

DRAFT
Islamic Education
A Brief History of Madrassas With
Comments on Curricula and Current Pedagogical Practices

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Introduction

Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, most writers, scholars, politicians, diplomats, development workers, teachers, students and others have been trying to understand the reasons behind that devastating day. Muslim radicalism, Islamic fanaticism, Muslim fundamentalism are a few terms that have become very popular. At the same time, many people in the West have become more interested in learning about Islam. There has been a surge in sales of books dealing with the topic of Islam. Whereas, many support the fact that there is no justification for the events of that dreaded day, some are trying to find answers as to where does this hatred originate and how to avoid such an attack from occurring in the future. Increasingly, scholars, researchers and educators are arguing that improving the educational status of the Muslim countries, many of which unfortunately have some of the lowest literacy rates, will help change the context that nourishes and/or permits the growth of radical terrorism and will help increase the number of citizens prepared to participate in the economic development of their states. In addition, as most of the operatives of the Taliban government in Afghanistan were 'educated' in the religious school system, the education in Madrassas in Muslim countries has gained special attention during the past two years. There are many questions. What are these schools? How did they evolve? How do they function? What do they teach? How do they teach? Where do they get their money? Who supports them? What kind of students do they produce? Why are some associated with radical activities?

This paper will attempt to shed some light on these questions. It is divided into three parts: 1) the history of Islamic education or Madrassa, 2) structure, curriculum, pedagogy and teachers' qualification in Islamic schools in different parts of the world, and 3) the interplay of politics and education in Madrassas. The information on structure, curriculum, and pedagogy is organized according to the countries – West Africa in general, Egypt, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Curriculum content and pedagogical practices are focused in details for Madrassas in Pakistan. Pakistani Madrassas represent a unique example of close link between the education and politics, hence the third part of this paper deals with the situation and the reasons behind radicalism in Madrassas in Pakistan.

This paper attempts to synthesize the limited knowledge that exists on this subject. It does not claim to present a complete and comprehensive understanding of Islamic education and various types of institutions, which operate in certain contexts in different countries. Every country example is unique and cannot be used to generalize or to make certain conclusions about the Islamic education system.

Before we move on, it is important to understand the difference between the terms Koranic and Madrassa education. The Koranic school or *Maktab* is a place where Muslim children go to read and recite the Koran only. Koranic schools can function in the mosque, under a tree, in the house of the Koran teacher or under an open sky. The term Madrassa is usually used for a bit more organized institutions with classrooms and teachers for different levels. Many Madrassas have boarding and lodging facilities for

students that are offered free of charge. In addition, whereas a Koranic school is usually a place for lower level of religious education (the recitation and pronunciation of the Koran), Madrassa is where more in-depth religious education is provided.

I. A History of Madrassas

Seeking knowledge has been an integral part of the Islamic tradition. The early years of Koranic revelations to the Prophet were embedded in the oral tradition. Similar to the verses of good poetry, revelations of the Koran inspired the people of Arabia and they memorized the verses. However, as Islam expanded and it became necessary to preserve this vast knowledge, these verses were written down and compiled into various chapters. This compilation became to be the book of Islam, the Koran.

From early on, Islam emphasized two types of knowledge, revealed and earthly –i.e., revealed knowledge that comes straight from God and earthly knowledge that is to be discovered by human beings themselves. Islam considers both to be of vital importance and directs its followers, both men and women, to go and seek knowledge¹. For Muslims, the Koran is the perfect word of God, sacred and therefore cannot be changed. It should be memorized from start to finish. Once a person has memorized it, he/she must reflect on these verses and have a detailed understanding of its meaning and interpretation over the lifetime. A person who has mastered it would carry the knowledge of Islam in his/her heart and spread the word to the ones who encounter him/her. According to Islam, seeking earthly knowledge is also important because earthly knowledge compliments the knowledge revealed by God in the Koran and helps Muslims to live productive and good lives in this world.

Having understood the above logic one can understand why mosques came to be central to the learning processes of Muslims in the early days of Islam and continue to do so to this day. It was at the Mosque where Prophet Mohammad would convene people to listen to his revelations and their interpretation². Mosques were the places where Koran was compiled. It was here where early Muslims seeking to solve their problems in the light of the newly revealed knowledge would come to obtain answers. The mosque was the first school in Islam. In the early days of Islam, there was no hierarchy and every one who could master the content of the Koran could lead the prayers and guide the people. The learned people would usually spent most of their time in the mosques debating and polishing their knowledge of the Koran and others who could not accord much time to this activity would simply seek their assistance in matters of daily lives.

After the death of the Prophet, when Muslims faced situations for which no answer could be found in the revealed knowledge of the Koran and the Prophet was not there to guide them, the Muslim scholars sought answers in the sayings and practical life of the Prophet. This led to the development of traditions of following the *Sunna*, the knowledge of deeds

¹ Boyle, Helen, *Quranic School Strategy and Mini Needs Assessment*, Trip Report to Nigeria, 2002

² Ahmed, Munir, Islamic Education Prior to the Establishment of Madrassa, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 1987.

of the Prophet and *Hadith*, the sayings of the Prophet. The mosque continued to be the center of learning even after Prophet's death. This mosque based understanding and acquisition of knowledge worked very well for the Muslims of the Arabian Peninsula because the tribal traditions combined with the teachings of the Koran were sufficient to govern the lives of people who spoke the same language and had the same cultural background.

However, as Islam expanded to other regions and came into contact with other indigenous traditions and languages, it became necessary to create a cadre of Muslim experts who would develop sophisticated writings and textbooks on *Fiqa* - Islamic jurisprudence, *Sunna* – Prophet's traditions, *Hadith* – Prophet's sayings, and *Tafseer* - the interpretation of the Koran, to cater to the needs of non-Arab Muslim populations. Thus began the tradition of Madrassa, the center for higher learning the initial purpose of which was to preserve religious conformity through uniform teachings of Islam for all.

The first known Madrassa is said to have been established in 1005 AD by the Fatimid caliphs in Egypt. This Madrassa taught the minority Shi'ite version of Islam. It had all the ingredients of an educational institution. It had a library, teachers for different subjects were appointed and students who were admitted were provided with ink, pens and papers free of charge. An interesting fact about this Madrassa is that a catalogue of inventory of this Madrassa prepared in 1045 revealed that it had 6500 volumes on different subjects, including astronomy, architecture and philosophy³. When the Sunni Muslims conquered Egypt, they revamped the Shi'ite version of Islam in this Madrassa and replaced it with the Sunni version, destroyed the books and manuscripts that seemed contrary to their version of Islam and preserved the volumes that related to the earthly knowledge. A huge number of books were taken to Baghdad where a Seljuk Vizier called Nizam-ul-Mulk Hassan Bin Al-Tusi, established the first organized Madrassa in 1067.

In the new Madrassa established by Nizam-ul-Mulk two types of education were provided: scholastic theology to produce spiritual leaders, and earthly knowledge to produce government servants who would be appointed in various countries and the regions of the Islamic empire. Later, Nizam-ul-Mulk established numerous Madrassas all over the empire that in addition to providing Islamic knowledge imparted secular education in the fields of sciences, philosophy and public administration and governance. Nizam-ul-Mulk is considered to be the father of the Islamic public education system⁴. He himself is the author of a renowned book (among early Muslims) on public administration called "Siyasat Nama"⁵ (the way to govern).

Even though a majority of the Madrassas during the subsequent centuries would remain the centers of Islamic learning, a large number of them produced renowned scholars and

³ Ahmed, Munir, Islamic Education Prior to the Establishment of Madrassa, Journal of Islamic Studies, 1987

⁴ Haqqani, Husain, *Islam's Medieval Outposts*, Foreign Policy Magazine, November 2002

⁵ www.Islamicweb.com

philosophers who contributed to earthly or secular knowledge too. *Ijtihad* – independent reasoning was a special feature of these Madrassas. This is especially true for Madrassas in Spain where the Muslims ruled for almost 800 years and which is usually referred to as the Golden Age of both Islamic and Jewish advancement in science, technology and philosophy. It was in Andalusia Spain that Islam is said to have given birth to a number of scholars who combined spiritual knowledge with the earthly knowledge and contributed to the preservation of Greek and European knowledge, which was at the verge of becoming extinct. ‘For Ibn Massara of Córdoba (883-931), man was responsible of his own history; Ibn Hazm of Córdoba (994-1064) was a pioneer of the comparative history of religions; and Ibn Gabirol of Malaga’s (1020-1070) fundamental work was the synthesis of the Jewish faith and the modern philosophy’⁶. Muslim scholars, along with their Jewish counterparts, pioneered the knowledge of rational sciences, mathematics and medicine. Many of these scholars have become familiar to students in the west under their Latin names, men such as the philosopher Averroes (Ibn Rushd), the mathematicians Arzachel (al-Zarqali) and Alpetragius (al-Bitruji), and the physician Avenzoar (Ibn Zuhr) to name a few.

At the same time, as Islam spread to further east, the *Sufi* orders of the Muslim faith were establishing Madrassas in the Indian Sub-Continent and Central Asia. In these *Sufi* Madrassas grammar, poetry, literature, logic, math and other disciplines of Islam and general knowledge were taught. As most of the knowledge about Islam was either recorded in Arabic and Persian, the Madrassas in Indian Sub-Continent became places for learning Arabic and Persian. Every student aspiring to reach the highest level of the Madrassa education had to learn these two languages whatever the mother tongue of the student. The most renowned poets of India at that time were, borrowing from the Sufi traditions of Persia and Central Asia, composing their poems in Persian.

These days of learning and scholarship in Madrassas would not last.

After the defeat of the Muslims empires one by one at the hands of the crusaders and political rivalries among Muslim leaders, Muslim learning and scholarship went into a state of decay, from which unfortunately, it has not bounced back. The defeat and the humiliation faced by the Muslims in terms of both the loss of material wealth and power and spiritual integrity, resulted in the Muslim *Ulema* (literally meaning the scholar) of the later days to shun any pursuit of worldly knowledge and go back to the basics. In other words, they closed the door to *Ijtihad* – independent reasoning. Going back to the basics for this cadre of Muslim scholars meant following those trends and gaining that level of spirituality due to which the earlier Muslims were able to acquire great power and wealth.

At the time of the European renaissance, the Muslim education structure was beginning to decline. There was depression, lamentation and nostalgia for the lost glorious days. In this state of total gloominess Muslim *Ulema*, slowly gained power by becoming the spiritual advisors and deliverers of whatever was left of the education and the political systems. These murky times in the Muslim history had profound impact on the function

⁶ Charafi, Abdul Latif, *Once Upon a Time in Andalusia*, taken from the website of Jamat-e-Islami Bangladesh http://www.jamaat-e-islami.org/rr/andalusia_charafi.html

and philosophy of the Madrassas all over the Muslim world. Many abandoned the pursuit of rational sciences and focused exclusively on the teachings of Islam as prescribed in the Koran. *Ulema* used the verses from the Koran to rationalize their stance that the earthly or rational knowledge either should not be taught in Madrassas or should only be studied in the light of the Koran, which for them had all the answers.

The last nail in the coffin of advanced learning in Islamic schools came with the European colonial powers taking over whatever was left of the Muslim lands. With colonialism came a new modern system of education that sought to replace the role of Madrassas in any type of development. In the new schools, only those elite were invited to obtain admission that could be used to run the machinery of colonialism. This resulted in a dichotomy of education system – secular education for the elite and religious education for the poor. The new Western powers also brought the idea of separation of state and religion, which for the Muslim leaders was synonym to heresy. The new system of governance did not require legitimization through religion and this was seen by Islamic scholars as a direct threat to the established code of conduct for the Muslim rulers and their own power⁷. They were not happy with the new changes.

One particular region in which Madrassa went through a radical shift in ideology was the Indian Sub-Continent. When this region came under the British rule and a new educational system was introduced, which was perceived to be a threat to the Islamic identity of the Muslims, the Madrassa system in India took upon itself the task of opposing the cultural and educational hegemony of the British. It is important to point out, however, that the Madrassa system in the Indian Subcontinent was the only one that underwent drastic changes in terms of Islamic education curriculum and teaching styles and quality and abandoning of the earthly science studies. The Madrassas in the Arab world also changed a little in terms of the orientation of the Islamic curriculum but they carried essentially the same system of education that was established in the early development of the Madrassa in Baghdad, and to this day accommodate the teaching of the secular subjects. This is especially true for Egypt where, under the Al-Azhar education system, the secular subjects compliment the Islamic education.

The following discussion provides a quick look into the structure and curriculum of various types of Madrassas in different parts of the world.

II. Structure, Curriculum and Pedagogy in Islamic Schools

Structure, Curriculum and Pedagogy in Koranic Schools

In the following section, I will outline the structure and pedagogy in a Koranic school. As mentioned earlier in the paper, a Koranic school can be described as the lowest level of learning in Islamic education. The curriculum in a Koranic school is usually the Koran only. Every Muslim child, girl and boy, is expected to read and recite the Koran early on.

⁷ Haqqani, Husain, *A History of Madrassa Education*, in *Education in the Muslim World: What Next?* Speech delivered at a Symposium at AED, Washington DC 2002.

A typical model of Koranic school which is common from Central Asia to China, from India to Arabia and from South Africa to the North is a small room, usually attached to a mosque, where a teacher, usually male, teaches students to read and in some cases memorize the Koran in Arabic whatever the child's mother tongue. Students usually finish the Koran in about three to four years. The students vary in ages from 4 years to 16 or more years. If it is a male teacher, then girl students do not study with him after reaching a certain age (typically 9+ years). A Koranic school usually functions during hours that are most compatible to the time and work schedules of the students – either first thing in the morning or late in the afternoon. In most countries of Asia and Arabia, students go to the Koranic school either before or after their school day in a regular public school. In some parts of West Africa, for poor people, Koranic schools are the only avenue of obtaining some literacy.

Each Koranic school on average has 40-60 students at one time and the number may decrease or increase depending on the population of the area where it is located. The Koranic teacher is usually a *Hafiz Koran* – the one who has memorized the text and teaches by one-on-one coaching technique. The teacher also teaches by organizing small groups depending upon the age and level of learning of the student. If the number of students is high, the teacher utilizes the technique of peer tutoring, where those students who have mastered a certain level of the Koran are made to teach the little ones.

On a typical day, the teacher would start by asking students to recite what was taught the day before. After ensuring that the student has learned to read and pronounce the Koranic words in an acceptable manner, he/she reads with the student the next few paragraphs three or four times, until the student begins to rightly pronounce and read the new text.

Koranic schools are informal education systems. This school sector is not centrally controlled nor does it have any clearly stated goals⁸ other than the fact that the students should be able to read and pronounce the Arabic words correctly. The in-depth learning of the Koran at the Koranic school level is not required. It is only at the Madrassa level – the more detailed Islamic learning level - where students study the Koran in its entirety, meaning, with full understanding of all aspects and detailed interpretation.

Structure, Curriculum and Pedagogy in Madrassas

As outlined in the history of Madrassas above, some Madrassas have evolved from the centers of Islamic learning to the centers of secular knowledge acquisition, to the current state of greater emphasis on Islamic teachings only. This is especially true for Madrassas in Pakistan and some parts of Indonesia. Others have tried to maintain a balance in teaching both religious and secular subjects (Egypt and Bangladesh). However, increasingly, the some Muslim *Ulema* are emphasizing that secular knowledge should be taught in light of the knowledge revealed in the Koran.

⁸ Bouzoubaa, Khadija, *An Innovation in Morocco's Koranic Pre-Schools*, A paper written for Bernard van Leer Foundation, May 1998

The structure and operational procedures of the Madrassas vary from region to region. In West Africa, most of the Islamic learning takes place in *Maktab* or Koranic schools. There are only a few Madrassas in West Africa where students obtain detailed Islamic education. In the Arab world, the governments who control the curriculum and ensure that some secular subjects are taught in these institutions finance most Madrassas. In Indonesia and Malaysia, governments follow more or less the same pattern as in the Arab world. In the South Asia region, a large number of Madrassas, although financed by special boards of religious education that operate under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, are free to acquire other funds from private donors.

The common curriculum in Madrassas, in all regions, is Islamic studies and acquisition of greater understanding of Islamic principals that govern day-to-day lives of the Muslims. Therefore, subjects such as *Fiqa* – Islamic law, *Hadith* – Prophet’s saying, *Sunna*– Prophet’s traditions, *Tafseer* – interpretation of the Koran, and logic form the crux of Madrassa curriculum. Whereas, most Madrassas in Pakistan teach only religious subjects, many Madrassas, such as the ones in Egypt, Indonesia and Bangladesh, also teach secular subjects.

Madrassas in West Africa

Islam has an extended history in West Africa. Islamic education was perhaps the first organized educational system that was introduced to the indigenous West African populations. Islamic schooling spread to West Africa through the effects of trade and war. As trade routes expanded and Arabs and newly converted African kings and princes conquered new territories, Islam spread to new and wider areas. The first Islamic schools were established along the trade routes in West Africa⁹. The small hotels and restaurants along the trade routes were used as Koranic reading facilities. The present West African term *Marabout* used for the Koranic teacher is derived from the Arabic word *Murabit*, which means inhabitant of *ribat* or the way-station along the trade route.

The most prevalent provision of Islamic schooling in the West African context is through Koranic schools. Similar to the Koranic school in any other region or country, the Koranic school in West Africa is also a small facility, usually attached to a mosque where children learn the Koran and the basic duties of Muslim life. The Koranic schools in West Africa, as in other parts of the world, are mostly community-based and community-financed places. The colonial authorities established a few *medersas* (Madrassas) as an effort to blend both Islamic and regular school system. These teach regular curriculum as well as Koranic studies and Arabic language and their *marabouts* are much more learned than the *marabouts* in Koranic schools. Another form of religious education in West Africa is “Improved Koranic Schools”¹⁰. This term covers a variety of initiatives undertaken by UNDP and other international organizations, to introduce additional subjects in the best of the existing Koranic schools. Under these initiatives, teachers or

⁹ Easton, Peter et al. *The Practical Application of Koranic Schooling in West Africa*, Florida State University, 1994

¹⁰ Ibid

marabout are provided specialized training and are prepared to teach additional secular subjects such as math, science etc.

As described in the description of a typical Koranic school, Koranic schools in West African context also teach the Koran in Arabic, whatever the child's mother tongue. The only difference is that in this region, in several Koranic schools, the Arabic writing is semi-phonetic. It can be and is use to transcribe several of the languages of West Africa. Speakers of these languages then often acquire literacy in the course of their Islamic education even if they never understand anything in Arabic.

Madrassas in Egypt

In Egypt, most Madrassas teach both secular and Islamic subjects to their students. These Madrassas are run by the Al-Azhar University education system. Al Azhar University is considered the Harvard of Islamic education, which was established in the eleventh century. It maintains separate Madrassa facilities for male and female students¹¹. It is responsible for religious education as well as other components of secular curriculum.

In the Al Azhar system of Madrassas, primary religious school extends over the first 6 years and preparatory school extends over the next three years. Students who then go on to successfully complete 4 years of secondary religious school can enroll at Al-Azhar University. Those who do not go to secondary religious school can attend, like mainstream students, vocational or secondary schools that operate under the Ministry of Education. Al-Azhar also operates higher education facilities that provide bachelor and master's level courses in Islamic studies, dentistry, commerce and medicine.

The supervision and administration of the Al-Azhar educational system is the responsibility of the Central Administration of Al-Azhar Institutes. This is a department of the Supreme Council of Al-Azhar, which is responsible for the development of general policy and planning to ensure the propagation of Islamic culture and the Arabic language in these schools.

Since Al-Azhar University – the very first Islamic Madrassa itself – is the center of Islamic learning which has remained unchanged since the medieval time, one can deduce that Madrassas in Egypt are teaching the same Islamic concepts and knowledge which is based on the Koranic teachings and interpretations that were developed during the earlier periods of Islamic learning. Al Azhar institutions also try to incorporate spiritual learning with the secular subjects. For example, in 1961, according to Al-Azhar University's legislative law No. 103 new colleges of applied sciences, such as the faculties of medicine and engineering, were also introduced. Appendix A provides details of Al-Azhar institutions and their location.

¹¹ Taken verbatim from http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PES/int_egypt.html, the US Department of Education - Planning and Evaluation Service

“These newly introduced faculties are not duplicates of their counterparts in other universities [such as regular schools of medicine] since they combine both the empirical as well as the religious sciences”¹². The information on how exactly Al Azhar system combines spiritual sciences with empirical or earthly sciences and what types of teachers teach there could not be obtained to include in this paper. The prevalent thought among the traditional Islamic scholars of today is that reason and pursuit of knowledge have a very important place in Islamic society as long as reason is *subservient* to the revealed knowledge¹³. It will be interesting to study how the Al-Azhar University teaches earthly knowledge (which, is increasingly based on reason) in the light of the revealed knowledge of the Koran.

Whatever the merits of the Islamic education system in Egypt, the demand for Al Azhar education is on the rise. The following table provides some statistics.

**Numbers of Registered Students and Existing Classrooms
in Al-Azhar Education System¹⁴**

Levels	Admitted Students		New Classrooms	
	<u>1981/82</u>	<u>1994/95</u>	<u>1981/82</u>	<u>1994/95</u>
Primary	128,048	701,979	3,355	19,780
Preparatory	66,344	187,326	1,783	5,816
Secondary	997,57	168,830	2,519	5,684
Teacher Education	3,241	9,445	-	2,24
Quranic Recitations	1,428	6,497	-	2,24
Total	298,818	1,074,077	7,657	31,733
Al-Azhar University	83,034	102,300	31 faculties	49 faculties

The above table shows that the number of religious institutes and students has continued to increase over the years. According to the Ministry of Information and Statistics in Egypt, in 2001–2002, 26% and 29% of the new students were expected to choose the Al-Azhar system for general and university education, respectively.

Similar to the secular education system, the Islamic education system in Egypt is no better prepared to produce students who would be absorbed into the regular job market. However, after graduating from higher levels of Islamic schooling, Madrassa students at least have a greater chance of employment in the religious sector. The Al-Azhar University graduates become renowned scholars and serve as *muftis* (Islamic teachers and scholars) and spiritual leaders both within and outside the country. Most of the teachers that teach in Madrassas of Al Azhar University are the product of the system itself¹⁵.

¹² Taken from Islam for Today <http://www.islamfortoday.com/alazhar.htm>

¹³ Tibi, Bassam, *Fundamentalisms and Society: The World View of Sunni Arab Fundamentalists: Attitudes towards Modern Science and Technology*; Edt. Marty, Martine M and R. Scott Appleby, University of Chicago Press, 1993.

¹⁴ <http://www.sis.gov.eg/public/achieve/html/ach04.htm>

¹⁵ Taken from Islam for Today <http://www.islamfortoday.com/alazhar.htm>

Madrassas in Indonesia

There are two types of Islamic schools in Indonesia: “Madrassas” and “Pesantrens” or “*Pondok*” meaning the bamboo hut. The former is an Islamic day school while the latter is an Islamic boarding school.

Madrassas in Indonesia 2000-2001¹⁶

Level	Private	Public	Total	Teacher Students Ratio	Number of Students
Upper Secondary	3130	575	3705	1:44	576,000
Lower Secondary	9,624	1168	10,792	1:10	1.9 million
Primary	20,554	1,481	22,035	1:18	2.9 million

Indonesian Madrassas provide education at three levels: primary, lower secondary and upper secondary. These schools teach the national education curriculum and use extended hours in which to teach basic Islamic education and principles. Students who graduate from the Upper Secondary level of accredited Madrassas are qualified to enter a regular university. The great majority of the Madrassas are privately owned and operated while others operate under the Ministry of Religion. Madrassas are less expensive than public secondary schools and provide access to basic education in rural and urban low-income communities. Hence, they widen access to basic education through more affordable schooling as well as supplying Islamic teaching to those parents and students interested in receiving it.

No. of Pesantrens in Indonesia, 2000-2001¹⁷

Total Pesantrens	Number of Students
11,312	2.7 million

Pesantrens operate as independent Islamic self-governing schools, outside of the national Madrassa and public education system. They exist as a community with a compound, mosque and boarding system where students and teachers eat, sleep, learn and generally interact throughout the day. Most are located in rural areas. Pesantrens vary considerably in size from only a few hundred students to as many as 4,000 or more. The majority of Pesantrens have a customized curriculum that consists mainly of Islamic teachings that are based on the interpretation of the headmaster (Kyai) or the school of thought under which the school operates. Religious subjects include Islamic theology; philosophy, jurisprudence and ethics; Koranic exegesis, recitation and memorization; and Arabic literature, grammar or astronomy. In addition to Islamic studies, a few Pesantrens also include subjects from the government prescribed secular curriculum.

¹⁶ Ministry of Religious Affairs, Educational Statistics. “Indonesia School Year 2000-2001”:

¹⁷ Ministry of Religious Affairs: Educational Statistics, “Indonesia School Year 2000-2001” Indonesia

Many Pesantrens have a business to make it self-supporting, so they provide training for the students in trading, farming, cottage industries, and other community based income-generating activities. Thus, many Pesantrens attempt to blend traditional Islamic values, such as Islamic unity, selflessness, simplicity, social justice and self-sufficiency, with selected modern ones, such as entrepreneurial business management with English language and computer skill training¹⁸.

With 43.4 million students enrolled in public primary and secondary schools (29.2 million in primary and 14.2 million in secondary) in the year 2001-2002, it is clear that the vast majority of school-aged children in Indonesia enroll in public schools. The comparable enrolment data for the same school year for public and Islamic schools are unavailable. However, it is estimated that Islamic schools in Indonesia enroll between 10-15% of the total school age population more than 40% of them are girls. While considerably smaller in number, these two types of schools do function in parallel to the public system to provide alternative avenues of education.

The teachers for Islamic schools are trained at the Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN), which is a consortium of fourteen National Islamic institutes that are located in major city centers and thirty-three Islamic senior schools in medium sized cities in Indonesia. The purpose of this consortium is “modernization of Islam in Indonesia by promoting critical thought an objective inquiry, interaction with tolerance and understanding of and understanding of other religions, a participatory, democratic and inclusive approach to government and development and the respect for egalitarian and open tradition of classic Islam¹⁹.

Madrassas in Bangladesh

The Development Gateway statistics, taken from the Ministry of Education in Bangladesh, show that in 1998, there were approximately 6,900 Madrassas in Bangladesh. The following tables provide the number of schools and the number of students enrolled by level of the Madrassa education system in Bangladesh in 1998.

Types and Levels of Madrassas in Bangladesh (1998)²⁰

	Levels of Madrassas	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
1	Dakhil	4206	4487	4839
2	Alim	894	949	997
3	Fazil	890	899	953
4	Kamil	110	120	126
	Total	6100	6655	6915

¹⁸ Dhofier, Zamakhsyari, *The Pesantren Tradition: The Role Of Kyia in the Maintenance of Traditional Islam in Java*, Arizona State University Publishers, 1999

¹⁹ *Impact on the Development and Modernization of Islam in Indonesia*, Impact Study of the Cooperation between IAIN and McGill University, Final Report, May 2000.

²⁰ Taken from Bangladesh Development Gateway

<http://www.bangladeshgateway.org/sdnp/education/documents/database/number-Madrassa.html>

Number of Students in Madrassas in Bangladesh (1998)²¹

	Type of Madrassas	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
1	Dakhil (primary - mostly Quranic recitation)*	1,174,000	1,296,000	1,370,000
2	Alim (middle to high)*	292,000	307,000	333,000
3	Fazil (higher secondary)*	350,000	352,000	358,000
4	Kamil (college and post graduate)*	59000	65,000	65,000
	Total	1,875,000	2,020,000	2,123,000

Secular and Religious Schools – A Comparison

Level	Secular System		Religious System	
	Number	Students	Number	Students
Primary	66235	17,627,000	4839	1,370,000
Secondary	13419	6,289,000	1950*	691,000*
College	3344	2,919,146	126	65,000
Total	82,989	26,835,146	6,915	2,123,000

* Alim and Fazil combined for comparison purposes.

As the above table shows approximately 10% of the students in Bangladesh attend religious education system. The secular school system caters to a majority of the students.

There are two types of Madrassa systems in Bangladesh: *Quomi* (also known as Dars-e-Nizami) and *Aliya*. *Aliya* Madrassas function under the auspices of the Government and teach secular as well as religious subjects. *Quomi* Madrassas teach only the Islamic subject. The *Aliya* Madrassa system (which is the government recognized Madrassa system) has four levels and its religious curriculum is prescribed by the Department of Arabic at the Calcutta Madrassa in India as follows²²:

Dakhil: Combined with *Ibtidayee* (primary), is equivalent to elementary school – grade 1-8. At early stages, religious education is mainly focused on reading and recitation of the Koran. As students proceed to higher grades, they study Islamic jurisprudence, sayings of the Prophet, Arabic language, History of Islam, Bengali, math, social studies and English.

Alim: This is equivalent to the lower secondary level of the mainstream school system (grades 9-10). At this level, students learn tenants of Islam such as interpretation of the Koran and the Prophet's traditions and sayings in details. They must also study Physics, Chemistry and English.

²¹ Taken from Bangladesh Development Gateway

<http://www.bangladeshgateway.org/sdnp/education/documents/database/number-Madrassa.html>

²² Memon, Abul, "Madrassa Education in Bangladesh: Background, Present Scenario and the Position of Women", Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha, 1997

Fazil: This level is equal to higher secondary or lower college level (grades 11-12). At this stage, the intensity of religious subjects increases with the addition of subjects such as Islamic logic, law, in depth study of Arabic literature and history. Students also study English and other basic social studies books.

Kamil: This is the highest level of religious education and is equivalent to a Masters degree in Islamic studies from a regular university. After completion of this stage, a student is expected to have gained knowledge on all aspects of Islam and lead large congregations. At this level, students are not required to study any secular subjects.

Most *Quomi* Madrassas in Bangladesh are dedicated to teaching the Koran and other basic Islamic ethics. They are numerous in number and do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Bangladeshi Religious Education Board. Daur-Uloom Deoband in India sets the curriculum for these schools. This curriculum structure is described in detail in the description of Madrassas in Pakistan. *Quomi* Madrassas do not teach any secular subjects or keep enrollment records.²³ Unlike *Aliya* Madrassas students, students enrolled in *Quomi* Madrassas do not take any exam administered by the Government²⁴.

A report on the Madrassa education in Bangladesh written in 1997²⁵, the author describes the atmosphere in *Quomi* Madrassas as follows:

‘As regard to education and atmosphere, the Quomi Madrassas maintain a conservative hard-line attitude and are against any sort of modern thinking. In these Madrassas, importance is given to Urdu and Persian rather than Bengali. Nevertheless, as there is a lack of teachers who have good command of both of these languages, children do not acquire sufficient literacy. As a result, the students are not attaining any proficiency in any language including their mother tongue.’

Madrassas in Pakistan

The following table shows the number of secular and religious schools and the number of students enrolled in each province of Pakistan during 2000-2002.

Secular and Religious Schools in Pakistan – 2000-2002*

Province	Secular Schools	Madrassa Schools+	Students in Secular Schools (M&F)	Students in Madrassa Schools**
Punjab	115207	3155	9,057,979	
NWFP	81292	1776	3,154,913	
Sindh	46035	905	2,750,850	
Balochistan	20756	692	789,868	

²³ Bangladesh Education Sector Review – Report 1, Prepared by Ground Work Inc., for Creative Associates International, June 2002

²⁴ Babur, Salahuddin *Madrassa in Focus*, 2002, <http://www.bccbd.org/probe/Madrassas.htm>

²⁵ Memon, Abul, “Madrassa Education in Bangladesh: Background, Present Scenario and the Position of Women”, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha, 1997, p 26

Mosque Schools	25229***			
Total	288,519	6528	15,753,610	1,197,427

* Data taken from the Ministry of Education for the year 2000 and the Ministry of Religious Affairs for the year 2002; **Data by province not available; ***Mosque schools operate under the Ministry of Education and are usually considered as secular schools; +refers to Madrassas only that operate under the religious education board.

There are three main types of religious institutions in Pakistan: Koranic schools (where only the Koran is taught), Mosque schools (where both Koranic and secular subjects are taught) and Madrassas (where only Islamic learning takes place).

Koranic Schools: Every Muslim child in Pakistan is expected and encouraged to read the Koran either in a mosque or at home. Koranic schools usually function in a mosque where the mullah teaches the Koran to children, both boys and girls. At the basic level, the Koran is taught in words only and no translation or interpretation is provided to students. The end objective is that all Muslims must be able to *read* the Koran in Arabic even if they do not understand the language itself. Students are expected to *try* to understand the Koran when possible but not much is actually done to impart detailed knowledge of the Koran to the student in Koranic schools. Koranic schools offer classes at various times - evening, morning, afternoon – to accommodate the time schedules of teachers and students.

Mosque Primary Schools: Due to a lack of resources to provide schools in every village, in the mid 80's the Government of Pakistan experimented with the idea of converting some Koranic schools into mosque primary schools in rural areas. The plan was to add some additional subjects such as basic Urdu and mathematics, which would be taught to the students by the local imam. The plan faced serious challenges because the local imams were not academically prepared to teach Urdu and math since many of them had not attended formal secular schools and the Government did not provide any training to prepare them for the new task. While some mosque schools closed down, some also survived. Currently, there are approximately 25,000 mosque primary schools in Pakistan. Studies on their efficacy are not available.

Madrassa: The mission of most Madrassas in Pakistan is to prepare students for religious duties. Adhering to strict religious teachings, Madrassas teach Islamic subjects such as the Koran, Islamic law and Jurisprudence, Logic and the Prophet's traditions. Depending upon the level of the Madrassa (primary, middle or high), the concentration of religious teachings increases. *Hafiz-e-Koran* (the one who memorizes the Koran fully) or *Qari* (the one who can recite the Koran with good pronunciation and in a melodic tone) are produced at the lower level of Madrassas. The higher levels of Madrassas produce *Alim* – the Islamic scholar and/or teacher. An *Alim* certificate from a Madrassa is equivalent to an MA degree in Islamic studied or Arabic from a regular university. A Madrassa student after graduating from grade 10, is qualified enough to declare *Fatwas* – religious edicts. Those students who enroll in Madrassas full time do so with the knowledge that they will become well versed in religious studies only and will find jobs in the religious sector since very few Madrassas supplement religious education with secular subjects.

There are five major Islamic schools of thought in Pakistan: Deobandi, Bareili, Ahle-Hadith, Salafi, and Shia. Each sect has their own Madrassas in which they teach their own version of Islam. The two main sects of Sunni Islam - Deobandi and Bareili - dominate the Madrassas system in Pakistan²⁶. Deobandi schools are most commonly found along the Afghan-Pakistan border and within the city centers. The Deobandi and Bareili sects originated in the colonial Indian sub-continent in response to the perceived imperial plot to destroy Islam and its followers by enforcing its own version of education. The Deobandi sect is considered the most conservative and anti-west.

The core religious curriculum in Pakistani Madrassas is similar to any other Madrasa in the world except that it had a few more books in Persian. It focuses on the teachings of Islam – *Hadith, Fiqa, Tafseer, Sunna* and the like. A typical model of what is taught in Madrasa schools in Pakistan is provided in this following table²⁷.

First Year	Biography of the Prophet (<i>Syrat</i>), Conjugation-Grammar (<i>Sarf</i>), Syntax (<i>Nahv</i>), Arabic Literature, Chirography, Chant illation (<i>Tajvid</i>)
Second Year	Conjugation-Grammar (<i>Sarf</i>), Syntax (<i>Nahv</i>), Arabic Literature, Jurisprudence (<i>Fiqa</i>), Logic, Chirography (<i>Khush-navisi</i>), Chant illation, (<i>Tajvid</i>)
Third Year	Koranic Exegesis, Jurisprudence: (<i>Fiqh</i>), Syntax (<i>Nahv</i>), Arabic Literature, <i>Hadith</i> , Logic, Islamic Brotherhood, Chant illation: (<i>Tajvid</i>), External study (Tareekh Millat and Khilafat-e-Rashida – these are Indian Islamic movements).
Fourth Year	Koranic Exegesis, Jurisprudence (<i>Fiqa</i>), Principles of Jurisprudence, Rhetorics, Hadith, Logic, History, Cant illation, Modern Sciences (sciences of cities of Arabia, Geography of the Arab Peninsula and other Islamic countries)
Fifth Year	Koranic Exegesis, Jurisprudence, Principles of Jurisprudence, Rhetoric, Beliefs (<i>Aqa'id</i>), Logic, Arabic Literature, Chant illation, External study (History of Indian Kings)
Sixth Year	Interpretation of the Koran, Jurisprudence, Principles of Interpretation & Jurisprudence, Arabic Literature, Philosophy, Chant illation, Study of Prophet's traditions
Seventh Year	Sayings of the Prophet, Jurisprudence, Belief (Aqa'ed), Responsibility (Fra'iz), Chant illation, External Study (Urdu texts)
Eighth Year	Ten books by various authors focusing on the sayings of the Prophet.

²⁶ Pakistan: Madrassas, Extremism and the Military, International Crisis Group, 2002

²⁷ Taken from the website of Darul-Uloom Deoband in India <http://www.darululoom-deoband.com/english/>
This institution prescribes the Madrasa curriculum in Pakistan

For graduate classes beyond eight years, greater emphasis is paid on interpretation of the Koran and various books written in Persian and Arabic are mastered at this stage. In addition, various aspects of Islamic jurisprudence are mastered through different books in Arabic and Persian, which cover all aspects of Muslim life, including banking, divorce, etc.

As can be seen from the above list of subjects, there is no mention of modern sciences, such as Chemistry, Biology or technology. However, since September 11, several Madrassas in Pakistan, especially those located in urban centers, have tried to include science subjects in their curriculum.

This brings us to the question of content and teaching methodology in Pakistani Madrassas²⁸.

Pakistani Madrassas pay heavy emphasis to the teachings of Arabic and Persian. The languages in the Pakistani Madrassas are not taught for their intrinsic worth but because they facilitate mastery of the religion and because they are necessary for an *Alim*. For this purpose Arabic, of course, occupies the centre stage. Persian, which was socially and academically necessary in Muslim India, still forms part of the curriculum. Urdu is generally the medium of instruction in Pakistani Madrassas. However, in the Pashto-speaking parts of the NWFP, Pashto is the medium of instruction while Sindhi is the medium of instruction in many Madrassas in Sindhi-speaking parts of Sindh. Urdu is, indeed, the language in which Madrassa students become most competent in most of the *Madrassas*.

Most of the books from which languages are taught are very old Arabic and Persian books that were written in the 1500's or before. Pakistani Madrassas today still teach many of the *Dars-e-Nizami* texts. These are some of the oldest existing Arabic books. Students also study the Persian translation of Arabic books. "The Arabic books are treatises on grammar in rhymed couplets. One of the best known among them, *Kafia Ibn-e-Malik*, is so obscure that it is always taught through a commentary called the *Sharah Ibn-e-Aqil*. The commentary is often the dread of students and a source of pride for the teacher who has mastered it. In the Madrassas Arabic is not taught as a living language. The student is made to memorize the rhymed couplets from the ancient texts as well as their explanations. As the explanations in a number of texts are in Persian, which is also memorized, the student generally fails to apply his knowledge to the living language. Some ancient texts, such as the *Mizbah-ul-Nahv*, are explained in Urdu. But in this case the Urdu is much Arabicized. The explanation is scholastic and would not be understood by, let alone convince, somebody who is not familiar with the special branch of medieval Islamic philosophy on which it is based".

²⁸ This discussion on the curriculum in Madrassas in Pakistan draws heavily from Tariq Rahman's "Language, Religion and Identity in Pakistan: Language-Teaching in Pakistan Madrassas" in *Ethnic Studies Report*, Vol XVI, July 1998. This is the only resource that could be found that discusses some aspect of pedagogy in Pakistani Madrassas.

In major Madrassas, students learn Urdu from the Government textbooks that tend to inculcate the feeling of nationalism and the glorification of war. In addition, many of the Madrassas teach *Muallimul Insha* which is written by an Indian *Alim*, which is a response to modernity. Whereas the ancient books never felt it necessary to prescribe an Islamic form of behavior as it was not in dispute or under threat, this book does advise to act a certain way to challenge modernity. In this book, history begins with the fall of Spain in the hands of Moorish prince Tarik Bin Ziad. It also states that English were always the enemies of the Muslims and advises that Muslims should adopt certain behaviors to challenge the modern advances that may encroach upon a Muslim's identity.

“The Persian books in the Madrassas include: Atta's *Pand Nama*, *Nam-e-Haq* and Sa'adi's *Karima*. These books are didactic and they are in Persian rhymed couplets. Although they are 'safe' from the *Ulema's* point of view, being about morality, this morality is strictly medieval and patriarchal. Both *Pand Nama* and *Karima* approve of hospitality and condemn miserliness. In both silence is a virtue and spontaneous talking is not. In both women are inferior, untrustworthy and alluring as, indeed, are beardless boys. Both belong to a male world confident in its superiority. Women are faithless and the wise must suspect them” (p 208).

Another Persian book, which is taught, is called *Nama-e-Haque*, which is concerned with the rituals of ablution, prayers, cleanliness and the like. Those Persian books, written by Sufi poets, such as *Golistan* and *Bostan*, which in addition to teaching classical Islam, taught about love and appreciation of various things in nature, are either not taught in these Madrassas or chapters dealing with love and appreciation of nature are taken out on the discretion of the *Alim* under whom the Madrassa is functioning.

As is the case in majority of Madrassas all over the world, the teaching practices emphasize rote memorization and encourage very little critical thinking. The teaching style of a typical teacher in a Pakistani Madrassa, especially, in lower grades is very autocratic and little children are punished for not conforming to the rules and regulations. Severe corporal punishment is the norm, which results in high drop out rates.

A Majority of the teachers is males who are the product of the Madrassa system. A few have attended Al Azhar University in Cairo to gain specialized Islamic knowledge. Al Azhar University also seconds some of its Islamic scholars to various Madrassas all over the world where they teach religion to students in higher classes.

III. Politics and Religion in Madrassas

Indian Sub-Continent (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh), is perhaps the only region where during the last twenty years, politicians from different parts of the world have found a platform in Madrassas to advance their political agendas. Now same thing is happening in Indonesia where religious leaders are increasingly using the Madrassas as launching pads to attack either their rivals or other interests. In the Arab world, such as in Egypt, Madrassas in general are, at least, not perceived to be playing any noticeable role in

politics. The Muslim Brotherhood political movement in Egypt, which is considered to be a terrorist group by the Egyptian Government, is not rooted in the Madrassa system of Egypt. It began as a political movement on secular university campuses, which over the years has *used* Islam to generate wider support. Most of the operatives of the Muslim Brotherhood have studied abroad and in secular universities in Egypt. While A-Azhar University is considered to be a conservative institution, there is no evidence that its schools or institutions are the 'breeding grounds' for Islamic radicals. It is true for other Arab countries such as Morocco, Yemen, Jordan, Syria, and so on also.

Madrassas in Pakistan present a unique example of what can go wrong with the religious education system if it is not monitored and/or nurtured in a positive manner. They are the only ones that came under immediate fire after the events of September 11, 2001. Why is it so? The following discussion addresses this question.

In recent months, many articles and reports have pointed out with alarm the increase in the number of Madrassas in Pakistan during the past 20 years. According to the 2002 International Consultative Group Report, the Ministry of Education estimated that in 1995 there were 3,906 Madrassas, which increased to 7,000 in 2000.²⁹ According to a September 2002 article in the Dawn newspaper³⁰, the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Pakistan reported the number of registered Madrassas at 6,528 enrolling about 1.2 million students. Yet, in April 2002, Pakistan's minister for religious affairs told the ICG that he believed that there were currently 10,000 Madrassas. However, he acknowledged that because of the problem of definition, he suspects there could be more, with as many as one million to 1.7 million students attending classes at least for short periods.³¹ Nobody knows for sure how many Madrassas currently exist in Pakistan but some analysts believe the number is higher than what was reported by the minister for religious affairs. Some say that it may be as high as 33,000³².

Madrassas in Pakistan are a product of Soviet-Afghan war. For most of Pakistan's history, Madrassas numbered in the low hundreds and focused on training the next generation of religious leaders. Beginning in the mid 70's, the number of Madrassas began to grow. The reason was that the government of Pakistan failed to provide education to the growing number of students. The rise of Jamat-e-Islami (an Islamic political party), and the active support from the Bhutto Government to essentially declaring Pakistan a theocracy, led to the expansion of Madrassas where children could come for religious education free of cost. At the same time, the events in neighboring Iran were also influencing the process of Islamization of Pakistan.

The number of Madrassas grew at an even greater rate in the mid-80s under Zia's regime, with financing from the Pakistani government, and the CIA. Large theological seminaries were established along the Afghan-Pakistan border to create a cadre of religiously

²⁹ Pakistan: Madrassas, Extremism and the Military, International Crisis Group, 2002, p. 2.

³⁰ Ali, Zulifiqar, *EU Ready to Help Madrassas*, Dawn News, September 2, 2002

³¹ Pakistan: Madrassas, Extremism and the Military, International Crisis Group, 2002. p. 2.

³² Gill, K.P.S, *Politics of Islam in Pakistan*, Hindu Vivek Kendra, March 2001,

<http://www.hvk.org/articles/0301/11.html>

motivated *Mujahidins* to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. Students in these seminaries were taught to fight the ‘Godless’ Russians and ensure that Afghanistan is freed to be established as a good religious state³³. Students learned basic mathematics by counting dead Russians and hand grenades.

Religious fervor, support from the super-powers resulted in the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Then the military dictatorship fell in Pakistan. As subsequent governments in Pakistan, who were engaged in inter-political bickering, were unable to fully control these Madrassas financially, additional funds started flowing in from private individuals and Islamic charities. At the same time, CIA abandoned these institutions and thought that now that the Soviet Union is gone so will all the lessons from the minds of the Madrassa students who were trained to fight the Soviets. In addition, the inability of the Government of Pakistan to provide education for all and the precarious political situation in Afghanistan kept the Madrassa system alive in Pakistan. More and more *Mujahidins* were recruited to fight for the ouster of the corrupt governments in Afghanistan and holy wars in other places such as Kashmir, Bosnia etc. In addition to Madrassas that were established to support the Afghan conflict, other sectarian Madrassas, flourished during the same time in Pakistan. The main purpose of these sectarian Madrassas was to guard and spread their version of Islam.

An interesting product of this transition in the Islamic education system in Pakistan is that after the fall of the Russian empire, the focus of hatred in Madrassas shifted from Russia to the West in general. The boundary of hatred that was earlier limited to Russia, the Godless enemy, expanded to include the West in general and the United States in particular. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was used as a pre-cursor by the Arab financiers from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to create a cadre of Muslim fighters who would not only, somehow, restore the land to the Palestinians but also strengthen Islam by restoring it to its original state – the puritanical Wahabi version. Those Madrassas that tried to propose the teaching of secular subjects so that their students would have some marketable skills were strictly forbidden to do so by the patrons in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait³⁴. Thus, Pakistani Madrassas came under a vicious circle from which there was no way out.

In summary, the inability of the Pakistani government to meet the demand of education by young Muslim males; economic deterioration in Pakistan; the events in Afghanistan; open financial support for expanding religious education by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait; and U.S. interests in terms of using *mujahidins* for the fall of the Soviet Union; played a crucial role in bringing the Madrassa system in Pakistan to where it is now. As the saying goes, too many chefs can destroy the cake. The same thing happened to the religious education in Pakistan – there were too many players who were following their own recipes and not paying attention to the final product.

³³ Haqqani, Huasin, Presentation on the Capitol Hill, February 2003.

³⁴ Interviews with the Principals of Madrassas in Pakistan, April 2002.

Conclusion

The purpose of Islamic education is giving meaning to life and enriching it with the light of the Islamic faith as outlined in the Koran. Another purpose is strengthening and advancing human societies. Over the years however, the underlying attempt of Islamic education to strengthen and advance human societies has failed to achieve its goal. Despite exponential advances in science and technology all over the developed world, the current Islamic world seems unable to respond both culturally and educationally to the popular western development approaches.

There are a few reasons for this isolationist approach. The encroachment of the Western powers in Muslim indigenous cultures and their insistence on creating systems of governments where religion had only secondary importance in daily life was a first blow to the Muslim identity and the very nature of existence. Second was the resolve of European colonialists to impose their version of education on the masses and create such conditions that without obtaining European version of secular education one had little chance of social mobility within the system. Religious education found means to exist but only on the fringes. By the turn of the twentieth century, most Muslim countries encouraged only those belonging to an upper class to obtain western education since they had a vital interest in preserving the newly encountered western culture. After the fall of the imperialism, only those Muslim leaders came into power that had gained riches during the colonial time and thus were committed to sustaining the western models of development. Both the colonists and subsequent Muslim leaders abandoned the Islamic education system that could have been used to mobilize the Muslim masses for enhanced development.

The blame, however, does not lie with the Westerners only. The increasing isolation and ghettoization of Islam is the result of a *reactionary*, rather than *precautionary* stance taken by the *Ulema* (Islamic religious leaders). Closing the doors to wider aspects of learning, which were the hallmark of advanced Muslim civilization, has pushed the Islamic education system into an abyss. When faced with utter defeat and disgust, Muslim leaders have often called for aggressive means of making their point. Instead of finding means and ways where Islam and secularization would go hand-in-hand for an advanced society, such as experienced by earlier Muslim empires, the new cadre of *Ulema* insists on nothing less than total adherence to their version of Islam, which to a vast majority of moderate Muslims is unacceptable. The resistance of the Islamic scholars to improve the curriculum in Madrassas to reflect new religious and political realities, including the concerns of women, has created a negative image of Islamic education not only all over the world but within Islamic societies as well.

The current state of Islamic religious education in many parts of the world does not pose an immediate threat to the world's security. Nevertheless, the grim situation of Madrassas in Pakistan, and increasingly in Indonesia, should serve as an example to all Muslim countries and Western powers that when education and religion become playing cards in the hands of the politicians, the results are often disastrous.

Having said that, could Islamic education be used or modified to bring about greater social and societal changes in the Muslim world? The answer is yes. The first place to begin with is the basic literacy level. Every Muslim child is encouraged to read the Koran in a mosque or a *Maktab* by the parents and community as a whole. In countries where large Muslim populations either do not have access to schools or do not want to send their children, especially girls, to schools imparting literacy through Koranic school would be a good start. A program, where perhaps, the Koran is translated into the local or national language and along with the Arabic children are taught the translation of the Koran would certainly add to the literacy skills of the students (as it is done in some parts of West Africa). Slowly this basic literacy acquisition may lead to other advances in learning. This type of intervention would require intensive skills building of the Koranic teachers. Some examples of Koranic school teachers' training exist in West Africa and, perhaps in Pakistan, which may inform policy options in this regard.

For advanced and scientific learning through higher levels of Islamic education systems (in Madrassas), major changes would be required. For example, in Pakistani Madrassas mere introduction of math and computer courses will not change the views of the students towards the society and the world at large. Computer and English language courses cannot do much to alter the mindset of students in Madrassas who are taught, for example that 'women are not to be trusted and that beardless boys are going to hell'. The first thing to consider, in this regard, is the *orientation* of the Islamic education curricula. The questions that Islamic scholars and teachers must be pushed to ask are, currently what types of religious ideologies and beliefs are being promoted by Islamic curriculum in various Madrassas? Are they compatible with the prevailing political, religious, human rights, women's right realities that surround the Muslim world today? How through Islamic education systems in combination with scientific interventions, Muslim nations can advance in the 21st century? Could the Madrassas be brought back to the point where they lead the debate on *Ijtihad* – independent reasoning and pave the way for advancement in Muslim societies?

The answers to these questions should come from the Muslim leaders and scholars themselves. At present, it would be wise for the international donors and educators to facilitate this dialogue. Only if Islamic leaders and scholars are able to articulate the answers to the above questions and are willing to adapt and change, the world could witness another Islamic renaissance.

Institutions Operating Under Al-Azhar University in Egypt³⁵

Faculties for Boys In Cairo and the Regions	Faculty for Girls In Cairo and the Regions
<p>Faculty of Islamic Theology. Faculty of Islamic Jurisprudence and Law. Faculty of Arabic Language. Faculty of Islamic and Arabic Studies. Faculty of Da'wa, Islamic Call. Faculty of Education. Faculty of Languages and Translation. Faculty of Science. Faculty of Medicine. Faculty of Pharmacy. Faculty of Dentistry. Faculty of Agriculture. Faculty of Commerce. Faculty of Engineering.</p> <p>The Regions Faculty of Islamic Theology and Da'wa in Assiut. Faculty of Islamic Jurisprudence and Law in Assiut. Faculty of Arabic Language in Assiut. Faculty of Islamic Theology and Da'wa in Zagazig. Faculty of Islamic Arabic Language in Zagazig. Faculty of Islamic Theology and Da'wa in Tanta. Faculty of Islamic Jurisprudence and Law in Tanta. Faculty of Islamic Theology and Da'wa in Mansoura. Faculty of Arabic Language in Mansoura. Faculty of Islamic Theology and Da'wa in Menofiya. Faculty of Arabic Language in Shebin El-Koum. Faculty of Islamic Jurisprudence and Law in Damanhour. Faculty of Arabic Language in Damanhour (Itia El-Baroud). Faculty of Medicine in Assiut. Faculty of Dentistry in Assiut. Faculty of Pharmacy in Assiut. Faculty of Science in Assiut. Faculty of Islamic Jurisprudence and Law in Al-Menofiya. Faculty of Arabic Language in Girga. Faculty of Islamic and Arabic Studies in Qina. Faculty of Islamic Studies for Boys in Aswan. Faculty of Arabic Studies for Boys in Diemyiat. Faculty of Agriculture in Assiut. Faculty of Quranic Studies in Tanta.</p>	<p>Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Faculty of Humanities. Faculty of Medicine. Faculty of Science. Faculty of Commerce.</p> <p>Regions Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Assiut. Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Suhag. Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Alexandria. Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Mansoura.</p>

³⁵ Taken from <http://www.frcu.eun.eg/www/universities/html/azhar.html#faculties>