

# Mainstreaming Madaris in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Socioeconomic Perspective

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**Received:** 30<sup>th</sup> November 2021

**Revised:** 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022

**Accepted:** 25<sup>th</sup> March 2022

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**Abstract:** Deeni Madaris (religious seminaries) are playing a key role in familiarizing people with Islamic education, traditions and values in Pakistan. After the tragic incident of 9/11 in 2001, Madaris in Pakistan were viewed as a crucial medium for sponsoring religious extremism, although their role in terrorism has been repudiated by several scholars. Some Madaris in tribal areas, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, however, promote sectarian strife and militancy with the students ill-equipped for employment in competitive job market and often drifted towards militancy. Although such alleged Madaris came under intense Government scrutiny, a need was felt to bring Madaris students at par with modern educational institutions by imparting contemporary knowledge and developing their job skills. This study explores PTI-led provincial government's initiatives which aim to build capacity and skills of Madaris students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and offer them economic opportunities for gaining employment and becoming a productive citizen. The study notes that the government needs to devise and implement reform strategy with mutual consultation of all representatives of Madaris for better management of religious seminaries.

**Keywords:** Education, Extremism, Employment, Madaris Reforms, Madrassah, Pakistan, Religious Seminaries.

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## Introduction

Religious education from Madaris (plural form of Madrassah, religious seminaries) has played a key role in Islamic history by fulfilling the needs of Islamic society. Madaris are "the most indigenous Islamic education institutions in Pakistan," (Anjum, 2017) but 'Madrassa' has generated a lot of curiosity in the mind of international community and in the most cases it is considered an institution of 'violence' that preaches extremism (Ahmad, 2009). It is generally perceived that Deeni Madaris (religious seminaries)

are threat to the international peace and security as well as a matter of concern for stability around the globe. Madaris are also perceived as hub of extremism and terrorism. Generally, the international community specially United States of America (USA) has developed a strong narrative that un-reformed Madaris are rapidly raising extremist and terrorist mindsets in the society (Rabi & Habib, 2019). After catastrophic event of 9/11, the subject of Madaris has persisted topic of intense academic debate and their existence are also considered a well-organized setup of religious extremists (Bhattacharya, 2014). In Pakistan, Madaris are still main focus of world's attention, and the West has established link between the growing militancy and religious education. The setup of Madaris is also linked with centers of radicalism and religious militancy (Sajjad, 2013).

The role of Madaris cannot be denied as it plays vital part in the development of an individual and social infrastructure in the country. Historically, Madaris have played important role for growth of Islamic society (Anjum, 2017). Madaris are also instrumental in the education system of Pakistan. There are estimated 35000 Madaris in Pakistan where three Million students are enrolled and getting religious education in various forms. Around 25000 Madaris are registered or affiliated with their concerned boards i.e., five boards of Wifaqul Madaris (Ittehad Tanzeemat-ul-Madaris Pakistan) and newly notified boards by Ministry of Education & Professional Training, Islamabad. Various steps have been taken for mainstreaming of Madaris since creation of Pakistan. For management of Madaris some important reform initiatives were also taken like establishment of Auqaf Department, Madrassa Board and training of 1500 teachers of Deeni Madaris. Moreover, the course of Dars-e-Nizami has also included in the Scheme of Studies of Secondary and Higher Secondary levels as well as final degree or course of Madaris is considered equivalent to M.A Islamiyat and Arabic by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), Islamabad ("Directorate General," n.d.). Although Government of Pakistan has been making tremendous efforts to streamline these Madaris, its efforts are inadequate and sporadic; there are some administrative limitations such as biased and partial study or research about these institutions, unrealistic and in appropriate legislation regarding Madaris and its imposition that impedes and further upsets the situation and Madaris reforms in Pakistan. Another factor of ineffective reform policy is that government is reluctant to take into confidence the representatives of religious seminaries and hesitate to employ mutual strategy to enhance and update structure of this system of education. The Madaris have some reservations and doubts about government reforms policy; first, these issues should be resolved (Shabir, 2012).

In rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the number of Madaris has increased and providing valuable services in the form of religious education to communities. Many madrassas are working independently (Zafar, 2020). Mainstreaming of Madaris in national development is the prime focus of the Provincial Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The government has initiated a comprehensive and constructive policy for Madaris regulation. For the first time, the registration, monitoring and examination as well as other allied activities related to Madaris have been brought in the ambit of Elementary & Secondary Education Department. However, there is no proper contemporary education system in the province to bring Madaris at par with modern educational systems that exist in the country (Ashfaq, 2018).

This study elaborates Provincial Government policy for mainstreaming of Deeni Madaris as well as initiatives taken for Madaris youth's skills development, capacity building and employment/business prospects in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Furthermore, the current study also reviews current status of Madaris reforms policy and to address the root causes which create hurdles in its smooth implementation. A proper and viable strategy will also be proposed to improve the current policy regarding mainstreaming of Deeni Madaris across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

## Madaris in Pakistan: An Overview

Madaris in Pakistan are regarded as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) that provide students with Islamic education along with the free boarding and lodging facilities, in order to impart religious education to mostly poor people (Anjum, 2017). Madrassa is a key institution of Islamic education, values, traditions and culture. In the history of Islam, Masjid-e-Nabvi was the first center where Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W; Peace Be Upon Him) used to impart knowledge and teach Quran by himself to his companions on Suffah. During seventh century, Masjid-e-Nabvi became first religious institution of Islamic teaching and learning. It is also evident that Madaris were also established in all those areas where Islam entered and taken roots during next four hundred years. In sub-continent, the ruler of Multan Nasir-ud-Din Kabbacha established first madrassa "Madrassa Firozi." During Mughal period numerous Madaris were also built in many parts of sub-continent (Azad et al., 2019).

Soon after creation of Pakistan, the government established Auqaf Department under the Ministry of Religious Affairs for the purpose to engage religious scholars in policy making process in order to integrate them with other segments of society. In late 1950s prominent religious leaders (Ulama) of all sects have realized the need of one school of thought where all Madaris and their activities are performed in uniformity, therefore, five Madaris boards on the analogy of secular education system were established in order to represent all major school of thoughts. The main purpose of the establishment of these boards were to provide proper platform to Madaris for registration, hold examinations and issue certificates and degrees to students. The government has also recognized these boards after its establishment. To challenge the narrative of West it was important to take initiatives for mainstreaming Madaris system. In recent past, the Government of Pakistan has made little efforts for mainstreaming education system of Madaris. Moreover, no proper policy was formulated to develop narrative for Madaris management and reforms (Rabi & Habib, 2019).

The proliferation of Madaris and changing face of these Madaris is traced back to Zia's era. During Zia rule, students of Madaris were introduced with ideology of Jihad and sent to Afghanistan to fight against Soviet forces. Moreover, Zia's 'Islamisation' policies are considered as major factor behind the exponential growth of Madaris in the country. Pakistan's Madaris received much attention following the multiple attacks in London on July 7, 2005. The accusation that two of the attackers got 'indoctrinated' during their stay at Madaris in Pakistan, produced concerns and sparked demands from international community for strict management and reforms of the religious seminaries. Nevertheless, many scholars think Madaris are playing a robust roles in society; like cultivating moral, ethical and religious values, increasing literacy rate, discouraging criminality and thus contributing to social order (Bashir, 2015).

Modernizing Madaris education system is a big issue in Pakistan. After 9/11, the Government of Pakistan announced to revamp the administration, educational and financial structure of these institutions. In 2001, a Madrassa Education Board was established for the purpose of implementing reform initiatives in order to regulate Madaris in the country. A fund amounting to Rs.113.00 million was also allocated for the said purpose. As a result, most Madaris refused and denied government assistance (Shabir et al., 2012). Ulama (religious leaders) of different sects have been reluctant to benefit from government's initiatives and policy intervention in respect of reforms which has created trust deficit between government and Madaris (Bashir & Haq, 2019). To curb the influence of religious leaders of different sects, General Pervaiz Musharraf, the then President initiated various steps for widening curricula of Madaris, improvement of working conditions, provision of financial assistance and

recognizing their degrees(Gulzar, 2021).However, reform initiatives taken for mainstreaming of Madaris under Enlightened Moderation concept failed completely. Madaris reform initiatives were taken without due consultation of Ulama (religious scholars) which made the reforms unacceptable for religious segment of the society. Moreover, it is also noted that the reform efforts for mainstreaming Madaris are ineffective as the government has no proper research on the Madaris education system. There is also lack of knowledge and ground realities as well as inconsistency in government policies and procedures.

Madrassa reform is a major concern of the government under National Action Plan (NAP) that the curriculum of Madaris to be reformed according to changing circumstances around the world and further all Madaris need to be registered and will be regulated by the state(Mustafa, 2020).Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)government has made efforts to streamline Madaris but due to biased approach and administrative weaknesses the current strategy of reform failed badly. The unrealistic and inapplicable laws regarding Madaris reforms are partial as the top management of Madaris has not taken into consideration. Brining structural change and reforms in Madaris is very sensitive issue as these Madaris are considered symbol of harmony and unity as well as nursery of promotion of religious knowledge, tradition, norms and value of Islamic culture(Azad et al.,2019)

Pakistan intends to manage and take control of more than 30,000 Madaris across the country in order to bring them in mainstream as the management of Madaris are blamed for promotion of extremism and violence in the society. The government is taking keen interest to introduce administrative as well as structural reforms in the setup of Madaris(Sayeed, 2019). From last two decades, authorities are reluctant to take control and management of Madaris as no clear mechanism is devised for their regulation. Moreover, the government has also complicated the governance of Madaris as three ministries i.e., Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Religious Affairs & Interfaith Harmony and Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training are dealing with Madaris. Recently, the Federal Government has announced that all Madaris would be working under supervision of the Ministry of Federal Education and subsequently all matters related to its registration and management will be tackled under the umbrella of the Ministry. Moreover, the Federal Ministry will also chalk out mechanism for mainstreaming of registered Madaris in order to prepare their students for upcoming challenges(Yousafzai, 2019). In February 2021, PTI-led Federal government created five additional “Wafaq” or educational boards for religious seminaries under the regulatory ambit of Directorate General of Religious Education (DGRE), a subordinate department of the Ministry of Education and Professional Training. This step will help in the registration process Madaris that had been impeded in the past after existing boards boycotted it (Ali, 2021).

### **Madaris in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

## 1. Overview and Analysis of Past Efforts

Religious Seminaries have been ignored and have never been included in the developmental processes of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Also, the frontier and boarder regions, that is, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the newly merged tribal districts have also been stigmatized with militancy. This negative image has destroyed the identity of this region, its institutions and its masses. It is essential and need of the current time to bring Madaris into the mainstream and remove this negative stigma from these religious seminaries, the provincial government has decided to provide equal opportunities to the youth of these institutions. In rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the number of madrassas has increased and providing valuable services in the form of religious education to communities. A large number of these Madaris are working independently(Zafar, 2020). Mainstreaming of these Madaris in national development is the prime focus of the Provincial Government.

The government has started formal registration of Madaris after creation of Directorate General of Religious Education under Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training in December 2021. The main purpose of this step is to bring Madaris under formal education structure in order to mainstream their education system and fulfill agenda of the present government. Moreover, an amount of Rs.2 billion has also been allocated for regulation and management of Madaris in order to eliminate extremism and intolerance(Jamal, 2021).

The Provincial Government took policy decision in respect of management of Madaris in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. For the said purpose the Elementary & Secondary Education (E&SE) Department was made responsible for registration, monitoring, curriculum and examination in the light of instructions issued by the Interior Ministry, Islamabad. The E&SE Department would also be responsible for other allied services or matters of Madaris across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Previously, Industries Department was responsible for registration and verification of Madaris under Societies Registration Act, 1860. Currently 4,648 Deeni Madaris are registered in the province(Annual School Census Report, 2020).

According to Professor Jamal Malik, professor of Islamic Studies at Erfurt University in Germany, most graduates of the Deobandi Madaris in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa belong to rural and backward areas. They lack skills and financial resources needed to help find a job or start a business. Many of these Madaris graduates often gravitated towards militancy due to limited employment prospects (personal communication, November 1, 2017). To increase job prospects for Madaris graduates, the curriculum currently being taught within *Madaris*“ needs to be reformed using Islamic precepts themselves which can help deliver important social benefits.” (Ali,2018). Besides, teaching English, science or mathematics, providing technical and vocational training for all Madaris youth could maximise their social capital and equal access to *economic opportunity*.

In 2014, the provincial government under Auqaf Department initiated establishment of Model Madaris in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Project aim to establish Model Madaris in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on pilot basis for the purpose to mainstream Madaris education with the normal education system on the analogy of three model Madaris established by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Islamabad, Sukkar and Karachi respectively. The project failed due to the absence of proper framework and policy. Moreover, no stakeholders were involved before or after implementation of the project. However, after *Federally Administered Tribal Areas—Khyber Pakhtunkhwa merger* in 2018, PTI led government enhanced focus on capacity building and skills development of Madaris youth to *contribute towards the reduction of unemployment among Madaris graduates*.

### **Initiatives Taken for Mainstreaming Madaris**

For management and mainstreaming of Madaris, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government has taken the following initiatives:

**a. Grants for Deeni Madaris**

Under this initiative various grants are provided to register Madaris across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through Auqaf, Hajj, Religious & Minority Affairs Department. So far, the Department has provided a total of 250 grants of Rs.18.20 million to 76 Madaris in two financial years i.e., 2019-20 and 2020-21 respectively. The main objectives of the initiative are to provide financial incentives (one time grant) to Madaris as well as to open a line of communication with Ulema and Government to build mutual trust.

**b. Scholarships for Deeni Madaris Students**

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government provides scholarships to students of registered Deeni Madaris. In fiscal year, 2020-2021, scholarships of Rs. 7.50 million were provided to 230 students of the province (Finance Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (n.d.). In November 2021, provincial government approved Rehmatul Lil Alameen (Peace Be Upon Him) scholarships for students of registered religious seminaries of the province (Rs. 750 million with scholarships worth Rs. 250 million to be given to Madaris youth of the merged district) (Scholarships for Madaris students in KP, 2021). Madaris students have long encountered hurdles to attending religious education. While enrollment rates are on the rise, Madaris students often face an uphill battle to cover their expenses. That's why scholarships and other financial assistance are vitally important in helping Madaris students to achieve their education & dreams. Under the scholarship component of the merit-based scholarships, various scholarships will be provided to students of Madaris in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The main objectives of scholarships are:

1. To financially assist meritorious, needy & deserving students of Deeni Madaris of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
2. To elevate the socio-economic status of Deeni Madaris students by enabling their chance to get religious education smoothly & satisfactorily.
3. To provide equal opportunities to students of Deeni Madaris in order to bring them in a mainstream.

c. **Capacity Building & Skills Development of Madaris Students and Teachers**

The capacity building & skills development programme has been designed for teachers and students of Madaris with an aim to provide platform to them which will not only polish their skills but open new avenues for them in their professional careers. Also, teachers and youth of Madaris need and deserves considerably comprehensive platforms for their exposure, empowerment and development so such activities will ensure their rights and importance to a greater extent. Diverse programmes have been planned under this initiative that will help removing the negative image and will bring these institutions and its beneficiaries to the mainstream and will equipped them with job-oriented skills that will improve their economic conditions. There is a considerably huge demand since the youth of Madaris and teachers have never been given opportunities to get exposure and have never been brought to mainstream. Such initiatives have a great importance to bring Madaris youth out of this mindset that

<b>Table 1</b>		
<b>Rehmatul Lil Alameen (Peace Be Upon Him) Scholarships</b>		
<b>S. No.</b>	<b>Component Description</b>	<b>Total (Rs. in Million)</b>
1.	Tajweed	57.60
2.	Hafz	57.60
3.	Al-Aamah	60.00
4.	Al-Khassah	72.00
5.	Al-Aaliah	96.00
6.	Al Alamiah	110.80
7.	Specialization (Tafseer, Hadith, Fiqa, Naho, Sarf&Lughat etc.)	46.00
	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>500.00</b>
<i>Note: Data compiled by Author from Auqaf, Hajj, Religious &amp; Minority Affairs Department, <a href="https://ahrma.kp.gov.pk/">https://ahrma.kp.gov.pk/</a></i>		

they are not the important segment of the society.

**Details of Activities**

There were total of 4 major activities initiated by provincial government in 2021 namely, Madaris Students Extracurricular Competitions, Madaris Students Exposure Programme, Madaris Students Technical Skills Training Programme and Young & Learned Ulama Summit that Provincial Government has initiated (Liaison Corporation, 2021).

### **Madaris Students Extracurricular Competitions**

A total of 1,000 Madaris youth between the age bracket of 18 to 29 years both male and females were given opportunities to explore their hidden potential and polish their talent. Across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, students of Madaris were invited to compete in various extra-curricular events/competitions related to literary, arts & performances including but not limited to Qur'an & Naat Competitions, debate & public speaking contests, writing competitions, Islamic calligraphy, quiz competitions in diverse areas of expertise/ knowledge and so on.

### **Madaris Students Exposure Programme**

A total of 200 Madaris Students (male & female) between the age bracket of 18 to 29 years participated in various exposure programmes from across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and newly merged districts each year so a total of 400 students were benefited from this project component. These students were also given considerable exposure through various initiatives, meetings, interactions, seminars, visits and cultural exchange. These students have also been taken to various parts of the country including Islamabad, Punjab and/or Sindh.

### **Young & Learned Ulama Summit**

A total of 300 Young & Learned Ulama were invited from across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (including newly merged districts) & renowned Madaris and Researchers/ Independent Scholars (not attached with Madaris). These Ulama were given considerable platform for dialogue for necessary policies recommendation on improving the structures and procedures of Madaris along with identifying capacity building requirements of students and specially teachers through various workshops, seminars, focused group discussions, interactions with civil society experts, Key note talks, group activities, presentations, creative dialogue, policy discussions, cultural exchange and exchange of ideas. It was unique platform where an amalgam in the form of productive diversity was observed in terms of young/new ideas with the expertise of learned people and scholars for greater cause of peace building and national harmony along with mutual coexistence in the society by improving this segment of education (Deeni Madaris). The event was organized in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with extensive media coverage while inviting young and learned scholars from across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and newly merged districts.

### **Skill Development of Madaris' Students and Teachers**

One of the core objectives of skill development was to build the capacity of Madaris youth and teachers of Madaris of the newly merged districts to bring them in the mainstream. Since the youth of Madaris in general and youth of Merged Districts' Madaris, in particular needed considerable exposure as they have never been highlighted on mainstream. The purpose behind this component was to bridge the gap between the youth of contemporary education system and Madaris. This is need of the hour so that all the stakeholders of the society may get involved in the development processes of the regions across country. Since after the merger of erstwhile FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it is quite essential to bring their youth in the mainstream. The components of this Scheme are discussed as follows:



**Capacity Building & Skill Development of Students of Deeni Madaris :** Under this component, 3 days training for 500 youth (preferably a minimum of 50 Madaris youth from each newly merged district is desirable) on various employability skills was arranged. Also, awareness on diverse key/ important areas of Islam was also highlighted while comparing with contemporary education system in the country. Important segments were highlighted that was useful for building up the society (Auqaf Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2021).

**Capacity Building (Training) & Awareness Program for Madaris Teachers:** Under this component, 3 days training for 500 Teachers (preferably a minimum of 50 Madaris teachers from each newly merged district is desirable) on various employability skills was arranged. Various potential areas for soft skills development and awareness on diverse important matters/ topics were given to teachers of Madaris.

**Madaris Youth Leadership Conference:** A total of 200 Madaris youth and teachers besides approximately 100 trainers, speakers, guests, media representatives, government officials, invited dignitaries were part of this activity. Madaris youth and teachers from across tribal districts (merged areas) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were invited for participation. These youth members and teachers were considerable exposure through various seminars, discussions, interactions and dialogues. Two days activity for the Leadership Development of Madaris Youth was implemented ensuring representation of all the districts of merged areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Madaris youth and teachers participated in such a comprehensive government platform for the above stated purposes and identify the key challenges the Madaris youth community are facing and feasible solutions were identified for necessary policy formulation and reforms at government level.

**c. Small Grants for Madaris Students for Establishment of Businesses/Startups**

The scheme to provide small grants for Madaris students for establishment of businesses/startups is provincial government led initiative to promote entrepreneurship in order to provide economic opportunities for Madaris students of newly merged tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Finance Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, n.d.).

The scheme was centered specifically towards Madaris students of merged areas, who do not possess a background in or exposure to how to set up and run a business well. The participation of Madaris students in the socio-economic development of the province is a significant aspect. In this regard, the initiative aimed to provide small grants to Madaris students so that they can get opportunities to excel in their respective fields as well as to promote & protect their fundamental rights in merged areas. This scheme also created motivation and positive interaction between Madaris students which lead to bring peace, religious harmony, progressive change & humanity among them as well as open window for government to introduce reforms in Madaris of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

**Conclusion**

Madaris reform initiatives taken in the past for mainstreaming of Madaris did not produce effective results. Madaris reform initiatives are taken without proper consultation of Ulama which made the reforms unacceptable for the religious segment of the society. Moreover, it is also noted that the reform efforts for mainstreaming Madaris are ineffective as the government has no proper research on the Madaris education system. There is also a lack of knowledge of ground realities as well as inconsistency in government policies and procedures.

Religious Seminaries (Deeni Madaris) have been ignored and have never been included in the socio-economic development processes of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Also, the frontier and boarder regions, that is, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the newly merged districts have also been stigmatized due to militancy. This negative image has destroyed the identity of this region, its institutions and its masses. It is essential and need of the current time to bring Madaris in the mainstream and remove this negative stigma from these religious seminaries and so, the provincial government has decided to provide equal opportunities to these institutions.

The government is making efforts to streamline Madaris but due to biased approach and administrative weaknesses, the current strategy of reform faces challenges. The unrealistic and inapplicable laws regarding Madaris' reforms are partial as the top management of Madaris has not taken into confidence. Bringing structural change and reforms in Madaris is very sensitive issue as these Madaris are considering symbol of harmony and unity as well as nursery of promotion of religious knowledge, tradition, norms and value of Islamic culture. Therefore, it is important to take representatives of Madaris into confidence for better management and proper implementation of reforms.

### Recommendations

Following recommendations are proposed for better management of Madaris in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:

1. The government needs to frame a comprehensive reform strategy with mutual consultation of all stakeholders of Madaris.
2. There is a need for more capacity building training for Madaris teachers and students, particularly vocational training for all madrassa students so they can effectively tackle the real-world challenges and earn a decent living.
3. The government needs to establish proper monitoring and compliance system for Madaris.
4. There should be a separate registration authority for Madaris.
5. There is a need to effectively engage CSOs for capacity building and showing employment avenues to Madaris students.

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