumi madrassa students were more polarized. Majority of the Qaumi students (57%) heard about inclusion of general course subjects in the curriculum, but more than 40% either heard but did not know details or did not hear about modernization at all.

Table 17: How to Modernize Madrassa?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How to Modernize?</th>
<th>Aliya</th>
<th>Qaumi</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government Recognition</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15(42.8%)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Need for Modernization</td>
<td>2(3.1%)</td>
<td>15(42.8%)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructural Facilities and Teaching Aid</td>
<td>15(23.1%)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT Facilities</td>
<td>7(10.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Humanities, Science, Commerce – All Branches</td>
<td></td>
<td>11(16.9%)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training of Teachers</td>
<td>20(30.7%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job for Students</td>
<td>7(10.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do Not Know</td>
<td>3(4.6%)</td>
<td>5(14.4%)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65(100%)</td>
<td>35(100%)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Structured Interviews, September 2010. Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage of column total.

A question was put as to how to modernize the madrassas in their views. Opinions were polarized between the Aliya and Qaumi streams. About one-third of the students emphasized on teacher training, nearly one-fourth talked about infrastructural and teaching facilities while about 17% felt that all three branches of curriculum – humanities, science and commerce – should be made operational, because in most rural madrassas only humanities group was operational. About 43% of the Qaumi madrassa students focused on Government recognition of degrees but an equal proportion said no modernization was needed.

In working out strategy of modernization of madrassas, these feedbacks are to be kept in mind for reflecting them in the strategy.

7.2 Basic Premises of the Proposed Strategy

What is required is to develop as well as identify a number of propositions that would set the parameters for the strategy (ies) to be proposed. The premises are based on the discussion in the preceding chapters.
a. Approach to education should comprise intellectual development, human resource development, as well as moral and ethical development. Approach to madrassa development should embody these aspects.

b. The first point that needs to be admitted is that the standard of overall education in the country – primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational as well as madrassa – is very low. Not more than 2% of GDP is spent on education. Education fails to serve any purpose other than choice of career. Curricula and syllabi in all branches remain outdated and irrelevant; teaching quality and pedagogy need to be upgraded. Madrassas suffer from second degree deprivation. Possibly, these challenges are manifested in the madrassa sector, including Qaumi subsector, in a magnified scale.

c. A nuanced approach will have to be injected in the avowed policy of unified approach to national education policy. This is because religion has a special place to people of Bangladesh. Any education that combines secular subjects with religion is valued by parents as religion means spirituality, morality and ethical development. Thus, madrassas provide an important avenue of education.

d. Coexistence of Qaumi madrassas presents diversity in madrassa education. Qaumi madrassas perform important function of leadership in religious affairs that need not be underestimated in the rush for modernization.

e. The madrassa sector in general and Qaumi madrassas in particular are on the dock attracting donor attention, policy makers’ attention, civil society attention as well as the stakeholders’ attention. Problem is that perspectives are working at cross purposes. That poses a formidable challenge to strategy formulation. The urgent task is to define the competing perspectives. For example, modernizing or reforming education for the sake of HRD and policies as part of the war on terror, more specifically, rooting out militancy from madrassas may not lead to same policy vectors.

f. Stigmatized attitude toward madrassa education should be removed because it presents a sizable sector, with newer opportunities emerging. It should be exposed to market forces and competition.

g. Finally, strategy should be to build on whatever has been achieved and whatever remains to be achieved. There has been significant progress in reforming the Aliya madrassas but the progress remains tenuous. Similarly, some progress has been made in reform of the Qaumi sector, while substantial sticking points remain. The government should also capitalize on the fact that the Qaumi leadership agrees about more or less unified curriculum for primary level. It should also build on the commitment that the Qaumi leadership has made to the Prime Minister herself that they condemn terrorism and that they will cooperate in rooting out terrorism from the country.

h. The Education Policy 2010 remains largely open about Qaumi madrassas as well as non-committal about this sub-sector.
7.3 Strategic Elements in the Strategy

a. Implementation of the Education Policy 2010 should be undertaken on a priority basis. In the past, education policies were promulgated only to gather dust. The present Government seems very serious about implementation of the Policy. The implementation should be participatory involving the stakeholders on the basis of continuous dialogues.

b. Aliya madrassa reform in the past has earned credibility because of its relative success in Bangladesh. However, for all practical purposes, these madrassas have become stagnant. These are producing neither good Ulama nor productive human resources for competing with general education graduates. The Aliya graduates should be made competitive vis-à-vis the general graduates.

c. In order to make Aliya graduates competitive, crash programme may be undertaken for promoting expertise in three areas – science subjects including IT, commerce/business and English.

d. Teacher training and curriculum development should be given utmost priority. This is not a very well-cared aspect in general education sector as well. In the madrassa sector, this is the most neglected aspect. There is just one teachers training institute in Gazipur, that too is not in good shape. This institute should be reinvigorated and indeed more should be set up. For general subjects, available institutional infrastructure in the private and public sectors may be utilized.

e. Qaumi madrassas should not be asked to change the curriculum lock, stock and barrel. But they need to be shown that they are holding on to a curriculum that has come to them from the Muslim renaissance period and that this is time bound and contextual. The Darse Nizami curriculum was appropriate during the Muslim rule in the subcontinent to produce Islamic scholarship and, at the same time, prepare for administrative manpower of the period well versed in Arabic, Urdu, Farsi as well as other subjects. Is the curriculum today producing Islamic scholarship as well as manpower for today’s requirement? Not the former except in very large centres of excellence like Hathazari and Lalbagh; not the latter because the context is changed.

f. Qaumi madrassas should be engaged in dialogues for their incorporation in the framework of the current education policy. The areas where they are agreeable should be the basis of the dialogues.

g. It is better that Qaumis should not be presented with threat perception or radical change. They should be taken on board, they should be engaged. Necessary disposition and patience will be needed to engage this otherwise stigmatized sector.

h. In the preceding chapters, mention was made about market mechanism and competition. Market should be allowed to play its role. A demonstration effect seems to be at work: competition with Aliya sector, competition with cadet madrassas, and competition in the expatriate market for better jobs. Concrete evidence of reforms
including better facilities, advanced teaching and pedagogy may attract the attention of the Qaumi madrassas.

i. The management, supervision and regulatory framework should be addressed on priority basis. Only one madrassa board is in charge of such a huge sector doing the whole range of functions. There should be more than one madrassa board. In addition, specialized bodies should be set up for curriculum development.

j. Physical infrastructure including buildings, class rooms and teaching aids of madrassas, particularly in the rural areas, is in a deplorable condition. Sufficient investment should be made in the development of physical infrastructure and logistics.

k. Finally, the militancy question. Militancy should be dealt with by the meta logic of security and the meta tools of security - pointed and precise action based on precision intelligence. The Qaumi leadership cannot protest if there is a precise or concrete case.

7.4 Conclusion

In attempting to put the strategies suggested above into a simplified frame, the following propositions may be made:

a. **Strategy of integration and diversity**: madrassa modernization is to be carried out as integral part of national education policy. However, the specialized features of the religious sector and, within religious education, the specialized features of Qaumi madrassas are to be paid attention to.

b. **Strategy of curriculum and pedagogy development**: Attention to specialized features should not preclude modernization and upgrading the curriculum and pedagogy.

c. **Strategy of capacity building**: Of course, strategy of curriculum and pedagogy development, which is the software development, should be backed by hardware development, in terms of infrastructure, class rooms, and co-curriculum activities.

d. **Strategy of competitive development**: The modernization strategy should infuse an element of competitive development, where possible bringing in the market element so that modernization takes its own momentum.

e. **Strategy of participative development**: Reforms and modernization should not be imposed from the top. Imposition may be viewed, particularly by the Qaumi stakeholders, as interference.

f. **Strategy of inclusive development**: Growth of female madrassas in both Aliya and Qaumi sectors is an important development and that should be sustained by all means. Taking the cue from West Bengal and Kerala, would it be possible for non-
Muslim students to get admission into madrassas? The policymakers may give a thought to this idea.

g. **Strategy of segregation:** Educational development and rooting out militancy from madrassas should be segregated and dealt with separately. Lumping up may be counterproductive.

By way of summarizing, the present study argues that strategies (a), (b) and (c) are the key planks of the modernization or reform architecture and the others are supportive.
Chapter 8

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, a good number of empirical studies have been undertaken mainly under the auspices of development partners at institutional and country level. Several NGOs, local as well as expatriate, also have undertaken studies focusing on madrassas, Qaumi madrassas in particular. Individual scholars have also produced scholarly papers. A significant body of information and insights about functioning of the madrassas has been generated. What is needed, for policy purposes, is to synthesise the findings and insights. The present study is an attempt in this direction. However, a good amount of primary data was also generated from a field survey for this study.

Madrassas are a stream of education in Bangladesh like humanities, science and commerce. It provides an avenue of educating children to significant percentage of parents in the rural areas as well as in the urban areas. From primary to post-graduate levels, there are about 37,000 madrassas in the country with a total of 3,340,800 students and 2,30,732 teachers. That itself is a sizable sector.

Be that as it may, the madrassa sector has its ontology. Parents and local community value the religious dimension while imparting education to children. Given the intense competition to get into general education institution, given the negative image of campus politics in general educational institutions in the country, combination of secular education with religious education has a value.

Thus, poor parents send their children to madrassas but richer parents are also turning to these institutions. Parents of girl children also prefer female education in madrassas in the overall conservative social milieu of the country.

In a kind of dynamic and globalized ambience, there will be cross-cutting trends – some parents moving out of conservative mindset and sending children to modern as well as English medium institutions but there is also the likelihood that as a response to the fast moving globalized world, more parents would like to send their wards – male and female – to madrassas where both secular and religious education are available.

No doubt that Qaumi madrassas pursue very outdated curriculum and pedagogy and that needs to be addressed. However, the epistemology and ontology of Qaumi system needs to be kept in mind. While the Aliya system rationalizes the purpose of life and education as a kind of simultaneous pursuit of life hereafter (deen) and this life (duniya), the binary character of the goals remain, because there is an increasing tendency among Aliya graduates to shift to secular university education for a better duniya. But it has also been found that Aliya graduates, in the process, lose much of what they have gained about
deen. Now, the Qaumi graduates internalize this dichotomy this way that one cannot pursue both at the same time, as one may end up getting neither. Rather, they tend to think, if one pursues only deen, duniya will automatically come in whatever quantity and quality. This is an argument in which Qaumis believe and their structure is built on. In fact, the terrain of education needs to be marked by diversity that gives alternative choices to parents and the society.
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