From education to welfare – A historical-exploratory approach for examining the role of madrassas

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Research Article

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Abstract

Much is written on the history of madrassas and their contributions to scholarship. In addition, several scholars have done considerable research to identify the causes of madrassas' growth, determine the linkage of madrassa education with breeding extremist ideologies and suggested possible areas for reforms. This particular aspect has been the topic of scholarly debates and a policy problem faced by many governments and international agencies, i.e., how madrassas can be reformed. However, not much literature could be located that draws parallels and dissimilarities between the madrassas of the golden age and the current era. This is important because any reform or policy is unlikely to succeed without considering a problem's historical and contextual factors. Hence this study adopts a historical-exploratory approach to identify the similarities and differences between the madrassas of the golden age of Islam and present times and explore the causes of such differences by utilising the case study of madrassas in Pakistan. Addressing these issues will make the following contributions: First, identifying the similarities and dissimilarities between the madrassas of the golden age and modern times requires a detailed exploration of madrassas' current state and their role, of which little is known. Second, identifying the factors responsible for the differences in madrassas' role from the golden age to modern times will help understand the implications of such differences on madrassas and society. Lastly, such implications will answer the repeated calls in the literature of formulating policies for reforming the madrassas that have been a significant policy problem faced by many countries.

1. Introduction

The "Golden Age" of Islam started from the 8th century A.D. was a considerable period of human development embodied by significant accomplishments made by Islamic scholars and scientists in areas of the arts and humanities, the physical and social sciences, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and monetary systems, etc. (Renima et al. 2016). Education was given very high importance, and the first Muslim institutions of learning were founded in Baghdad, where Muslim scholars translated and preserved the work of Ancient Greek philosophers (Bobrick 2012). In these institutions, the Muslims collaborated with scholars of other religions and assimilated and expanded the scientific knowledge of previous civilizations such as Roman, Persian, Chinese, Indian, Egyptian, and Phoenician civilizations (Falagas et al. 2006 & Cohen 2013).

One such institution of learning where much of the scholarly knowledge was preserved and created was "Madrassa," dedicated to studying religion and natural sciences (Mortel 1997). Therefore, it is not surprising to see that most of the Muslim scholars of the Golden age such as Jabir ibn Hayyan, ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Sina, etc. whose contributions are invaluable towards the modern sciences received their education from these madrassas (Mirakhor 1987; Alatas 2014). However, the institution that contributed so significantly towards the preservation, formation, and extension of human knowledge and such knowledge was fundamental towards the European renaissance, which shaped modern history (Freely 2010) is seen with susceptibility in today's world as the breeding ground for extremism especially after 9/11 attacks (Kazmi & Pervez 2011; Bergen & Pandey 2006). In present times, madrassa is mainly viewed as the providers of a specific form of education, leading to terrorism and fundamentalism, in the opinion of some scholars (Abbas & Syed 2021).

Much has been written on the history of madrassas and their contributions (see, for example, works of Makdisi 1961, 1970, 1979; Alavi 1988; Mortel 1997; Alatas 2014; Bashir & Ul-Haq 2019 etc.). In addition, several scholars have done considerable research for identifying the causes of the growth of madrassas and tried to establish madrassa education with breeding extremist ideologies and suggested possible areas for reforms (See, for example, Chandran 2003, Ali 2010, Rahman 2016, etc.). This particular aspect has been the topic of scholarly debates and a policy problem faced by many governments and international agencies, i.e., how madrassas can be reformed. However, not much literature could be located that draws parallels and dissimilarities between the madrassas of the golden age and the current era. This is important because any reform or policy is unlikely to succeed that do not take into account historical and contextual factors of a problem (Farnham 2004; Rayner & Howlett 2009).

Therefore, in this study, we will answer the following research questions: a) what are the similarities and differences between the madrassas of the golden age and present times? and b) What are the causes of such differences? To answer these questions, we will use the case study of madrassas in Pakistan. Responding to these questions will make the following contributions. Firstly, identifying the similarities and dissimilarities between the madrassas of the golden age and modern times requires a detailed exploration of madrassas' current state and their role, i.e., what form of activities are undertaken by madrassas in addition to providing religious education in society. Currently, not much is known about this domain. Secondly, identifying the factors responsible for the differences in madrassas' role from the golden age to modern times will help understand the implications of such differences on madrassas and society. Lastly, such implications will answer the repeated calls in the literature of formulating policies for reforming the madrassas that have been a significant policy problem faced by many countries.

The article will proceed as follows. The following section presents the methodology, including the research design and data collection. Taking a historical approach through an appraisal of literature, sections three, four, and five provide details of madrassas in the golden age of Islam, madrassas of India before colonization, and how the colonization of India by the Britishers impacted them. Adopting a similar methodology, section six documents important events in Pakistani history that shaped modern-day madrassas. Parallels and differences between the madrassas of current times and the medieval era are drawn, and analyses are conducted using the data collected through a survey and semi-structured interviews in section seven. The last section presents the limitations, conclusions, policy implications of the study, along with the scope of further research.

2. Methodology

Pakistan as a case study is selected to answer the research questions because it belongs to a larger class of the lower-income countries and madrassas are present on a large scale. Although the official figures are unknown, in 2015, an estimated 3.5 million students were enrolled in 35,337 madrassas registered with the ministry of religious affairs in Pakistan; the numbers are one of the highest in the Muslim world (Khalil 2015). There are also thousands of

unregistered madrassas that are operating all across the country. It is for these reasons that we have chosen Pakistan as a case study to study madrassas for the present research.

2.1 Research design

This study follows a historical-exploratory methodology to answer the research question. Historical research is valuable when it is desirable to understand the significance of past events and their likely effect on the current events (Danto 2008). This approach (Witkowski & Jones 2006) primarily utilises qualitative sources such as books, reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, etc. As the questions posed in this study require drawing parallels and differences between madrassas of the golden age and modern times and identifying the causes of such differences, a historical methodology is adopted to answer these questions. Firstly, we will undertake a detailed analysis of the role of madrassas of the early Muslim period, focusing on the activities within these institutions, how these activities were managed, and their significant contributions. The purpose of carrying such analysis is to create a baseline for comparing madrassas of the early Muslim period and the current era. Secondly, we trace the history of madrassas in the Indian sub-continent to analyse the impact of colonization on these institutions. This analysis will identify some of the crucial causes for the decline of madrassas. Lastly, we will analyse important events in different periods of Pakistani history to assess their impact on the madrassas in Pakistan.

An exploratory methodology is adopted to determine the forms of activities in madrassas of the present era and how they are managed. An exploratory research design is most useful when researchers have little or no knowledge of group processes, activities, or situations requiring examination (Stebbins 2001). This methodology is adopted to gather primary data through a survey and interviews for establishing an in-depth understanding regarding the various kinds of activities undertaken by madrassas of present times and how they are managed because limited information is available in the literature on such a subject. This historical-exploratory methodology would enable us to carry out a meaningful comparison between the madrassas of modern times with medieval times and identify the causes of such differences.

2.2 Data collection

For the historical approach, we relied on peer-reviewed journal articles, books, reports, etc., to conduct a keyword search on resources such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and Web of Science in three stages. In the first stage, a search was conducted separately using keywords; "Madrassas," "Islamic institutions of learning" and then using combination words such as "madrassas in Islam," "history of Islamic institutions of learning," "early madrassas," "contribution of Islamic institutions to science" etc. The articles found in this stage incorporated a variety of topics on madrassas. We also looked at a reference list of several papers to further narrow down our search.

In the second stage, we further refined our search and used keywords; madrassas in the Indian subcontinent, Madrassas under Mughals, colonization of India, educational policies under colonization in India, Islamic religious institutions of learning in British India, madrassas under colonization, etc. The data obtained by using this approach allowed us to understand the madrassas system before the colonization of India during Muslim rule and analyse the impacts of colonial education policies on madrassas. In the final stage, we use the keywords such as "role madrassas in Pakistan", "education imparted by madrassas in Pakistan", "madrassas and Pakistan", and "Afghan war and madrassas" etc., to collect data regarding the role of madrassas in Pakistan and various periods that impacted them.

Our search covered the period between January 1900 to May 2021. This period allowed for the construction of an inclusive database. Initially, the search yielded a sample of 900 sources. We refined our search by filtering the articles according to various relevant (inter)disciplinary areas, education, colonization, informal welfare, sociology, and social sciences. In so doing, we included articles that are published in the fields of education and social sciences. Consequently, the search was limited to 400 articles. This method was primarily used because of the inclusivity concerns and anticipation of finding articles that empirically or conceptually refer to madrassas. We then read the titles, abstracts, reference lists, and full texts to refine the most relevant articles further to narrow down our sample. Consequently, our final sample included 100 sources which were then used for this study.

For exploratory research, a multistage sampling methodology was used for the survey conducted in fourteen cities of Pakistan (Arnab, 2017). In the first stage, all the cities of Pakistan were divided into various clusters based on MPI as follows; cluster1 included cities having MPI of 1–10, cluster2 included cities with MPI of 11–20, cluster3 included cities with MPI 21–30 and so on; In the second stage, up to two cities were randomly selected from every cluster for the survey and a total of 14 cities were selected from 10 clusters. In the third stage, from the list of madrassas present within each city, 4–8 madrassas were randomly selected for the survey. In the fourth stage, a list of the households sending their children to madrassas was obtained from each madrassa. Eight households were randomly selected from that list, and a total of 660 survey questionnaires were distributed. Five hundred and seventy valid responses were received – a response rate of 86%. The same methodology was used for selecting participants for semi-structured interviews. A total of 90 semi-structured interviews (30 interviews from heads of madrassas and 60 interviews from heads of the households sending their children to madrassas) were conducted in fourteen cities used to triangulate the survey data and to interrogate critical themes further. The necessary research ethics approval was obtained from the university.

In Sect. 3,4, 5 & 6, we will trace the history of madrassas from the medieval era to present times using secondary sources to provide an overview of madrassas and highlighting the critical events primarily responsible for shaping the present-day madrassas. The information provided in these sections will then be used in conjunction with surveys and semi-structured interviews to draw a comparison between madrassas of the golden age with current times in Sect. 7. Tracing the history of madrassas is a big topic; therefore, we only provide descriptive information in Sect. 3,4,5 & 6, which will be used for analysis in Sect. 7. As such, the purpose of the discussion in the following section is to establish a baseline for the comparison of madrassas of the medieval era with present-day madrassas.

3. Madrassas In The Early Islamic Period

3.1 Genesis

The traces of the first institution of learning in Islam can be traced back to as early as the seventh century when the Prophet Muhammad laid the foundations of the first Islamic state of Medina, wherein his companions studied Qur'anic revelations in the mosque of Medina from the Prophet himself (Nomani & Nudvi 1987; Falagas et al. 2006). The mosque was not only a place of worship, but a place of gathering and learning (Spahic 2009; Laugu 2007). This tradition of learning in the mosques led to the establishment of "mosque schools" where the focus was not only on instructing the explanation of Qur'anic revelations but also the children were taught subjects such as arithmetic, Arabic grammar, history, law, theology, and algebra, etc. (Nakosteen 1964; Artz 1980).

Teaching became a full-fledged profession in the more prominent mosques, and the mosques gradually took on more functions. With the expansion of the territorial boundaries of Islam, interest in the education of a much larger population increased. Therefore, to preserve the mosque's sanctity, which was also a place of worship, the mosque schools were removed from the mosques and became centralized under the new institution called "madrassa" (Dodge 1962; Berkey 1992). Hence, the mosque became a place of worship of daily canonical prayers, and the religious education and madrassas emerged as an institution of higher and secondary learning where the focus was on religious law and other sciences (Makdisi 1961, 1988; Daud 1989).

The term madrassa is derived from the Arabic word "darassa" which means "to study," dars means a lesson, and "mudarris" refers to a teacher (Makdisi 1961). So, madrassa is a place wherein education is the main activity of a teacher and student (Makdisi 1981; 1991). According to Nasar (1987), madrassa (also known as college) was the only central facility of higher and secondary education in the Muslim empire of the medieval era. The first formal madrassa, "Madrassa al-Nizamiya," was founded in 1045 in Baghdad by Nizam al-Mulk, governor (vizier) of the Seljuk sultans, which gained pre-eminence in natural and social sciences (Dash 2012). The Seljuk Turks expanded the madrassas from Iraq to Khurasan, and hundreds of such institutions were built, often under royal patronage (Waardenburg 1965; Green 1988).

3.2 Organisation of madrassas

By the late 10th century, madrassa developed into a fully-fledged college and university system created for education with distinct features in architecture, organization, instruction, learning, curriculum, and funding sources (Kadi 2006; Makdisi 1981; Nasr 1987). Besides residential areas for students, a prayer hall, and teaching areas, each madrassa featured a library (Pedersen 1929 & Green 1988). The madrassas had their origin in an endowment (waqf); a charitable trust to make and fund a college as a separate, independent, non-governmental entity (Makdisi 1961, 1981). The purpose of the institution's endowment was to provide the necessary funds for its operation and maintenance to keep it in existence long after the founder had died. Some madrassas were raised by state officials and were declared as waqfs (Makdisi 1961, 1981). The founder left the institutions largely untouched, and the teachers were free to supervise and regulate the transmission of knowledge (Berkey 2010).

In some cases, students studying in these institutions were exempted from paying fees and were also provided with monetary allowance (Waardenburg 1965). In addition, free residential and food facility was also provided to limited number the students (Dodge 1962). The founder entrusted the management of madrassa and its sources of income to one or more persons (Makdisi 1961, 1981). After the founder's death, provisions for the proper functioning of the college fell into the hands of the state who held ultimate authority for designating professors and administrators.

3.3 Method of instruction and contributions

One of the main objectives of the madrassas was to teach the law and natural sciences to supply the society with professionals such as professors of law, astronomy, grammar, philosophy, dogmatic theology, mysticism, and literature and judges to deliver legal decisions (Makdisi 1961, 1981). A critical feature of the method of instruction in madrassas was based on the spirit of inquiry through the use and ultimate elimination of disagreement; method of khilaf (Makdisi 1961; Alavi, 1988). Achieving consensus in such ways required years of memory-based preparation and tireless questioning and examination by the teachers (professors), including student oral defence of a graduate thesis (Makdisi 1974). Permission to grant license (ijazah; personal license issued by a teacher to his pupil), i.e., to start a study in a particular field or a degree after the successful completion of the study, remained outside the reach of the state or the founder of the madrassa. Only the masters retained control of the studies for qualifying their students (Makdisi 1970).

Madrassas predate western universities by several centuries, and the radiance of such institutions played a fundamental role in the foundation and teaching methods of the European centers of higher education. (Makdisi 1974, 1981; Nasr 1987). For example, the idea of madrassa as a philanthropic, charitable foundation was quite definitely native to Islam that preceded colleges and universities of the West (Meri 2018). The earliest colleges at Oxford, such as University College, Balliol, and Merton, emerged from the charitable trusts or bequests of private donors in much the same way as those within Islam more than a century before (Makdisi 1981). The method of "khilaf" practiced in madrassas became the fundamental method of instruction in the Western universities in the shape of thesis preparation and its defense (Makdisi 1981). Like the madrassas system of "ijaza," the only thing that mattered in western higher institutions of learning was with whom and how students studied that became a whole matter between the teacher and pupil in the west (Makdisi 1981; Berkey 1992).

The tenth and eleventh centuries are generally regarded as a period associated with the rise of Muslim scholars who advanced a vast scholarship in natural sciences and philosophy (Al-Daffa 2020). For example, Madrassa al-Nizamiya of Baghdad's inventory in 1045 A.D. was 6500 volumes on different subjects, including astronomy, architecture, and philosophy (Ahmed 1987). It was the time when Europe was in the dark ages and was unaware of the vast knowledge of classical civilization. This knowledge was translated and cultivated by Muslim scholars in madrassas (Struik 2012). The madrassa was a building, not a community open to Muslims and non-Muslims (Makdisi 1970). For example, Muslim scholars and their Jewish and Christian counterparts pioneered rational sciences, mathematics, and medicine in the madrassas of Baghdad and Spain. European scholars got educated in madrassas carried back and applied the acquired knowledge to Europe (Meri 2018). Muslim works on science, philosophy, and other fields were translated into Latin, stimulated European thought, and thus helped bring about the Renaissance (Al-Attas 1977).

3.4 Madrassas in Indian sub-continent before colonization

The traces of madrassas in the Indian sub-continent can be found in the cities of southern Punjab such as Multan, as early as the 8th century A.D. when Muhammad bin Al Qasim in 711 A.D. conquered the province of Sind (Gabrieli 1965; Vincent 1920 ; Alavi 1988). However, the establishment of madrassas in northern India is associated with conquests of Turkish ruler Mahmud of Ghazni in the 11th century (Alavi 1988). During this period, Muslim preachers and mystics spread in parts of the Punjab region and played a vital role in establishing madrassas. Prominent among those was madrasa in present-day Ajmer established in 1191, which played a vital role in sowing the seeds of education in India, by another Turkish ruler Mahmud Muhammad Ghori (Alavi 1988). Later on, several other dynasties such as the Khaljis, Tughlaq, and the Lodis ruled the Delhi Sultanate from the 13th to the 16th century, built several madrassas (Hardy 1972). As many as 1000 madrassas were present in Delhi in the 16th century (Sikand 2005). These madrassas were imparting education on the same lines as their counterparts in other parts of the Muslim world in literature, logic, religious and natural sciences, and mysticism (Nayyar 2003).

The Mughal era attracted disproportionately more scholarly attention than any other period in Indian history (Hardy 1972). During the reign of Mughal emperor Akbar, teaching in madrassas was brought under the state purview and was labelled as college or school for secondary education (Rezavi 2007). Further impetus to the madrasas was given during the reign of emperor Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb. Particular emphasis was provided in the madrassas on comprehension rather than mere learning by memorization, and natural sciences. Madrasa curriculum contained mathematics, agriculture, geometry, astronomy, physics, logic, natural philosophy, theology, etc., (Rezavi 2007; Robinson 2001; Kalhoro 2018). The Mughal emperor Aurangzaib provided financial support to many already existing madrassas and established "Frangi Mahall" madrasa in Lucknow to promote the learning of rational sciences. Rapidly it became the most prominent learning centre in eighteenth-century India. The curriculum of this madrasa became famous as "Dars-e-Nizami" contained subjects in traditional and modern courses and aimed to enhance critical thinking ability among students (Robinson, 2001). With time, Dars-e-Nizami became the standard of madrassas education in the sub-continent (Riaz 2010).

The primary language of instruction in madrassas was Persian (Bansas 2014). The madrassas education sought to cater to all sections of the society. There were, of course, madrassas that served the elite sections of the society ranging from the nobles to the middle classes and the scribes. There were also madrassas catering to the needs of the general civic population, including the petty merchants (Bansas 2014). Usually, students of madrassas got employment in prestigious jobs in royal courts after completing their education, and the role of such students in state affairs was significant (Farooq & Hussain 2017).

4. Impact Of Colonization On Madrassas In India

The beginnings of British colonialism in India are associated with the assumption of political power in Bengal by the British East India company in 1765, nine years after the Battle of Plassey, which saw the defeat of the nawab of Bengal at the hands of Britishers (Raj 2000; Riaz 2011). Importantly, this was the period when Europe had come out of the dark ages, and the renaissance produced some of the greatest thinkers' authors, scientists, and literature in human history (Burke 1997). This also created a sense of superiority of western knowledge and morals in minds of the colonisers because at the time of the European renaissance, the Muslim education structure was beginning to decline due to reasons such as not following the rules of pure reason and logic and defeats in wars at various fronts (Palmer 1992; Armstrong 2001).

The period from 1813 to 1835 occupies great importance in the history of British India because of the passing and implementation of the Charter Act of 1813 (Mayhew 1926). Under this Charter Act, the responsibility for educating Indian people by the colonisers was replaced by English from Persian in the Indian education system. The only expectation was that Oriental languages would co-exist English as a means by which moral law could be reinforced (Garg 2003). The major aims of this Charter Acts were; a) to made Muslims and Hindus literate in science and literature and enabled them to assist in the administration of the country, and (b) acquire the cooperation of the Indian peoples in the suppression of moral and social evils attributed to superstitious ignorance (Hough 1853). Under the Act of the Charter, an annual allotment of one hundred thousand rupees was provided by the court of directors of the East India Company for the revival and improvement of literature and introduction and improvement of knowledge of the sciences in India. In 1830, this sum expended amounted to £44,330 (Hough 1853). Under such a system, the Hindu College in 1817 and the Sanskrit College in 1824 in Calcutta were established that largely attracted the children of elites for English learning, reflecting a policy of filtration (Riaz 2011). Another important change was the replacement of Persian as the official language by regional languages as a medium of the higher and lower courts of law in 1835 and 1837 (Riaz 2008). Moreover, in 1844, Governor-General Henry Hardinge declared that only those with western-style education and knowledge of English were eligible for government employment or a career in public life. This ceased the utility of the Persian language, and the employability of madrasa-education became redundant (Riaz 2011).

The Mutiny of 1857 ended the East India Company rule, and the British Government assumed direct control of India, and a new education policy was promulgated in 1859 (Whitehead 2005; Rao 2016). The new plan brought education to India under the direct responsibility of the colonial Indian Government, and it was aimed to end the filtration policy by transforming madrassas into western-style institutions through provision of grants-in-aid (Whitehead 2005). However, these changes further marginalized the madrassas because eligibility for grants-in-aid required adopting a curriculum focused on math, science, and English, and more importantly, removing all references of religion from the curriculum (Langohr 2005). To receive the grants-in-aid, it was also required that educators receive formal teacher training with teaching certificates issued by colonial authorities that did not rest well with religious teachers running the madrassas. Resultantly, madrassas teachers became more engaged in instructing religious education and teaching of natural sciences established as the domain of full-time educators in the private schools (Langohr 2005).

In the long run, the education policies of the colonial administration impacted the madrassas in India by creating rigid compartmentalization between secular and religious studies (Education dualism) (Sikand 2005). Religion was pushed to the private sphere, and madrassas became committed to providing religious education instead of general education, whereas western-style institutions such as schools and universities were raised and patronized by the colonizers for imparting western knowledge (Sikand 2005). The focus on religious education authorized the madrassas heads (imams) to use religion as a mode of resistance to colonialism because marginalization of religious education and the exclusion of overt religious texts in schools created a space for religious

movements to reach the public through madrassas (Sikand 2005). Hence, madrassas played an important role in the identity politics of the Muslim community that became a motivating factor to support anti-colonialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Farooq & Hussain 2017).

Major changes in the curriculum of some madrassas in the early 20th century did take place primarily to continue receiving state financial support. These changes include English as a mandatory subject replacing Persian, and introducing mathematics, geography, history, and physical education to the curriculum (Riaz 2011). However significant they may be, these changes were received with very little enthusiasm by madrassas' heads because, by then, a distinct tradition of the madrasa with an agenda of Muslim consciousness, empowerment, and activism had already made its mark (Riaz 2011).

5. Madrassas In Pakistan After 1947

At the time of the partition of India in 1947, there were fewer than 300 madrassas in Pakistan running parallel to public and private schools, mainly providing religious education similar to colonial time (Mohanty 2013; Ahmad 2004). Interestingly, "Islamic studies" remained a compulsory subject at the primary and secondary levels in public and private schools.

Madrassas were not the centre of attention from independence to the period of the early seventies (Andrabi & Das 2005). The first mention of madrassas in the official documents is found in the fourth Five Year Plan of 1970–75 and the 'New Education Policy' of 1970 that identified three categories of educational institutions (madrasa, public and private system) in the country and highlight the vast differences that existed between them (GoP, 1970, p. 155). Recommendations were provided in these documents to narrow the gap between the madrassas and students of public and private institutions. However, the education policy of 1972-80 asserted that the status quo would be maintained regarding madrassas (GoP, 1972, p. 37).

Madrassas became the topic of policy debate, and their number grew substantially under General Zia's dictatorial regime in the period of eighties when madrassas received significant financing from the Pakistani government, USA, and Saudi Arabia to counter a religion-based resistance to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Andrabi & Das 2005; Aznar 2003). Large madrassas were established in Pakistan to create a class of religiously inspired 'Mujahidin' to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan under state sponsorship (Aznar 2003). This profoundly affected madrassas outlook and teaching because the major focus was on preaching 'Jihad' in madrassas supported and financed by the USA, Saudi Arabia and the Pakistani government (Ahmed 2009). Furthermore, this led to an increase in madrassas' growth, and in the early nineties, the estimated madrassas in the province of Punjab were more than 2,500 (Zaman 1999).

After the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and the fall of the military dictatorship in Pakistan, the subsequent political governments in Pakistan could not financially control the madrassas because a large part of financing received by the USA during Afghan war ceased to exist (Aznar 2003). Consequently, the reliance on funds from Saudi Arabia, other rich Muslim gulf countries, private individuals, and Zakat and charities became a significant source of financing for these madrassas. This resulted in substantial growth of sectarian madrassas during the nineties as different countries and influential individuals following specific sects were financing their brand of madrassas in Pakistan. The madrassas that tried to impart the teaching of subjects different to the ideology of their sponsors were strictly forbidden to do so by their patrons (Aznar 2003). Thus, Pakistani madrassas came under a vicious circle from which there was no way out.

After the 9/11 attacks, madrassas faced severe criticism for breeding extremist ideologies. The media, various governments, policymaking institutions, the 9/11 Commission, and the US Congress were apprehensive of madrassas in exporting terrorism (Rahman & Bukhari 2006). This aspect is visible as several studies indicate madrassas' role in breeding fundamentalism (see, for example, Siddique 2009; Mohanty & Mahanty 2010, etc.). The government has implemented several reforms for reforming madrassas largely at the behest of the USA and Western countries. A policy in 2002 was enforced in Pakistan requiring madrassas to audit their funding for foreign students and registration with the government (Inamullah et al. 2010). A five-year, one-billion-dollar plan financed by the US government introduced in 2003 aimed to introduce modern science subjects in the syllabus and bring madrassas under the control of the education ministry (Inamullah et al. 2010). Following the terrorist attack on Army Public School in Peshawar in December 2014 provided further impetus for a National Action Plan (NAP) for countering terrorism and extremism. One crucial point was that madrassas would be reformed, registered, and regulated (Shafiq et al., 2019). However, all such reforms met with resistance from the religious circles (Shafiq et al., 2019). Such reforms are not likely to succeed because they do not consider the historical factors that have shaped the present state of madrassas, as elaborated in this study so far.

In the following section, based on the survey results and the discussion presented in Sect. 3, 4, 5 & 6, parallels and differences between the madrassas of current times in Pakistan and the medieval era are presented.

6. Results And Discussion: Parallels And Differences Between Madrassas Of The Golden Age And Present Era

The survey had two parts. The first part required the households to inform about their socio-economic status and benefits they receive from madrassas. The second part asked madrasa leaders regarding the benefits of students and the community and how they manage their finances. The survey data were triangulated through semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted from the households sending their children to madrassas and with the heads of madrassas. Similar questions to surveys were asked from the participants in the semi-structured interviews.

The descriptive statistics of the households that send their children to madrassas are shown in table 1. These results of the socio-economic conditions of the surveyed households were further triangulated through semi-structured interviews indicate multiple forms of deprivations and vulnerabilities faced by them. This sample is indicative of the impoverished and neglected population of the country. The average annual per capita income of the surveyed households is much below the national per capita income, and the majority of the households do not hold substantial assets. Informal sector employment restricts their access to formal credit markets. Communicable and chronic diseases are also common among the surveyed households, and some of them live in areas

prone to natural and man-made disasters, including conflict. For managing the risks and shocks, the surveyed households rely primarily on informal sources, although their poor socio-economic conditions justify their need to assist formal welfare interventions by the state.

Tables 2 and 3 records the usefulness of households' benefits from madrassas and the benefits provided by madrassas to the students and their households. These results indicate that religious education is one of many functions that are performed by the madrassas in Pakistan. Other functions include providing social benefits such as shelter, food, stipends, marriage ceremonies, burial expenses, and financial assistance for health care to the students and their families (Table 3). The assistance provided by madrassas to the students and their families is considered helpful to a large extent by them (Table 2). Following observations are recorded regarding similarities and dissimilarities based on the survey and semi-structured interview results and the discussion provided in Sect. 3, 4, 5 & 6.

A parallel observed between the madrassas of older times and the present era relates to their architecture. The madrassas of older times had a teaching area, prayer hall, residential facility, and a library (Sect. 3.2). During the fieldwork for this study, it was observed that the architecture of present-day madrassas in big cities is essentially the same. The enrolment in madrassas is quite substantial, as stipulated from the survey results (Table 3). For example, Jamia-e-Ashrafia is a madrasa in the Lahore district of Punjab province, with over 3000 students are provided with daily meals for day-scholars and boarders. Madrasa has a vast residential campus that can accommodate over 1000 students and has its health facility and an extensive library.

As explained in Sect. 3, religious and natural sciences received the same level of importance in the madrassas of the medieval era. Those madrassas were receptive to scholars and knowledge of other religions and, as a result, contributed immensely towards the transmission of natural sciences. Whereas the Pakistani madrassas are biased mainly towards religious education and little importance is provided to natural sciences (Interview with the head of the madrasa). These madrassas are not open and responsive to other religions, and no student or teacher from other religions was found to work in these madrassas. One of the reasons for such non-responsiveness was attributed to the government policies of the eighties and nineties (Sect. 6) that largely propagated extreme form of ideologies against the west (Interview with head of the madrasa). Furthermore, the teachers (heads of madrassas) who impart knowledge of modern sciences are not well-versed with the latest discoveries in science and teaching methods (Participant interviews). In some cases, their focus on natural sciences was non-existent because of the non-availability of the teachers. Comparatively, the teachers of madrassas of the golden era were the great names of their fields and remained part of many scientific discoveries.

The method of instruction in the madrasas of the golden age was scholastic (method of Khilaf, Sect. 3.3) that western universities later adopted. However, Pakistani madrassas follows a method of memorisation of texts, and not much emphasis is provided to free-thinking and independent research (Interview with the head of the madrasa). Such education practices leads to a redundant form of education that is unlikely to contribute to natural or social sciences.

The madrasa education in older times was employable because graduated students occupy important government positions and other areas (Sect. 4). Whereas a student who graduated from a madrasa of present times has very few options of getting a job in the market. These options include becoming a mosque leader, giving private tuition in religion, Arabic language helps in employment in gulf countries, and opening a madrasa (Participant interview and head of the madrasa interview). In some cases, the madrasa graduates were retained as religious teachers by prominent madrassas (Interview with heads of the madrasa)—however, these are low-wage informal sector jobs with no social insurance or labour market protection. Despite all this, such a form of employment is considered useful by a substantial number of surveyed households (Table 2).

As explained in Sect. 4, the madrassas of older times use to cater to students from all segments of society. So much so, the princes and nobility got educated in the madrassas of older times. However, as evident from the survey results (Table 1), largely poor households send their children to madrassas because they do not have the resources to afford private schools (Participant interviews). As described by one of the participants that their kids are fed in madrassas, provided with clothes, and sometimes stipend, which significantly reduce the burden of their household expenditure (Table 2). This largely attributes that madrasa acts like a shelter in the storm of poverty for the poor in Pakistan.

The primary purpose of the madrassas of older times was to impart religious and natural sciences education. Providing welfare to the poor households was not their primary function (Sect. 3). However, the survey results and semi-structured interviews indicate that madrassas in Pakistan have attained an important role in providing welfare to a large segment of the poor population in the country. Tables 2 & 3 stipulates that madrasa provide welfare benefits such as providing food, shelter, health assistance to the students and their families and such assistance is considered useful by them to a great extent. This shows that madrassas of the current era can be viewed as a significant provider of informal welfare in a society.

In the madrasas of medieval times, Arabic and Persian was the primary medium of instruction, and all the knowledge of classical civilization was translated into these languages (Sect. 3 & 4). However, Urdu is the medium of instruction in Pakistani madrassas, and Arabic is also taught essential to understand religious texts. However, not much of the modern knowledge can be located in these languages. The teachers responsible for instruction in these madrassas have minimal understanding of the English language (Interview with heads of the madrasa). Therefore, the madrasa graduated students are not familiar with the vast knowledge of modern times created in the English language, limiting their employability in the formal job market and opportunities that could otherwise be available to them if they are familiar with such language. The reluctance to learn English had its roots in the colonization of India when English replaced the Persian language, as explained in Sect. 5.

The madrassas of the golden era were religious endowments (Waqf) through which all the expenditures of running a madrasa were met, as explained in Sect. 3.2. However, some Pakistani surveyed madrassas are declared religious endowments, but they mainly manage their finances through Zakat and charities. In some cases, the money to run madrassas is received through countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, which follow a particular form of Islam (Interview with the head of the madrassas). This aspect of financing has a profound impact on what is being taught in these madrassas. In older times, teaching in madrassas remained a matter between the student and master, and madrasa's patron had no control over the madrasa curriculum (Sect. 3.3).

However, the financier now exercises significant control over the curriculum in a madrassa (Interview with the head of the madrassas). This aspect is vital in understanding the rise of sectarianism and hatred against other ideologies in Pakistan.

Policy implications that emerge from this discussion along with conclusions and scope of future research is presented in the following section.

7. Limitations, Policy Implications, Conclusions And Scope Of Further Research

As the scope of this study is to find similarities and differences between the madrassas of the medieval era and present times in Pakistan and analyse their implications, there are several aspects relating to madrassas that could not have been studied and are the limitations of this research. Firstly, madrassas representing various sects are operating in Pakistan, and such details are not provided in this study. However, during the random selection of madrassas, it was ensured that madrassas representing various sects are selected to have an even distribution of madrassas representing various sects in Pakistan. Secondly, table 3 indicates that female enrolment in madrassas is quite substantial, which provides a gender dimension to the study of madrassa not addressed in this paper. Thirdly, madrassas in Pakistan enjoy having political affiliations that, to an extent, form the basis of criticisms against them. This holds in cases when religious parties use madrassa students in staging mass protests. This is an important aspect related to madrassas not covered in this paper. Lastly, as per the ethics approval process, we only studied the registered madrassas in Pakistan. Hence the results presented in this study can only be attributed to registered madrassas in the country.

Based on the results and discussion in the previous section, we conclude that there are several differences between the madrassas of the golden age of Islam and the present era. These differences can be attributed to important events in history, such as the colonisation of India by the Britishers, policies of international powers, and the Pakistani government of the eighties and nineties that used the madrassas to wage holy wars against their enemies. Such events are primarily responsible for shaping the present outlook of madrassas in Pakistan. Madrassas are faced with criticism for breeding extremist ideologies and terrorism, and many proposals for reforms have been put in place by the Pakistani government on directions of international powers (Sect. 6). Such reforms do not take into account the historical factors that have shaped modern-day madrassas. Hence, we also conclude that any policy to reform the madrassas is unlikely to succeed if it does not take the historical and contextual factors (Bryman et al. 1996) that have shaped madrassas of current times. Based on these conclusions and the discussion presented in Sect. 6, the following policy implications arises from this research.

Firstly, this study has identified religious organisations such as madrassas as policy actors (Howlett & Giest 2012) in the area of social welfare. The survey and semi-structured interviews conducted for this paper showed that madrassas are fulfilling the welfare needs of a large segment of the poor population in the country by providing assistance in the shape of cash or in-kind transfers, managing their health risks, and providing them with education to get a job in the market. Therefore, it is crucial to involve and integrate such actors in the social policy processes of the country. How this integration can be done is a topic of subsequent research.

Secondly, as found, a large segment of the poor population in the country is dependent on the madrassas for their welfare. Hence, any radical measure towards reforming such institutions will deprive a large population of the welfare they receive from madrassas. This could also lead to social unrest in the country. This implies that government needs to strengthen its welfare mechanisms to reduce the dependence of a large population on informal welfare. However, in the wake of financial constraints faced by low-income countries, this remains an uphill task.

Thirdly, the results indicate that most of the poor population send their children to madrassas as they are provided with food, shelter, clothing, and stipend in madrassas. The implication of this is that poverty reduction measures are imperative for reducing the reliance of a large segment of the population on madrassas.

Fourthly, we found that madrassas are closed organisations (Cole 2001) that do not interact and open to receive ideas from the outside, especially from the western world. Openness and integration with other cultures was the hallmark of madrassas of the golden age (Sect. 3). This implies that madrassas of the current era need to be opened for the outside world. The first step in this regard could be to collaborate with universities in research projects on Islamic history and religious sciences subjects. This will not help in the opening up of madrassas with the outside world but will also improve the employability of madrassa students. It could also potentially act as a step towards mainstreaming madrassas.

Fifthly, madrassa graduated students have a limited understanding of the English language, which can be attributed to the teachers imparting education in these madrassas. The policy implication of this is that madrassa teacher could be trained in English through government education training programmes. This would allow the madrassa teachers to interact with the outside world and ultimately lead to better education.

Sixthly, this study has highlighted some of the critical events in history that have shaped the outlook of modern-day madrassas. We also mentioned that religious leaders did not welcome several measures aimed at reforming madrassas because such reforms were imposed from the top, with little attention paid to madrassas' contextual factors. Hence, any policy aimed to reform and mainstream these madrassas needs to take the religious leaders on board responsible for running these madrassas. Change in the curriculum or madrassas functioning cannot be possible without their support.

Seventh, in some cases, madrassas are financed by foreign countries who follow a particular sect of Islam, giving rise to extreme ideologies. This implies that funding coming from such countries needs to be monitored by the state. The flip side of this is that it could potentially deprive some madrassas from their primary financing sources.

Lastly, as observed, these madrassas are mostly run-on private charities by private individuals. Funding such a vast number of madrassas in a country such as Pakistan requires a significant number of resources. At the same time, the tax to GDP ratio of Pakistan is one of the lowest in the world because of low-income tax collections. This shows a lack of trust in citizens in the government who find it more beneficial to give charity to such organisations instead of

paying taxes to the state. This implies that the country's governance structures need to be improved to establish trust between the citizens and the state. How this could be done is beyond the scope of this research and can be explored in future projects.

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Tables

Table 1: Characteristics of households surveyed

Income and employment status

Occupation of head of the surveyed household											
Formal sector government job	Formal sector army job	Formal sector private job	Informal sector own small business-	Informal sector work for other (includes daily wages labour)	Informal sector own land agriculture -	Informal sector work on other land (tenant)	Unemployed	Child labour	Retired government servant	Working overseas (labour)	Formal business
10.18%	1.75%	6.84%	20.00%	27.54%	11.75%	4.04%	11.75%	1.75%	1.58%	1.05%	1.76%

Average per capita income per day of the surveyed households

Average household size	Average annual household income	Income per person per day per
9	\$1533 US	47 cents per day (\$171 per year)

Assets

Dwelling				Condition of dwelling						Average number of rooms per house	Living density per room
Rented	Owned	Living on someone else land in a temporary shelter	Living on someone's property without rent	Government accommodation	Completely cemented and bricked	Partially cemented or bricked	Mud house	Temporary shelter			
8.07%	79.47%	3.86%	7.54%	1.05%	42.28%	21.23%	33.16%	3.33%	2		Approx. 5 persons

Agriculture Land								Bank Account	
No Land	Less than one acre	Less than 5 acres	Between 5- 10 acre	Between 10 -15 acres	Between 15 -20 acres	More than 20 acres		Have an account	Do not have an account
62.28%	18.25%	13.33%	4.04%	1.23%	0.35%	0.53%		25.09%	74.91%

Risks and Shocks

Means to manage the risks and risks

No need of assistance	Government Support	Sold assets	Help from Community	Informal credit (Loan)	Committee (Informal Insurance)	Did not receive any help from any source and bear the shock	Formal Loan from Bank	Help form family, relatives etc.	Savings own	NGO local	NGO international
19.65%	1.93%	3.16%	16.32%	20.70%	8.07%	22.28%	0.18%	5.09%	1.23%	0.53%	0.88%

Table 2

Usefulness of madrassa assistance

	Madrassa consumption assistance	Madrassa health assistance	Madrassa assistance during unemployment	Free public Education from madrassa	Overall usefulness of Madrassa
Did not receive the assistance	41.23%	46.32%	89.47%	4.74%	6.84%
Not useful at all	10.00%	13.86%	5.26%	10.00%	22.46%
Useful when complemented by other sources	47.19%	38.95%	4.91%	77.54%	58.07%
Sufficient at its own and not to be complemented by other sources	1.58%	0.88%	0.35%	7.72%	12.63%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table -3

Average number of students studying in madrassas

Average of Male	Average of Female	Average of Total students in a madrassa
420	193	613

Assistance provided by madrassas to students and their households

Percentage of madrassas that were providing benefits provided to students												Percenta
Food	Clothing	Boarding	Stipend	Health expenses	Marriage, funeral expenses	During disasters	During festive seasons	School education	College education	Providing job	Religious education	Food
91%	64%	85%	69%	70%	52%	50%	57%	67%	35%	65%	100%	8%