



MADARSA MODERNIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SPQEM: REPORT

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The purpose of writing this report is to highlight the significant role of Madarsa in providing education to Muslims in contemporary India. It is true to mention here that no discussion on the education of Muslims in India can be complete without discussing the role of madrasas because Madarsa play vital role in educating Indian Muslims in general and poor and vulnerable Muslims in particular. A number of attempts have been made to modernize the Madarsa to meet the religious and material needs of Muslims. A significant contribution of the 2006 Sachar Committee Report was its frank and illuminating discussion on the role of madrasas in the education of Muslims in India. The main issues that it dealt with and the solutions that it articulated are still relevant to any discussion on their role in a new education agenda for Indian Muslims.



Only a Small Percentage of Muslim Students Attend Madrasas:

One of the major contributions of the Sachar Committee was to provide a corrective to the popular myths about the number of Muslims attending madrasas – “a persistent belief nurtured, in the absence of statistical data and evidence, is that Muslim parents have a preference for religious education leading to dependence on Madarsas” (Report, 2006). The report noted that the common belief that a high proportion of Muslim children study in madrasas stems from the

fact that they are actually enrolled in the local Maktabas (often attached to mosques), and that only 4% of all Muslim school-going children attended madrasas.¹

The latest official DISE data indicates that recognized and unrecognized madrasas had a total enrolment of about 25.5 lakh students which constituted about 7.7% of the total Muslim student enrolment of 3.3. crores in 2015-16. Following table-1 clearly indicates the data calculated from DISE 2015-16 publications.

Table-1: Number of Muslim Students and Madrasas Students Enrolled at Different Stages of School Education and the Proportion of Madrasas Enrolment to Respective Totals of Muslim Students.

	Elementary Stage	High School Stage	Higher Secondary Stage	All School Stages
Enrolment of All Students	196,716,511	39,145,052	24,735,397	260,596,960
Enrolment of Muslim Students	27,149,228	4,008,453	1,991,199	33,148,880
Total Madrasa Enrolment Recognised / Unrecognised	2,210,145	234,870	108,836	2,553.851
Percentage of Madrasa Enrolment to Total Muslim Students	8.1%	5.9%	5.5%	7.7%

Source: Calculated from DISE 2015-16 publications

The 2006 Sachar Committee Report and DISE 2015-16 data indicating that 4% and 7.7% of all Muslim school-going children attend madrasas are the best recent official estimates available. However, National Monitoring Committee on Minorities' Education in its report in 2011-2012 indicated that 9.7% of Muslim children attend recognized and non-recognized madrasas.² Though, even official estimates vary, it is clear that the overwhelming majority of poor Muslim students receive their formal education in mainstream government, government aided and private schools.

Post-Independence Madrasa Reform and SPQEM:

A number of attempts have been made by the community as well as government to revamp Madarsa and to impart quality education through Madarsas. The first major intervention of the Central Government was the MHRD scheme, *Area Intensive and Madrasa Modernisation Programme of the Ministry*, which focused on infrastructure and curriculum development and was implemented for a number of years. The Sachar Committee considered the scheme ineffective, and recommended that the scheme be reviewed, and revamped before embarking on its expansion.³

While there have been some other government sponsored programmes, the next major intervention in the modernisation of madrasas was the MHRD centrally sponsored scheme, *Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrasas (SPQEM)*. According to a 2018 NUEPA evaluation, SPQEM started during the XIth Five Year Plan in 2009-10 covered over 21,000 madrasas and was currently being implemented in 18 states in the country.⁴

The two main objectives of the SPQEM are: a) to encourage Madarasas and Maktabas to introduce formal subjects i.e. Science, Mathematics, Social Studies, Hindi and English; b) to enable the children studying in Madarasas and Maktabas to achieve academic proficiency in classes I to XII.³⁶ This was to be achieved by providing for the following: salary of additional teachers, strengthening of libraries and book banks, providing teaching learning materials (TLMs) and other essential pedagogical equipment for teaching modern subjects at primary/middle/secondary and senior secondary levels.

Evaluation of the Implementation of SPQEM:

While individual or some groups of private madrasas are also undergoing modernisation, it is the quality of the large-scale implementation of the SPQEM in many states of India which has the greatest relevance to understanding its role in the education of vulnerable Muslims in contemporary India. The following is based on the findings of a 2018 NUEPA evaluation report, and to a lesser extent an earlier 2013 evaluation conducted by the K. R. Narayanan Centre for Dalit and Minorities, Jamia Millia Islamia.

1. The responses of the community, parents and madrasa staff and management were considerably enthusiastic about SPQEM because it combined religious and modern subjects thus serving both material and spiritual needs.⁵
2. The positive impact of the scheme included improvements in the enrolment of poor children and madrasa infrastructure. It also provided madrasa students a new opportunity to study modern subjects and thus allowing students to aspire to “becoming doctors or engineers or civil servants or police officers”.⁶
3. Under the SPQEM scheme, the extent and coverage varies from state to state. Most madrasas focus mainly on elementary education and the coverage of higher levels of education is limited.
4. The 2013 evaluation observed that there was little clarity on SPQEM guidelines on eligibility of madrasas, which had resulted in a variety of implementation deficiencies. Among the more important consequences was the inclusion of ineligible institutions. Funded under SPQEM, many madrasas were being “run as essentially mainstream public schools” and in many others “the curriculum followed was hardly any different from that of any elementary school except one or two classes of Sunni theology each week.”⁷

Limited Teaching of Secular Subjects:

Both the 2013 and 2018 SPQEM evaluations had documented that untrained and unqualified teachers were teaching subjects like science, mathematics and English, and that teachers were appointed by individual madrasa managements, and not regulated by any authority. Moreover, in many governments funded madrasas, the science kit and the single computer provided was also not used by students. Moreover both students and teachers were using the conventional rote methods of teaching and learning used in teaching the Quran and Islamic subjects for the secular subjects such as science and social studies.⁸

The teaching of secular subjects in other unrecognised madrasas is likely to be even more limited, since it is government SPQEM funding that has enabled many madrasas to provide both the teachers and learning resources to teach secular subjects. A 2015 report of a survey of 55 madrasas conducted in by Karnataka Students’ Islamic Organisation of India (SIOI) documented

that less than half taught English, and less than 20% had access to science, mathematics and social science subjects.⁹ Another study of 500 prominent madrassas across India revealed that 85 per cent of them did not teach Social Science, English and Mathematics to the students.¹⁰

Relevance of Madrasa Certification into Higher Levels of Education:

The Sachar Committee had recommended that mechanisms needed to be worked out to link madrassas with mainstream education and employment in 3 ways:

- Madrassas could be connected to higher secondary boards so that madrasa students could shift to mainstream schools after completing madrassas.
- Provision of "equivalence" to Madarsa certificates/degrees for subsequent admissions into institutions of higher level of education, especially when admission is done through common entrance examinations.
- Similar recognition of madrasa degrees to enable them to sit for competitive examinations for Civil Services, Banks and Defence Services.¹⁰

There is no evaluation of the extent to which these mechanisms have been implemented, and have enabled madrasa students to access higher levels of education and employment. The 2018 NUEPA evaluation indicated that only a small number of students used the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) scheme to enable madrasa students to study at the secondary and upper secondary level, mainly due to lack of awareness of this facility.¹¹

However, despite any formal recognition of madrasa qualifications, transitioning from a madrasa to a mainstream institution at any stage of school or college education will pose adjustment and academic problems. As Arshad Alam has noted that when students transition from the parallel stream of primary-level madrassas to continue their education in regular schools, they “will find it very hard to adjust to new educational and pedagogical context”.¹² This can become perhaps impossible for most madrasa students to cope with when they transition later at high school or higher education stages.

Medium of Instruction in Madrassas and its Impact on Higher Levels of Education:

Like many other aspects of madrasa education in India, there is no empirical data available on the medium of instruction in these institutions. In 2002, Imtiaz Ahmad impressionistically observed that Urdu was the medium of instruction in North Indian madrassas.¹³ It is unclear how many madrassas continue to teach in Urdu in the northern and other states of India.

Imtiaz Ahmad also noted that in Bengal, Assam, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the medium of instruction was the regional languages. Madrassas registered under SPQEM are likely to be using the regional language, but the extent to which the regional language is used as a medium of instruction in madrassas is also likely to vary from state to state, and even within states. In Karnataka, the Students Islamic Organisation of India (SIOI) study of 55 madrassas indicated that more than 50% did not offer Kannada as a subject.¹⁴

Moreover, the study of Koran and related religious subjects in most madrassas would be in Arabic. Therefore, even if government increasingly facilitates the recognition of madrasa degrees for entry into higher levels of school or higher education, many madrasa students immersed in religious instruction and secular subjects in other languages like Arabic and Urdu would find it

far more difficult than regular students to cope with academic requirements when they transition to mainstream educational institutions.

Madrasa Graduates and Opportunities for Employment and Social Mobility:

There is only limited evidence, and no state or all-India level studies available, exploring the link between madrasas and employment. A study of 77 madrasas in Mewat district of Haryana, a Muslim majority district, enrolling about 8,000 poor Meo students indicated that 78% of the madrasa graduates were employed in madrasas, dargahs and mosques, and only a few went on to university education. The study noted that only around three per cent of madrasa educated persons have attained a higher level of socio-economic development. Otherwise “most of them fell into the category of poor socio-economic conditions as madarsa trained persons cannot bring any substantial socio-economic change because their professions cannot bring good remuneration”.¹⁵

SPQEM could be improved to provide Quality Education for Vulnerable Muslim Students?

The evaluations of the SPQEM indicate that poor Muslim parents overwhelmingly support the SPQEM initiative primarily because it combines secular subjects with religious knowledge. This is also an important factor in sending girls to madrasas i.e. there are more girls than boys in them. This imbalance is a direct consequence of the gendered world view of poor parents which privileges the main goal of school education as preparation of daughters to be good Muslim wives and mothers.



However, while clearly the introduction of secular subjects in madrasas is absolutely critical in contemporary India, and is welcomed by poor Muslim communities they serve, the implementation of the SPQEM scheme is extremely deficient and needs to be reviewed thoroughly before expanding it. Recruiting additional untrained and unqualified teachers by Madrasa Committees, and formally adding secular subjects and some resources -a single computer, a science kit which have rarely been used, and an arbitrary selection of library books - will not significantly improve the quality of teaching and learning in government funded madrasas.

Reforms in Teaching Secular Subjects in Government Funded Madrasas:

Both the 2013 and 2018 evaluations of SPQEM have suggested a number of changes to improve their administrative functioning as well as their quality of teaching and learning. The present Minister of Minority Affairs, Muktar Abbas Naqvi has recently reaffirmed the present BJP Government's commitment to modernize madrasas which included the training of teachers in secular subjects to connect their students to mainstream avenues of education.¹⁶



Conclusions and Suggestions:

It has been observed that madrasas were instruments of identity maintenance to Indian Muslims. To ensure that they continue to play that role in contemporary India, it is important that Muslims continue to run makhtabs and madrasas, and that the state does not arbitrarily interfere in the religious education they provide. Decisions on changes in the content of this religious component should be left to members of the community.

For government schemes to be implemented speedily and properly, Muslim organisations and Civil Society groups will need to actively advocate at state and sub-state levels for such provision. It is therefore important for Muslim organisation and Civil Society Groups to actively engage with the government to ensure the availability of accessible government alternatives. It is

also highly important to concurrently encourage both government and community initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning of secular subjects in all madrasas. It is equally important for Muslim organisations to hold discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of madrasa education in Muslim communities and accordingly explore, plan and implement schemes for the modernization of madarsas.

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