

## Dual System of Education and Poverty Persistence in Pakistan

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### *Abstract*

This article investigates the duality of institutions (official versus indigenous) in the area of education in Pakistan. It is assumed that some poor people, due to various structural reasons, cannot afford to get their children enrolled in official schools. Instead, they send their kids to *Madrassas* (indigenous institutions) which provide free education, food and boarding logistics. However, these *Madrassas* impart the type of education hardly relevant for the increasingly competitive job market. Further, *Madrassa* education heavily influences the lifestyle and worldview of its students. Consequently these students remained socially excluded and have minimum participation in the economic activities. For empirical evidence, field data were collected from the district of DG Khan. Randomly selected teachers of *Madrassas*, students and their parents were interviewed.

It was found that *Madrassas* not merely provided free religious education but also had their specific agenda to implement. Further, as a part of the social system, these institutions had multiple functions to perform---ranging from imparting political socialization to cultural orientations. Students were indoctrinated that modern innovations and cultural globalization were inherently dangerous for their religious tradition and would corrupt their value system. The curriculum and training of these institutions laid a great emphasis on theological issues and sect-specific character building. Such a training and personality development might have its own virtues but, practically, rendered the *Madrassa* graduates ineligible to compete for the rewarding jobs available in the public and private sector. However, to be on positive side, *Madrassas* were giving relief to the poor children by providing them free

education, food, and shelter---such facilities might not otherwise be available to them. Hence, in the functional perspective, *Madrassas* were performing some function to maintain the social equilibrium and tranquility in a highly volatile condition. In a way, the institution of *Madrassa* was acting as an instrument in reproducing and transmitting poverty from one generation to another; if not creating poverty itself. The empirical data also provided evidence that *Madrassa* students, by virtue of their training and worldview, did not feel the pinch of social exclusion, non-participation and consequential poverty.

### **Introduction**

The study evolved from the assumption that there is duality of institutions in the area of education in Pakistan. There are two types of institutions, though not mutually exclusive in some respects, operating in the same setup. One system can be termed as official system (run by the state: the official schools) while other has been named as indigenous system (run by the local population: the *Madrassas*).

Both systems operate under different philosophies and pedagogical parameters. The official schools impart education and training according to government policies. In this system, the teachers are appointed and paid by the government's education department and as such they are accountable to the government. The school curricula are designed by the government. The certificates/degrees issued by these schools are accepted for various public and private sector jobs. The students of these schools have the opportunity to get integrated with the institutions of higher learning within the country and abroad.

The indigenous system is operating in the country for centuries. This system is not under the control of the state education department. *Madrassas* are established by religious circles and funded by the private individuals/organizations. The teachers of these *Madrassas* are not paid by the government nor do they follow

the government prescribed curricula. These institutions are usually attached with the mosques and impart religious education and training. Many of them do not issue diplomas/degrees and where these are issued, most of the degrees are not recognized by the state institutions. Further in addition to education, these institutions have wider agenda to implement. Usually students are provided accommodation and food 'free of cost' and *Madrassa* has stronger leverage to influence the behavior and life style of its students.

The central assumption of this study is that the existence of indigenous institutions tends to create social exclusion and consequential poverty. The argument is that the individuals who are educated from a *Madrassa* lag behind and lack capability to compete with the individuals who are educated from the official schools. For instance, a graduate of official school learns English, mathematics and other basic science subjects and therefore has better prospects to work for government or private enterprises. Whereas a graduate of *Madrassa* who, except memorizing Koran and some knowledge of Persian and ancient Arabic, has no training or orientations to work in a modern commercial Organization. Hence a person who depends on *Madrassa* education could be doubly disadvantageous; he comes up with education having little functional utility in the job market plus his exposure towards life is restricted and he is indoctrinated to perceive the things in a way that makes him largely isolated from the society.

The point here is that the duality of institutions provides two different categories of people in terms of their training and orientations; they are different in terms of 'worldview' aspirations, ideology and life style. A graduate of official school is trained keeping in view the job requirements in the market. The curricula is designed and developed by the state-controlled institutions. Whereas the graduate of *Madrassa* is taught the syllabi designed by the clergy, which has its own specific aims and objectives. These objectives may not necessarily be in line with the objectives of the state and state sponsored education system.

It is assumed that this duality of institutions is creating two distinct classes in the society. First, the people who depend on the official institutions develop more potential and have better prospects to occupy rewarding positions and other social resources. Second, the people who depend on indigenous institutions (especially *Madrassa*) cannot acquire necessary skills, training and orientations which are essential to compete for various rewards in the society. Because of their incapacitation, they cannot get integrated with social mainstream, remain non participant, socially excluded and consequently poor.

## **Methodology**

### *Theoretical Assumptions*

It is commonly reported that the official schools are insensitive and non-responsive to the indigenous 'felt needs'. The official institutions offer services which may not be affordable to some sections of the local population. Consequently the local population may develop institutions which could address their needs. To put in functional perspective, society develops parallel institutions when state institutions render dysfunctional.

More precisely, the assumption is that *Madrassa* is functioning in response to the various needs of the local population---the needs which are not met by the official institutions. Hence in addition to education, *Madrassa* is filling the services vacuum especially in the areas of health care, social security and care for destitute children. This could be the reason for the persistence and growth of these institutions in society.

In the absence of viable and well functioning schools combined with the inefficient and ineffective government's social sector services system, poor people find no option but to revert to the alternative option---the *Madrassa* system. *Madrassa* not only provides free food and accommodation to the students but promises some services which are affordable and understandable to the people. Hence the *Madrassa* has deep roots and greater

influence in the local community. However the type of education and overall training in *Madrassa* produce personalities which do not possess requisite qualifications and competencies to adjust with the larger social mainstream. As a result *Madrassa* graduates fail to get integrated with the official structures and are systematically excluded and 'disqualified' to hold rewarding positions and statuses.

The underlying assumption is that socio-economic system and institutional network of a society create 'felt needs' of the people. To fulfil these needs, people develop and support institutions which, according to their perceptions and understanding, are 'doing well'. Rest of the institutions, no matter how strong official legitimacy they have, are considered redundant at 'ground level'. Their choice ought to be understood within the overall social matrix wherein an individual operates. His/her choice may not be perceived as sign of 'illiteracy' and ignorance'.

#### *Respondents and sampling*

The field work was conducted in DG Khan: a Southern district of the Punjab province. The district consisted of rural (Tehsil *Tounsa*) and urban (DG Khan city) areas. And from the selected *Madrassas*, all the teachers who were willing to talk with the researcher were interviewed with the help of a semi-structured interview schedule. Randomly selected students were also interviewed from each of the selected *Madrassa* with the help of an interview guide. The parents of the students and *Madrassa* managers/financiers were also interviewed. Where possible, focus group discussion was conducted to elicit the spontaneous responses of the stakeholders. The researcher also spent sometime in *Madrassa*, so that he could observe the overall system in its totality.

#### *Field Experiences*

The researcher was stunned to see some ground realities in these *Madrassas*. Quite unexpectedly, there was an ultra orthodoxy being indoctrinated in these institutions with a great zeal and

fervor. Surprisingly, in some localities these *Madrassas* attracted more students than official schools.

Ninety percent of these *Madrassas* wanted to stick with the style and curricula developed in 11<sup>th</sup> century. They were not only determined to pursue the same but wanted to resist any move that could change it. Almost all the *Madrassas* had very unsatisfactory hygienic conditions and overall environment was very depressing. It was shocking to note that 17 students were supposed to sleep in 14x18" room and that very room was also used as class room in the morning. Only two percent of the students and ten percent of the teachers regularly brushed their teeth.

It was noted that the *Madrassas* were situated in very poor localities where the living standard of the population was extremely low. However the administrator of *Madrassa* enjoyed some facilities like telephone and carpeted office with electric fan. In some cases they had refrigerator in the office as well. However, this did not mean that the students had the access to these facilities. Only the *Madrassa* administrator and some senior teachers were allowed to use these facilities. Overall, the living conditions of the students were very poor.

It was also noted that every *Madrassa* had an expansion plan; construction work was going on which reflected the continuous financial support of the community for these institutions. Every *Madrassa* has a history of expansion and progress; not even a single *Madrassa* was ever closed down. Once established, it continued to function. Number of *Madrassas* has sharply increased during the last ten years and so is the number of students.

Interestingly there was mushroom growth of *Madraas-tul-Binat* (*Madrassa* for daughters/females). It was, however, not possible for the researcher to contact with any teacher/student of these institutions on cultural reasons. The teaching staff of these *Madrassas* was only females. The female *Madrassas* worked under the direct supervision of the associated *Madrassa*. The reason for

establishing these *Madrassas* was to 'prepare good wives/mothers in accordance with religious model of a particular sect.

### Findings

Randomly selected students of both rural and urban areas of the district DG Khan were interviewed with the help of a semi-structured interview schedule. The main points of the interviews with the students are given below.

#### A. *Students*

1. A majority of the students of *Madrassas* were from extremely poor families. Most of them had no clear career planning or high aspirations. They seemed satisfied with the living conditions and food provided by the *Madrassa*. The students were discouraged to establish contact with their age fellows in the community especially with those who were school-students. Generally the students were confined to the four walls of *Madrassa*.

2. Students had deep sense of fear from the teachers who used to give them severe corporal punishment in case they showed any negligence to their studies or violated the disciplinary code of *Madrassa*. No *Madrassa* had any sports facility and the students were discouraged to participate in any game: cricket, hockey or foot ball were considered undesirable activities and a wastage of time.

About 20 percent of the students were from destitute families; their father or guardian seldom visited them. They were completely at the disposal of *Madrassa*. It was also noted that such students had relatively longer stay there and were deeply involved to assist the day-to-day administration of the institution. It was noted that there was some division of labour among such students. For instance, some were responsible to collect cooked food from neighboring homes, others had to look after the cleanliness, water supply and sanitation.

4. About 15 percent of the students were physically or mentally impaired/handicapped. These students were not given any type of special treatment, rather they were humiliated by calling their names by referring to their disability. There was no arrangement of proper light in the classrooms. Many students complained that they had low vision problem, but it was never properly diagnosed nor *Madrassa* had any arrangements to get their students medically examined by a qualified doctor.
5. Majority of the students was convinced that religious education was the “real education” which ensured salvation in the next world and was an instrument to “please God”. For them worldly education (e.g. education of science, technology, medicine, liberal arts etc.) was not an education in its real sense. Such an education was a tool to ‘earn wealth’ and was ‘ultimately destructive for humankind’. The students were exposed to carefully selected literature produced by their respective sectarian think tanks.
6. Some senior students expressed their strong will to work for the promotion of their sect/religion no matter how odd the circumstances may be. It was also noted that the students were allowed to read only few prescribed books written by the senior *Ulema* (religious scholars) of their particular sect. The students were also discouraged to study any newspaper/magazine which deals with ‘worldly things’.
7. Some students compared *Madrassa* with school and considered the former a better institution for education and character building. For them *Madrassa* education was the source of salvation not only for them but also for their parents and even for the parents of the parents. In the local cultural context, the school was not honored with any such blessing.



8. Some senior students of *Madrassa* viewed that the school has lost its traditional importance because of very high incidence of unemployment. One student said "people go to school only for one reason i.e. to get education which could help them to get a job. Now there are no jobs. If there are no job then what is the benefit of school". Hence the conventional argument that "school education is job-oriented while *Madrassa* is not" could not convince many students.
9. Almost all the students were physically beaten by their teachers if they could not understand/remember the lesson at proper time. Some students showed prominent scars on their back caused by the physical beating by their teachers. For a majority of the students, teacher had every right to give physical punishment. The junior students were beaten more frequently and violently than the senior ones.
10. It may also be noted here that a *Madrassa* was not just a knowledge imparting institution but it had its own agenda to preach and implement. There were various religious sects which run these institutions. The primary focus of the *Madrassa* highups was to shape and mould the personality of their graduates according to their ideal *Imams* and saints. To achieve this objective, each *Madrassa* had clear-cut instructions to its students as to what should be the color of their cap, length of their beard and trouser and over all dressing and presentation. Any deviation to these 'codes of conduct' was punished and could lead the summary exclusion from the institutions.

### *B. Teachers*

In order to understand the functioning of these *Madrassas*, randomly selected teachers were interviewed with the help of a semi-structured interview schedule. The core issues discussed in the interview were their ideas about education, religion and other socio-economic issues which had bearing on the training and

education of their students. The main points of the interviews with the teachers are given below.

1. Almost all the teachers had their education from *Madrassas*. Most of them never studied in the official school. Those who reported that they were enrolled in the school, their stay in the school was not more than two to three years. There was not even a single teacher who could write or understand simple text in English language. Their knowledge was restricted to Koran, *Hadith* (saying of Holy Prophet) and selective study of some Persian literature written in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.
2. The average salary of a *Madrassa* teacher was Rs. 1800 (equal to \$ 34) per month. It was quite low even in Pakistani standards. The married teachers had average five children. Not even a single teacher was in favor of birth control practices. For them, any human effort to control birth was a great sin: "it was a war against God", one teacher observed. Despite the fact that they had very low level of income and large family size, they never complained of 'financial problems'. One teacher commented on the situation: "Our life is simple, we do not indulge in wasteful and extravagant life style. We work for God and we trust in Him: He is responsible for the fulfillment of our needs" (from field notes).
3. A close observation of the system revealed that the teachers had intimate relations with the local people. They were 'with the people' in every aspect of life, in every moment of joy and sorrow. They provided guidance and help to the people in the time of trouble by interpreting the Islamic *Sharia*. They were also involved with the local community and provided variety of services: for example, to negotiate the matrimonial contract, lead the funeral prayer when some one died, recite Holy verses when one is ill, offer special prayer when there was some natural calamity like flood or earthquake and other events of social significance. People may also seek their guidance from them whom to vote in the public elections. They were also leaders of public opinion on various

4. It was noted that a majority of the teachers were not happy with the functioning of state departments. They considered them the 'remains of colonial history'. While commenting on the judicial system one teacher observed. "Judges and magistrates are trained in the British law and not in Islamic Law. The whole judicial system is an imitation of a foreign system. This system is not applicable to Muslim country. That is why, there is no justice, and injustice and corruption are every where" (form field notes). Another teacher lamented the performance of the state social welfare department where employees were getting salaries without doing any work for the public. The teacher was proud of his *Madrassa* which was providing free food, accommodation and education to more than 300 poor students without any help of the government. In short all the teachers considered that government departments were not working for the welfare of public.
5. Almost all the teachers were fiercely against the prevailing socio-political system specially the propagation of values like democracy, liberation, freedom of expression, toleration, equality of women. They considered these values against their religious order and major source of corrupting the society. One teacher believed that *Madrassa* was the only institution which was fighting against this flood of 'foreign values'. He argued that in the name of democracy, the corrupt, lawbreakers and 'infidels' are getting political power. The teacher observed "Those who deserved jails, sit in the parliament. All sorts of sins are rewarded and legitimized in attractive language. *Madrassa* would continue to fight against it. It is a true *jihad*. We are committed to continue this *Jihad*. We do not mind if we are called fundamentalist or terrorists" (form field notes).
6. All the teachers believed that physical punishment was necessary for the proper and effective learning. Without the fear of physical punishment, a child cannot learn properly. It was regrettable to note that even the disabled/handicapped children were physically punished and ...

visible on their bodies. Not even a single teacher had any formal professional degree/training for teaching.

7. There were very few teachers who were dissatisfied with their extremely low paid jobs. Surprisingly one teacher in DG Khan was highly dissatisfied with his job as well as with the whole *Madrassa* system. He considered the system as out dated and was not serving its intended purposes. He commented: "The input of *Madrassa* is extremely sub-standard. The kids of poorest families who have lowest IQ or suffering from some disability are usually sent to these institutions to 'please God'. This is hypocrisy; no one is sincere about religious education. The output of these institutions is narrow-minded *Mullahs* who are not trained to address the contemporary social, economic and political challenges" (from Field notes).

8. It may be interesting to note that *Madrassa* was deeply involved in the matters relating to health and illness of the local population. Teachers of *Madrassa* were providing healing services to the local population by applying spiritual healing techniques. An overall observation of *Madrassa* system revealed that these institutions had their peculiar culture specially in the matters relating to health and illness. They had their own explanatory model which helped them to understand illness. Usually illness was attributed to some sort of deviant behavior. At the same time, good health was directly linked with one's conformist behavior. The basic idea was largely based on the assumption that 'If you commit sin you would be ill, if you follow the principles of religion you would remain healthy'. Majority of the teachers of *Madrassas* was involved in religious healing to some degree. Overall *Madrassa* did play a role in shaping the health care related behavior of its students in particular and the community people in general. *Madrassa* provided services in the following fields

- Usually the teachers provided spiritual treatment based on the verses of Holy Quran and other sacred methods. Normally they did not charge any fee for the service. Some teachers had good

reputation to treat some incurable diseases like diabetes, infertility and cancer with the help of spiritual therapy.

- In case of serious illness, some people invited the students of *Madrassa* with the request to recite Holy Koran many times, so that, with its blessings, the disease could leave the house and the ill person could get well.
- Some of the teachers of *Madrassas* were also providing herbal treatment by charging nominal fee.
- The teachers were well versed about the knowledge regarding good health. For instance problems of liver and anemia were thought to be caused by masturbation, homosexuality rendered kidneys dysfunctional, breast cancer and vaginal cancers were due to the use of contraceptives. Illegitimate wealth led to cardiac failure and high blood pressure or diabetes.

### *C. Parents of the Students*

1. About 80% of the parents who send their children to *Madrassas* were poor and had larger size of family. Almost all the parents professed that their decision to enroll their children to *Madrassa* was based on their "first preference" to religious education. For them, it was the duty of every Muslim to sacrifice for the spread of his/her religion. Some of the parents were conscious of the fact that *Madrassa* education cannot promise good career. But at the same time, they viewed that getting good job was not the sole purpose of life. For them, the tremendous benefit of *Madrassa* education was that it ensured the salvation in the next world.
2. Most of the parents thought that the official school was not 'feasible' for them keeping in view their social and financial resources. They were of the view that their child would not get any job even if they educate him in the school for years. There were various readily available examples which substantiated their fears. Hence in the eyes of the parents, the money and time invested in school education was not worth. One father of a *Madrassa*-student observed: "See, there is no job: not even for highly technically

trained people. Secular knowledge is useless if there is no job as its sole purpose is to get job. But if one has *Madrassa* education, one is successful even if one does not have a job. *Madrassa* education is a source of blessing and eternal success" (from filed notes).

3. Most of the parents were not happy with the school education. Their dissatisfaction from school was due to various reasons. Many parents believed that if one is successful in religious education, he would be successful in this world and the world hereafter. It was perceived that religion teaches simplicity, honesty and contentment. These are the keys to success. Most of them did not see many benefits from school education. For them, it was expensive and long-term exercise which they could not afford.
4. Majority of the parents expressed their satisfaction that *Madrassa* was providing free education, accommodation and food to their kids. "What else we need; our kids are getting religious education and other facilities free of cost. This is a great blessing of God", commented a poor peasant whose three children were studying in a *Madrassa*. "No student of *Madrassa* ever committed suicide, no matter how poor, chronic jobless he may be", the father added.
5. Some parents reported that they first contacted the official school but they were frustrated from the institution because of various reasons. They expressed their displeasure over the "irresponsible education" being imparted by the official schools. There was a realization that the school was serving the end of the powerful and rich but not the poor. One parent observed: "There are thousands of doctors, engineers, judges and bureaucrats---all educated from expensive modern schools. But for us (the poor people) they are useless: doctor's services are not available, engineer is not constructing for us, there is no justice and no rule of law. They may be professionally competent and well qualified but not good human beings. They are not doing any service to the poor. They must be given religious education. Only then a just society

6. There were some cases, where child was forced to leave the school and was admitted to *Madrassa*. Pathetic conditions in the official schools was the main factor which compelled the parents to withdraw their kids from the schools. There were widespread complaints that the schools lacked basic facilities like furniture to sit, drinking water, toilet and even rooms and boundary walls. However these facilities were provided by *Madrassa*, though the quality of services/facilities was below the reasonable standard.
7. It was interesting to note that some parents made career planning of their kids in "collectivity": keeping in view the interest of the family and not the future needs of the individual kid. For instance, some parents wanted to send at least one of their kids to *Madrassa* so that he could provide guidance/services to the family after completing religious education. For some families it was desirable to maintain a balance between religious education and secular education.

## **Analysis and Conclusions**

### Role of Madrassa in the local Institutional Network

#### *Madrassa and Local Poor*

Data showed that the role of *Madrassas* was not restricted to impart education and religious training to the students, but these institutions were deeply involved in providing various services to the local population especially for the poor. These services include spiritual health care provision, guidance and advice to the local population on day to day problems and providing solution usually in the religious context. Hence these institutions provided psychological security to local people and tranquilize the poverty ridden and troubled sections of society in various ways. One old man in the district of DG Khan observed: "When I am ill, I get spiritual treatment from *Madrassa*: the Koran is the fundamental source of healing. When my kids and grand kids suffer from 'evil-eye' Shah Sahib (the head teacher of *Madrassa*) provides treatment. The whole day, students learn Koran and with the blessings of this Book, we are safe from natural calamities" (from field notes)

In the field, it was observed that there was an elaborate catalogue of religious beliefs, practices and superstitions which guided the people as to what to do in a particular social situation specially when one is in trouble. For instance, when a family member was seriously ill and could not be recovered by the 'worldly treatment', it was a norm that the family should buy a black color sheep and offer to the local *Madrassa*. It was believed that when the *Madrassa* students would eat the meat of the sheep, it would be a great source to get the blessings of God and the ill person would get recovered. Similarly an old person near to death was persuaded to donate his sizable chunk of wealth to *Madrassa*. By doing so he would ensure permanent and everlasting source of blessing of God even after his death. The appeals of *Madrassa* for financial help were so powerful that some ladies offered their jewelry and other valuables to these institutions.

#### *Madrassa and Modernity*

There were various types of *Madrassas* representing half a dozen Muslim schools of jurisprudence. Each sect fiercely differed with others in the interpretation of various religious injunctions and some times had bloody clashes more conspicuously between *Shia* and *Sunni* sects. However, one thing was common in all *Madrassas*: all were against foreign cultural innovation (Ahmad 1986). It was observed that these institutions were more interested to maintain continuity of religious and cultural traditions. For them, after all, modernity symbolizes the victory of the enemies of Muslim power. This kind of teaching started to keep modernity at bay (Rehman 2000).

*Madrassa* students also learnt how to refute anti-Islamic doctrines. As to what is anti-Islamic varies from sect to sect. Western ideologies such as socialism, Marxism, liberalism were refuted in all *Madrassas*. However, in some there were texts refuting the doctrines of other sects and sub sects. The basic role of *Madrassa* was to provide ideologically committed people who could purify society (Hoodbhoy 2000). One administrator of a *Madrassa* while explaining the role of the institutions argued: "Our society is



running blindly after wealth, status and power. Every one wants to accumulate more and more wealth. Powerful are sucking the blood of the poor. This is the sole purpose of modern education and this is the 'spirit of capitalism'. This race leads to total catastrophe. However these institutions (referring to *Madrassas*) show the right path---to work for the humanity and have sympathy for the poor" (from field notes).

It was found that these institutions skillfully inculcated these values to their students. Since most of the students belonged to poor families, therefore they were dependent on these institutions for food and shelter (and may not have any other option to fulfil their basic needs). Consequently these students have to follow the 'instructions' and 'code of conduct' provided by these *Madrassas*.

#### *Madrassa and Politics*

As noted above that there were various types of *Madrassas* and each type was supported and financed by a particular religious sect. The curricula of these *Madrassas* were designed according to the philosophy and 'world-view' of that particular sect. In this way, *Madrassas* were streamlining and reinforcing the sectarian division in the society (Lefebvre 1999). Additionally, the outlook and out fit of the students of (e.g. the type of dressing, shape of cap and the way they offer the prayer) each *Madrassa* was conspicuously different. Some of these *Madrassa* were playing an active role in the local power politics. Most of the time, these *Madrassas* provided 'street power' to the political organizations of their choice. *Madrassa* has also bearing on the local politics in many ways. For instance, financial aid to a *Madrassa* was a symbol of pity and religiosity. In the times of national or local elections, competing political candidates provided sizable donations to *Madrassa*. The bigger the donation, the more the projection of candidate as religious and generous person. Such an image naturally enhances the vote bank of the investing candidate.

Each *Madrassa* had an attached Masque. In Muslim society, and specially in relatively underdeveloped area, the Mosque was a

central and sacred institution and a nucleus of various social activities. The local community remains closely in touch with the Mosque as most of the people have to visit Mosque five times a day to offer prayer. Usually, the managers of *Madrassa* were also the administrators of the attached mosque. Hence they were closely in contact with the local people and understand their psychology. They usually got the people involved in the affairs of the *Madrassa* and underlined the importance of religious education in pre-prayer Friday sermon every week. Hence the repeated preaching and continuous projection of *Madrassa* effectively motivated the public to provide the financial and social support to these institutions.

#### *Madrassa and the State Institutions*

It was found that the *Madrassa* had multiple roles in Pakistani society. Ground realities suggested that *Madrassa* was not functional equivalent to the official school. Basically the official school had a narrow and specific role whereas the *Madrassa* had comprehensive and multiple roles. A closer look at the functioning of *Madrassa* revealed that these institutions were in fact filling the vacuum created by low key functioning of the state controlled departments in the areas of (1) education, (2) social security and (3) social welfare.

People in abject poverty combined with illiteracy had restricted access to seek recourse to the state institutions to solve their problems. Additionally, the state institutions were notoriously insensitive to the needs of the local population. Consequently poverty-ridden people were left with no option but to develop their own institutions which could cater to their felt needs (Jalil 1993). *Madrassa* was an obvious example of this model.

Empirical data showed that people extended their consistent and generous financial support to these institutions. Voluntary funding could be an indicator of deep trust in the ability of *Madrassa* to deliver. It may also be noted here that in Pakistan, tax-paying culture has not yet been developed and there is massive evasion of taxes (Malik 1997; Banuri and Kemal 1997). At popular level,

paying tax to the government was usually considered penalty and wastage of money. One teacher of *Madrassa* while seriously questioning the credibility of Government said, " Why should people pay tax to the corrupt and cruel Government officials? They waste public money on useless foreign trips, holding seminars in expensive hotels and other wasteful activities. Poor do not get anything from these taxes. If they give money to *Madrassa*, it goes to poor children who get religious knowledge. *Madrassa* also provides them free food and shelter: no governmental institution can do this. Government collect taxes, but provide no service" (from field notes).

### **Madrassa and Life Style of its Students**

During the fieldwork, one thing was quite conspicuous in *Madrassa* and that was "the culture of contentment". There was no sensitivity about the living standard and quality of life. *Madrassa* students had least planning about their financial future and career and the challenges that might come in the future. It was also noted that they had their own ideology and 'integrated thought system' which provided the guidance in decision-making in almost all the spheres of life including the decisions related to their selection of food, quality of housing, sanitation, attitude towards women and children, attitude towards innovation, personal and social hygiene, work ethic, leisure time spending and so on. In all aspects of social life their vision and approach towards "social affairs" was usually at odd with the society at large. Their indoctrinated Knowledge helped them to rationalize their decisions and justify the sufferings they usually face as a consequence of their relative social isolation.

The researcher stayed in the *Madrassas* for some time to observe the things closely. It was found that the main focus of these institutions was to resist the social change and convince the students that a departure from the traditional lifestyle was dangerous and destructive. Drinking Coca-Cola or eating ice cream or listening to music, seeing movies---all are harmful for the body and soul. They were taught to stick with the lifestyle adopted by the founding fathers of their religious sect. Tynbee (2000) while

analyzing the inhibitions in the 'globalization of culture' arrived to similar conclusions.

The most dangerous thing they are told is the globalization of culture. For them globalization of culture is a jumble of deep-seated alarms---moral, intellectual, political, spiritual, artistic and nationalistic, melting into great pot of 'globalization panic'. It causes great panic about cultural future of a world turning homogeneously horrible (Tynbee 2000)

#### *New Opening for Madrassa Students*

After interviews with some alumnus of *Madrassas*, the researcher concluded that the graduates of these institutions have carved out their own place and role within the existing social and political system. Over the years, they were able to find some role in the power-politics ranging from the local political activist to the cross boarder export of ideology (Rashid 2000). In *Madrassas*, the students were also given sensitivity to political and ideological issues and were also trained to act as active political workers. They were also "schooled" to seek solution to the problem by their own system of knowledge and strategies which could not be necessarily in line with the "official philosophy of progress and development". It was also noted that there was a high sense of self-righteousness and they rarely admit any discussion or objective analysis of their thoughts and actions (Zakar 1999).

During the interviews from senior students, It was noted that the geo-political environment of the region had provided various "openings" and new opportunities to *Madrassa* graduates. Although administrators of the *Madrassa* refuted that they had any intention to directly involve in power politics, but various alumni revealed that they were deeply interested in the cross boarder political developments.

Keeping in view these 'openings' and prospects, the senior students of these *Madrassas* did not feel socially 'isolated'. Rather they felt that their future was quite bright and hoped that one day

the system based on injustice would be replaced by the "true system". They had in their mind the practical example---the *Taliban* in Afghanistan majority of whom were educated in the *Madrassas* situated in North-West regions of Pakistan. Rashid (1999) in an article published in *Foreign Affairs* also predicted some nexus between *Madrassa* education and rise of *Taliban* in Pakistan.

The *Taliban's* purist ideology and Pakistani recruits it has nurtured have had immense cross boarder repercussions in Pakistan. An already fragile nation in the midst of identity crisis, economic meltdown, ethnic and sectarian division, and suffering under a rapacious ruling elite unable to provide good governance, Pakistan could easily be submerged by a new Islamist wave---one led by not established mature Islamist parities but by neo-*Taliban* groups (Rashid 1999:27)

#### *Madrassa: a Rational Choice for the Poor*

During the field research, it was noted that the institution of *Madrassa* had deep roots into the religious, cultural and historical layers of society. Hence just to pick one or two variables to explain the complex and culture specific phenomena of duality of institutions could be both artificial and non-scientific. Given the complexity of the situation and interplay of countless variables, it seems advisable to study the phenomena in a holistic perspective.

The basic question was that why did people send their kids to *Madrassa* instead of official schools. It may also be noted here that most of the parents were well aware of the fact that *Madrassa* education had least value in the job market. Despite knowing this, how could their behaviour be interpreted? This is the core question addressed by this study. For instance, when a person decides to send his kid to *Madrassa* and not to school, it could be a rational choice ---rational within the available opportunities and ground realities. In ethno-methodological context, his decision to send his kid to *Madrassa* may have strong logical foundations and

pragmatic social context. He may calculate the cost and benefit of sending his kid to *Madrassa* vis-à-vis official school. The point here is that it is the socio-economic context which forced parents to send their kid to *Madrassa*. And the similar social factors provided sustainability of the very system of *Madrassa* as well.

Parents may face various inhibitions to send their kids to official school. For instance given their resources and need urgencies, the official school may be irrelevant for them. They might have seen various persons disappointed from official school. The official school may not have capability to change the 'status quo' in the foreseeable future. Or the parents have already been disappointed from the official school. So they found it appropriate to send their kid to *Madrassa*. One father of *Madrassa* student explained the situation well: "I enrolled my eldest son to the official (public) school. He studied there for five years. Due to chronic and habitual absence of the teacher, there was no learning environment in the school. But, all the time, my son used to ask for money to buy school dress, books, stationary articles etc. I could not afford that. Now I have enrolled my son in *Madrassa*. He has learnt three *Sparas* (chapters of Holy Koran ). Every thing is provided by *Madrassa* free of cost and I am happy with the performance of this institution (from field notes)

Most of the respondents thought that official school was expensive and they did not have enough resources to bear the expenses for a long period of time. Technically, official school needed long term investment. It was difficult for extremely poor people to make such a long-term investment. They may be more concerned with the fulfillment of their immediate needs.

People had every legitimate doubt about the future of their kids even if they educate them in the school. Could the child get reasonable job after completing the education? Chances were rare as good jobs went to those who were educated from the more expensive private 'English medium schools'. Any way, even if a person completes his school education, there was remote

possibility of getting jobs. So it was quite rational if people send their kids to *Madrassa*.

During the course of informal talks with the *Madrassa* students and teachers, It was noted that, due to their restricted social exposure, persistent economic hardships and other system generated incapacitation, they had developed an approach towards life which was dominated by pessimism and fatalistic overtones. Their ability to make a long term planning ( and its implementation) was severely crippled. They were more concerned to fulfil their immediate and short term needs and hence were unable to come out from the vicious circle of poverty and powerlessness. It was also noted that their pessimist and fatalistic approach was not only restricted in the area of education but extended to other domains of social life which encompassed their fertility behavior, attitude towards women, development of social capital, acceptance and adoption of innovative ideas and artifacts, spending and saving as well as health care utilization. For instance, a father of ten children who did not have any regular and reasonable income to feed them observed: 'This (child) is God's property and it is His responsibility to feed him' (from field notes). The only responsibility the father felt was to get the child enrolled in the *Madrassa* where he would not only get education but boarding and lodging free of cost.

#### *Is Madrassa Creating Poverty?*

It would be an oversimplification to state that *Madrassas* are producing poverty. In fact, the existence of these institutions seemed to be a reflection of distrust the people had in the official institutions as their ability to deliver has progressively disappointing. Understandably, *Madrassa* thrived as the overall condition and functioning of the government controlled schools declined to the lowest ebb. Visibly low key performance of schools provided sufficient justification to the people not to get their kids admitted in *Madrassa* by bypassing the mainstream official school system. Dr. Tariq Rahman (2000), a prominent social scientist arrived at similar conclusions.

Contrary to some stereotypes about *Madrassas*, most of them do not have children in chains. Indeed they provide free board and lodging to say nothing of education, to poor children who might otherwise be murdered by perverted criminals. Indeed the *Madrassas* are doing what the state should have done in the first place----provide education, food, security and comfort for all children. If for providing free services, if *Madrassa* teach young people what they think necessary, the fault is not of the *Madrassa* but of our ruling elite which has never bothered to teach poor children at all (Rehman 2000).

Data showed that *Madrassa* was attracting more poor students as it seemed more 'viable institution' for them. Hence, they come to *Madrassa* because of their poverty and remain in poverty because of their 'programmed incapacitation' as *Madrassa* imparts education which may not help them to integrate with the social mainstream. The process is cyclical and self-perpetuating. The overall institutional arrangements and social milieu plus 'ideological indoctrination' further reduce their chances of social inclusion. Hence poor people find it perfectly rational and pragmatic to develop their own social-system and *Madrassa* is a part of that system. Through the system dynamics, they are socialized in such a way that they get some insensitivity to the pains of poverty and relative deprivation. Poverty may be undesirable 'academically' but may not be dysfunctional for all. Poor may serve the interests of some sections of the society as well. So the institutions which 'help' the people to remain poor may be supported by the 'vested interest'. It was also noted that *Madrassas* were funded by the feudal and big landlords who were the political bosses of that particular area. Their interest to support *Madrassa* could be many-fold. First, *Madrassa* education resists social change and sustain conservative social order. Second, it restricts social mobility as well as political and social awareness. Hence, such conditions pose least threat to the local political establishment. However, the official school may create political



and social awareness which could be detrimental to the existing political forces (Malik 2000)

There is a tendency among the policy makers in Pakistan to readily label the choices of the poor people “as outcome of illiteracy and ignorance”(Nadeem-ul-Haq 1991). However, there is need to understand their behavior within the larger institutional and structural context. People make decisions keeping in view the available choices and ground realities. Their exclusion is not by chance, it is by design.

However it is difficult to pass an explicit judgement whether *Madrassa* is increasing, decreasing or maintaining social exclusion and non-participation. The contribution of *Madrassa* in providing food and shelter to the poor students may be an instant relief to the students as well as their families. However, it would not be justified to say that this help from *Madrassa* could reduce their poverty or help them to come out of the poverty cycle. Rather, they may further sink into the deep waters of poverty by exposing to such a system of knowledge/ideology which not only rationalizes the status quo but also further incapacitate their ability to participate and get integrated with the existing socio-economic system. These students are brain washed in such a way that poverty becomes less painful for them and they learn the art to live with it peacefully.

### ***Conclusions***

1. *Madrassa* was providing education, food and accommodation to poor students free of cost. In this way, the institution was providing some instant relief to the poor children who otherwise might face worst conditions. To this extent, this institution was functional in the local setup and that was why the community continued to support it financially. The number of new *Madrassas* and children desirous of taking admission in these institutions were on the rise.

2. Despite the fact that *Madrassa* was providing temporary relief to the poor students, but the type of education the institution was providing had no value in the job market. After completing education, *Madrassa* graduates were not eligible to compete for any well-paid and prestigious job in the private or public sector. Consequently, they remained socially excluded and poor.

3. The role of *Madrassa* was not confined to education but to train its students for specific religious purposes which included preaching and propagation of particular religious sect. Hence the real aim of *Madrassa* was not to impart scientific and technological education which was required in the job market but to train ideologically committed zealots for specific purposes.

4. *Madrassa* students were discouraged to have an access to the newspapers, Radio, TV and other mass media of communication. Such a 'closed-training' led to develop the personalities who rarely admitted discussion and tolerance to the others view point.

5. *Madrassa* system seemed totally alienated from the state institutions. *Madrassa* did not follow the 'government's education policy' rather the objectives of *Madrassa* were at cross-purpose with the state. In some issues, like women status, attitude towards minorities, freedom of expression and religion and other democratic values, *Madrassa* was uncompromisingly hostile to government. Accordingly, *Madrassa* graduates were vigorously trained and deeply 'indoctrinated' to refute the official viewpoint. Hence they seemed more interested to dismantle the existing socio-political system rather than getting integrated with it.

6. Worsening economic conditions of the country and consequential high incidence of unemployment led the poor people to conclude that "long term investment on school education was not rewarding". Hence, they preferred 'free and convenient' *Madrassa* education which was surely rewarding in the 'world

7. Massive corruption and virtual failure of the state institutions to cater to the needs of the local population had alienated the people from government. *Madrassa* readily offered people a "contingency plan": offering them an alternative system and ideology which could solve their problems. However principal strategy of *Madrassa* was to justify and rationalize the abject poverty by using religious explanations. They were told that poverty is in fact a blessing of God and they should bear the sufferings with high degree of contentment.
8. Through a systematic indoctrination, the *Madrassa* students were 'schooled' to undermine the importance and significance of various scientific achievements and innovations. Their analytical ability was impaired and their vision was tainted: they remained suspicious and always smell some 'conspiracy' behind every new idea.
9. In some localities, *Madrassa* and official schools were competing with each other. The official schools were notoriously mismanaged and substandard especially in the rural areas. Poor people, by getting frustrated from these schools and having no money to pay for the expensive schools, sent their kids to *Madrassa*.
10. Due to cultural globalization, the local people perceived threat to their indigenous values and traditional institutions. *Madrassa* challenged this 'cultural imperialism' and promised to resist this invasion by reinvigorating the 'glorious past'. The poor people who were extremely dissatisfied with the prevailing conditions, reverted to *Madrassa* with the hope to change their lot.
11. *Madrassa* had multiple functions to perform. In addition to education, the institution provided various services which made the people socially and psychologically tranquil in a highly unsatisfactory socio-economic conditions.

Based on the empirical data this research concluded that *Madrassa* was not 'creating poverty' rather it was providing temporary relief to the poor children. However, *Madrassa* was "reproducing poverty" as the poor children did not get any relevant education, hence, they stood ineligible to occupy any reasonable job. As a result, they remain in the vicious circle of poverty. The empirical data substantiate the theoretical assumption that dual system of education was contributing to the persistence of poverty in Pakistan.

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