

The Independent Madrasas of India: Dar al-‘Ulum, Deoband and Nadvat al-‘Ulama, Lucknow

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Introduction

In recent years Madrasas have attracted immense attention in India, more so than Mosques and other endowed institutions of Indian Muslims. This has partly been on account of the general perception that fundamentalism (ideology under-shoring the need to recover the traditional Islam), Islamization (process of establishing traditional beliefs and practices among ordinary Muslims) and extremist violence stem from the Madrasas. The part played by ‘Deobandism’¹ in Pakistan and Afghanistan is perhaps responsible for this image of Madrasas in South Asia. Islamization in itself is not problematic. It becomes a problem when fundamentalism (and the intra and inter-religious fault-lines it accentuates) and violence (inter-faith conflicts leading to symbolic or actual suppression of diversity or bloodshed) come to be linked to the Madrasas.²

There is no space to go into details. Scholars and journalists alike may be able to garner evidence for Muslim efforts at recovering or maintaining medieval Islam, or an effort at Islamizing Muslim masses perceived to be erring from orthodoxy, or even some evidence for the ‘proliferation of separatist attitude’ among the impressionable youth of the Madrasas, but is this view of Madrasas entirely right?

Madrasas of India do not form a single system. There are Shi‘a Madrasas³ and Sunni Madrasas.⁴ The Sunni Madrasas themselves are divisible into, at least, three different streams: Those that are endowment (*waqf*) board-run; the government of India keeps a close tab on such Madrasas, since their funding is controlled by boards acting under the government supervision. Although not managed centrally, ‘the Deobandi Madrasas’ are the largest independent group of Madrasas dotting the entire subcontinent; they are inspired by one of the premier traditional Muslim Seminary, Dar al-‘Ulum at Deoband in North India. A relatively smaller number of Madrasas are inspired and run along the line of Nadvat al-‘Ulama’ at Lucknow in North India. Both of the latter two types are managed independent of the Government.

¹ This is a philosophy purporting to be inspired by the premier Islamic seminary in South Asia, Dar al-‘Ulum in Deoband, India. The So-called Deobandi Madrasas, located in Pakistan, control a system of education, which nurtures a single vision of Islam with a view to raising a cadre of activist-scholars with a mission to counter a perceived external threat to Islam in South Asia, not least in Afghanistan.

² The Godhra arson in Gujrat is said to have been led by Mulla Umerji, an alumnus of Deoband. He is said to have had a close link with Deoband in providing financial support to the families of those accused and imprisoned. See more in D E Singh, “Hindu-Muslim Violence in Gujrat...” in *Transformation* vol. 20, no. 4, October 2003, 206-216

³ Shi‘ism is a major sect forming about 15% of Indian Muslims. Y S Sikand’s interview with Maulana Sayyed Hamid ul-Hasan, principal, Jami’a Nazmia, Lucknow, a Shi‘i madrasa has likely been published by *Qalandar*; This author has the text of this interview sent to him by email dated June 01, 2003

⁴ Sunnism is the mainstream Islamic sect which forms over 80% of Indian Muslims

In this paper I attempt to draw readers' attention to the two key independent Madrasas of North India, which are the chief models of Madrasa education in, at least, South Asia. Addressing the view that the hall-mark of Madrasa education in India is essentially medievalist and separatist, I am asking if this perception is not a trifle too simplistic. The fundamental argument is that even though these Madrasas are fully independent of *waqf* and government control, they are not hermetically sealed from the modern world and the challenges being faced by the wider Indian society. They have sought and continue to sincerely seek to be relevant.

Overview of Madrasas in India⁵

Indian civilization is ancient. It has been enriched, during this time, through the culture, language and religion of people-groups from different parts of the world. This plurality reflects also in India having had more than one system of education. Some of these systems go back thousands of years to the period of the Vedic *rishis* (sages) who taught that which they heard (*shruti*) and remembered (*smriti*).⁶ These *rishis* were also called *guru* (teacher) and the centers of learning, teacher's estate (*gurukul*).⁷ Students lived with the *guru* and focused mainly on the development of wisdom and not just on the accumulation of knowledge. Two major fields of education existed: knowledge of the material world (*vidya*) and knowledge of the spiritual world (*vrata*). These centers were meant exclusively for the elite, for the system of paying fees (*gurudakshina*) was widespread. Consequently, the poor (almost always of lower castes) were generally excluded from receiving education. The students normally spent 14 years in *gurukuls* pursuing wisdom, knowledge, character and skills suitable to their station in society. The system is known to have produced writers, scholars, philosophers, warriors and rulers.

The origins of Buddhism can be traced back to the year 563 BCE when Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, was born. Buddhism was a great leveler. It defined itself strictly in relation to Brahminism: abandoning Brahminic priesthood and rituals; possibility of all to attain the annihilation of soul (*nirvana*) or liberation (*moksha*), irrespective of one's ritual, economic and socio-political background. In Theravada system of Buddhism⁸ - denial of the existence of gods whose bodily representatives Brahmins claimed to be; separation between the *karma* and the *dharma* of one's caste; *moksha* through the 'eightfold path' alone; adoption of the 'middle way' rejecting extreme asceticism and wealth – created the conditions for an unprecedented leveling of castes and, hence, made education common and accessible to all. Buddhism saw to the establishment of the great institutions of learning, connected to monasteries, such as the ones in Nalanda,⁹ and Vikramshila.¹⁰ The University of Nalanda is known to

⁵ See <http://hcilondon.net/studying-in-india/index.html>

⁶ The two means by which divine revelation is communicated in the Vedic Hinduism

⁷ See chapter 20 in Acharya Gandhipati Tulsi *Transmutation of Personality through Preksha Meditation* tr. RK Seth, elec. Version S Sisodhiya at <http://www.jainworld.com/preksha/tulsi/atptindex.htm>

⁸ Theravada (doctrine of the elders) is inspired by Tipitaka, the oldest record of the Buddha's teachings; predominant religion of Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand; Theravadists number over 100 million worldwide. Theravada holds to the 4 Noble Truths, which conduce to the awakening: awareness of suffering, desire as the cause of suffering, suffering is not permanent, means to the end of suffering is the 8-fold path.

⁹ Founded in the 5th Century CE, Nalanda was one of the World's most ancient Universities; it lies in ruins about 62 kms from Bodhgaya and 90 kms from Patna, the capital of Bihar in India. Emperor

have had an enrolment of over ten thousand students including a huge number of international students from the whole of Asia.¹¹

The genesis of Madrasas in South Asia is attributable to the Delhi Sultanate (13th century CE). The original purpose of the Madrasa was to equip the youth for the administrative service of the Sultanate. Whether these Madrasas incorporated the then known scientific subjects as preserved and expounded by the illustrious philosophers and mystics remains to be fully answered. But, given the proximity of the early 13th century to the great philosophical, mystical and scientific temperaments of Ibn Sina (370/980-429/1037)¹², Ibn Rushd 520/1126595/1198)¹³, Al-Ghazzali (d. 505/1111)¹⁴ Ibn ‘Arabi 560/1165-638/1240),¹⁵ and the masters of the Chishti and Naqshbandhi brotherhoods [of whom Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624) and Shah Waliullah Khan Dehlawi (1703-1762) are especially significant], it is improbable that the Muslim rulers would ever have ‘turned a blind eye’ to these legacies. Examples of attempts made to bypass the liberal philosophical and mystical traditions may be found, but no tradition within the Islam of Indian subcontinent, remains unaffected by these inputs. It is known that throughout the medieval period, there existed a rich interchange of knowledge between Indian and Islamic traditions across the fields of theology, religion, philosophy, arts, architecture, mathematics, medicine and astronomy. Madrasas, during these times, were centers of higher learning with Islam forming the dominant backdrop. Madrasas served as the centers of education from where came the lawyers, doctors, philosophers, poets, clerks etc.

Similar to the Muslim rulers’ policy of establishing Madrasas to equip administrative staff of government, Warren Hastings instituted a Madrasa in Calcutta (1781) to train government officer dealing with administering law among the Muslims. The Sanskrit Colleges of Banares (1792) had a similar objective of equipping officials dealing with legal matters to do with Hindus. The motive was governance of Muslim and Hindu affairs in the absence of a unified code of law. These Madrasas differ from the later traditional Madrasas both on the scores of the purpose they served and the agencies responsible for their establishment.

The colonial expansion in the 19th century and the European missionary movement brought modern western education to India. The famous Hindu College was established in Calcutta in 1817. In 1834, the Elphinstone Institute was founded in Bombay. Several famous institutions of higher learning in Allahabad (Ewing Christian College), Kanpur (Christ Church College), Madras (Madras Christian College), Bombay (Wilson College) etc. came into existence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Calcutta, Chennai and Bombay Universities were set up in 1857. Continuing the missionary enterprise in promoting western education, today, there are in India, over 226 universities and thousands of colleges affiliated to them, 428

Ahoka built many monasteries, temples and Viharas here; see for pictures of its ruins
<http://www.kalavinka.org/pilgrimage/nalapics/nalapics.htm>

¹⁰ Remains of the ancient Vikramshila University were excavated at the village of Antichak in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar, India. King Dharampala who founded the University; see more at
<http://www.tourmyindia.com/states/bihar/vikramshila.html>

¹¹ See http://www.indian-embassy.dk/culture_welcome.htm

¹² Also called Avicenna and *al-shaykh al-ra'is*

¹³ Averroes for the West

¹⁴ Known as the greatest Muslim theologian, philosopher and mystic

¹⁵ Known as the ‘greatest master of Sufism’

engineering colleges and technological institutes, more than 100 medical colleges, scores of agricultural institutes and other professional colleges.

Western education, which provided broader opportunities, gravely affected traditional Madrasa education. The job-market is inundated with the graduates from the modern western educational institutions. Since the decline and eventual cessation of Muslim rule in India, the graduates of Madrasas do not have job opportunities outside the *ummah*, apart from a handful of those who continue their studies in departments of Islamic, Arabic, Persian or Urdu in some of the Modern Indian Universities. The more accomplished of these graduates from dual systems of education get absorbed in Universities, the rest remain content with either teaching in the fast mushrooming Madrasas (Government or independent) or becoming leaders (*imams*) of the equally fast growing Mosques. The departments for *waqf* (endowment; pl. *awqaf*) affairs, however, were established to look into the management of Muslim properties. In India, the central *waqf* board and its state subsidiaries functioned and continue to function through government grants and individual donations.

The Islamic concept of charitable giving (*sadaqah*) is founded on three Qur'anic principles:¹⁶ the interpenetration of spiritual and material life, the nature and purpose of Muslim community (*ummah*) and the trusteeship of wealth and property. God is the absolute sovereign. The Prophet, his successors, his *ummah* and the state are instruments of God. Charitable giving becomes institutionalized through almsgiving (*zakat*) – one of the five essentials of Islamic practice – and *awqaf*. *Waqf* literally means 'to hold' or 'to confine'. This term is used in Islam in the sense of endowing and preserving something for the benefit of the needy among Muslims. It relates primarily to land and buildings (Mosques, Madrasas and Hospitals) and, secondarily, to books, cattle, shares, stocks and cash. The objective of *awqaf* is to meet needs, but it goes beyond mere service to the greater object of being near God.

It has been suggested that the *awqaf* are rooted to the very beginnings of Islam. The Ka'bah in Mecca, for instance, was entrusted to believers for not just the worship of God, but also to offer to 'the outsiders' the invitation to worship the One God. The mosque in Madina, built after the flight of Muslims (*hijra*) there, is said to be the second earliest example of the *waqf*. The two basic characteristics of *waqf* were and continue to be: 'perpetuity' and 'permanence'. This means that the nature and purpose for which the property is originally endowed, in principle, remains unaltered. Thus, Mosques provide a place for communal ritual worship of God, hospitals for the care of the sick and the Madrasas for the education of the children irrespective of their social, ethnic and economical background and the vagaries of politics. Historically, rulers of India – Muslims, British and Socialist-Secular-Democratic, and Hindu-Secular – have sought to maintain the principles of perpetuity and permanence despite rapid political changes.

Over the last few decades there has been an increasing polarization between mainstream Muslims and Hindus. The phenomenal growth and popularity of the Hindu cultural organizations on the one hand and the political success of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Hindu Political Party) is said to be gradually affecting the manner in which *waqf*

¹⁶ See p7ff. at <http://www.amila.org/education/RetreatReadings2002.pdf>; see also Mawlana W Khan's paper on charity on pp12-16 and the roots of charity in the Qur'an and the hadith on pp. 2-11

has functioned in the past. The most populous state of India, Uttar Pradesh (UP), contains the largest number of Madrasas in the country. In the last decade, UP has witnessed a quick rise to power of the ritually 'lower' castes represented by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). The BSP has remained in power largely through a strategic alliance with the mainly high caste Hindu party, the BJP. In the middle of the last decade, the government of Uttar Pradesh (UP)¹⁷ decided to apply the grant-in-aid scheme to nearly 135 Madrasas. Approximately \$2000000 were set aside as the aid budget for these Madrasas. This number was subsequently reduced to 68, alarming Muslims throughout India. The teachers' association of the Madrasas in UP openly condemned this decision.¹⁸ In some areas of North India, Government holds a large number of *waqf* properties on behalf of Muslims. One of the allegations against the government has been that these properties have been leased out or in some cases, due to consistent neglect, the properties have been encroached upon by squatters or builders. For instance, the *waqf* board of Delhi has reportedly asked the Welfare Ministry to release 123 properties of the *waqf* to the board so that it can establish Madrasas and other welfare institutions for Muslims.¹⁹

In light of some such problems associated with the management of *waqf* properties and boards, the tenth *fiqh Seminar*, among others, made following observations:²⁰ *Awqaf* are to be held in perpetuity. Muslims of India and government are responsible for their protection and development; Sale or transfer of any *awqaf* is abhorrent. Mosques command greater sanctity than other *awqaf* and therefore, its sale is absolutely prohibited even when it lies unused (*i.e.* the *namaz* is not performed there); Even Mosques protected by archaeological department must be open for *namaz*; Partition caused a great mass exodus of Muslims from India. Many Mosques, Madrasas and other properties were simply left behind. Local Muslims and *waqf* boards have the responsibility to protect and maintain these; and the surplus *waqf* land endowed to Mosques can be used to establish Madrasas with appropriate provisions.

The widely current opinion of Madrasas being grounds for encouraging separatism based on Islam's fixation with the past has its genesis in the 1857 'sepoj mutiny'. Ironically, the general Indian perception of this uprising was and continues to be that it was a 'war of independence' against the British. This perception was due to the fact that it identified in the British a common enemy who had to be evicted. The ailing Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Jafar, was widely acclaimed, at this point of time, as the ruler of India. The 'sepoj mutiny' did not obviously succeed. It succeeded, however, in hardening the attitudes of the British against Indians, not least Muslims. The 'mutiny' also marked the beginning of the transference of India from being a Company territory to being subject to the Crown and with it a new sense of urgency to 'teach' the natives in the way of the West.

The aftermath of the 'mutiny' brought a realization of an immensely humiliating final defeat to the hundreds of years' long Muslim rule and civilization in India, but also witnessed an increasing polarization between the elite Muslims and Hindus. The

¹⁷ The most populous northern state of India with the maximum number of Muslims in India and hence, the endowed institutions

¹⁸ AB Masoud 'Madrasa Association flays UP Government decision' in *Islamic Voice* Vol. 11-05 no. 124, May 1997

¹⁹ A Akhter 'Release of Wakf Properties Demanded', *Islamic Voice* Vol. 12-07, No. 139, JULY 1998

²⁰ 24 - 27 October 1997, Haj House, Mumbai; see fuller report at <http://ifa-india.org/101th.htm>

common enemy, the British having left, Masrasas today are increasingly suspected of engendering pan-Islamic and anti-India (Hindu) sentiments.

Two principal routes of recovery of the lost empire were conceived by the Muslim elite in the immediate aftermath of 1857: firstly, alliance with the British and the revitalization of Muslims through western-scientific education; and secondly, revitalization of Muslims through traditional Islamic education. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–98), a famous Indian Muslim ancestrally connected with the Mughal court, is well-known for his alliance with the British, and his views against the futility of rebellion. After the ‘mutiny’ he actively sought the revitalization of Muslims through western-scientific education. The Muslim Anglo-Oriental College he established later became the Aligarh Muslim University.²¹ The college/University played a central role in the subsequent Indian politics.

Since, the *waqf* controlled Other Muslims, being fearful of the decline of Muslim prestige, power and civilization, led the counter ‘Madrasa Movement’ which sought to establish Islamic schools where the Arabic-Persian legacy as well as Islamic sciences, faith and the way of life could be safeguarded. This was seen as the way by which Muslims in India could be revitalized. These were Madrasas that remained independent from the government controlled endowed Madrasas. Dar al-‘Ulum, Deoband (1866) and Nadwat al-‘Ulama’, Lucknow (1893) are two chief examples of the several other similar traditional schools in India established in the latter part of the 19th century.²² Today, there is an explosion of Madrasas inspired by the Deobandi model throughout Asia.

The belief that these Madrasas have been fixated with the past needs, however, to be revisited.

Dar al-‘Ulum, Nadwat al-‘Ulama’ ***Establishment of Nadwat al-‘Ulama’***

The Nadwa was established with a view to provide a balanced synthesis of the classical and the modern. The concern was to seek ways in which Muslims can learn to integrate the revealed fundamentals and the ever transforming world of modern knowledge. The Nadwat al-‘Ulama’ (Nadwa in short) attributes the need for traditional Madrasas to ‘the political ascendancy of the West’. The West with its emphasis on materialist, liberal secular values is perceived to have caused fissures within Islam, dividing Muslims into ‘the modernists’ and ‘the orthodox’. The modernists uncritically adopted the Western system of education, whereas the orthodox reasserted reliance on the infallibility of the way of life and thought of the ‘Ulama’ of the past.

In this context of conflict within Islam, Maulana Muhammad ‘Ali Mungeri, a pupil of Mawlana Lutfullah Sahib of Aligarh and the spiritual successor (*khalifa*) of Shah Fazlur Rahman of Muradabad [all from the state of present Uttar Pradesh] emerged as

²¹ See J MS Baljon, *Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan* (1949).

²² For example, Mazahar al-‘Ulum, Saharanpur (1866), Madrasa Baqyatris Salihat, Vellore (1883), Mazahar al-‘Ulum, Banares (1893), Madrasa Aminia, Delhi (1897) and Dar al-‘Ulum Khalilia, Tonk (1899), Madrasa al-Islah Azamgarh (1909) etc.

the leader of a group of scholars following the tradition of the great 18th century reformer, scholar and Sufi, Shah Waliullah Dehlawi.

This group of scholars laid the foundations of the Nadva aiming mainly to promote harmony among Muslims. It was believed that progress was only possible when Muslims united on a single vision of religion and its goals; with this agreement in place, then Muslims themselves would be able to determine the extent of educational reform and improvements in the dated syllabi of the Arabic Madrasas.²³ The foundations of the Nadva were laid in the city of Cawnpore (Kanpur) in 1893 with Mawlana Lutfullah Sahib as its president. The Nadva had the following main objectives: Reformulating the Madrasa syllabi taking into account the changed conditions of modern life; addressing the problems and questions of modern life by recourse to scriptures – the Qur’an and the Hadith; establishing a modern library aiding the study and research on Islam; propagating Islam through the writing and publication of literature; and equipping preachers possessing a sound knowledge of the scriptures and the world

There is nothing here that suggests a simplistic obscurantist and medievalist Muslim agenda. Almost all of the mainstream Christian theological institutions can identify with the desire of a civilization on the decline to re-conceive itself along the lines suggested by these objectives. Initially, the Nadva functioned merely as an association of scholars who gathered in different town from time to time to discuss matter of importance to Muslims in the modern context. In order, however, to fully realize the objectives, the Nadva established a permanent school in 1898 at the very heart of the Islamic culture of the time, Lucknow.

The Nadva leadership draws its inspiration from the great eclectic Indian Sufi traditions. It therefore, seeks to balance commitment to traditional faith with scholarship and the open-minded tolerant attitude of the Sufis. The leaders represented distinguished families and were widely recognized for their wisdom and scholarship. Mawlana Muhammad ‘Ali Mungheri, the president of the association of the Nadva was appointed as the first General Secretary (*nazim*), an honorary position in the school. He was succeeded by Mawlana Masihuzzaman Khan, a resident of Shahjahanpur near Lucknow and the teacher of the former Nizam of Hyderabad. Mawlana Khalilur Rahman from Saharanpur, Mawlana Syed ‘Abdul Hai, Mawlana Syed ‘Abdul ‘Ali and Mawlana Syed ‘Abdul Hasan ‘Ali Nadvi (1914–1999) followed him as the General Secretaries of the Nadva. Mawlana Nadvi was one of the most respected Muslim scholars of the 20th century India. Following in the footsteps of Shibli Numani,²⁴ he became Principal of the Nadva in addition to being General Secretary. He is remembered both in the Muslim world and in the West as a distinguished scholar, preacher, reformer and educationists and for his contributions to interfaith harmony.²⁵

²³ The Arabic Madrasas of the 19th century followed a dated syllabus on Islamic studies

²⁴ Shibli Nomani (1857-1914) was a Lawyer, poet, historian, teacher, nationalist from Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh, North India

²⁵ His eclecticism is manifest from the fact that he was associated with the Chishti, Suhrawardi and Naqshbandi brotherhoods of Sufism. He served as a member of the Deoband and was singularly responsible for the establishment of the Academy of Islamic Research and Publications at Lucknow. He was a productive writer. His works are prescribed as text books in several Arab Universities. He

Study and Research Programs

The school was founded with the understanding that change was the essential ingredient for the success of Muslims in Modern India. This necessity to change however, did not involve the dilution of the traditional, but the affirmation of the dynamic nature of the faith. One of the changes the Nadva brought about into its system of education involved the removal of subjects from medieval period whose relevance today is hard to establish. This includes the dated traditional scholastic sciences which are irrelevant today due to the absence of the sects and disputes which gave rise to those sources. The Nadva included, in their lieu, the study of modern sciences and languages in its curriculum.

The Nadva study ranges from the primary to the University stage. The total number of years required to go through this system of education is sixteen years. The Nadva today has a total of 4000 students located in the main center in Lucknow and its branches. The students do not normally pay for the boarding, lodging and study. Approximately 1/3rd of its students receive monthly stipends ranging from RS. 25 to 100. The academic year begins from *shawwal* (October/November) and ends in *sha'aban* (December/January). The Nadva has today over hundred tutors.

The primary stage (6 years) includes the teaching of Urdu, Hindi, English, Arithmetic, Geography, and other Sciences. This period of study includes subjects taught in the parallel secular system of education in India. This level consists of over 2000 students. During this period, those students who show an inclination about committing the entire Qur'an to memory are given special additional tuition. Approximately 200 students elect this as an elective.

The secondary stage consists of 3 years program after the primary stage. In this level, in addition to learning English, students also learn Persian and Arabic Grammar, Composition and Literature. The higher secondary state consists of 2 years of study (corresponding to the High School of the parallel system of education). During this stage, the students are taught Arabic, Persian and English languages in addition to the religious sciences and Islamic History. The Graduation (*'alimiyat*) stage is a 4 year long program. This parallels the Intermediate and degree program of the secular system of education. During this period, students are study the commentaries of the Qur'an, Traditions, Jurisprudence, Literature etc. At this stage the students also acquire higher knowledge of English equivalent to the Intermediate level of the secular education.

Post-Graduate Stage (*fazilat*) is a 2 year long program after *'alimiyat*. During this stage the students are instructed in advanced Arabic literature and other traditional sciences consisting of the commentaries, Traditions, Jurisprudence and Shari'ah. At this point the students are also required to submit their master's thesis on a subject of

also served as a visiting professor in a number of Arab universities. He served on the Higher Council of the Islamic University, Medina, the Executive Committee of the Federation of Islamic Universities, Rabat, and was Chairman of the Board of the Centre of Islamic Studies, Oxford. See for a good review of his contributions, Yoginder Sikand 'Islam And The Muslim Minority Predicament: Reflections On The Contributions Of Sayyed Abul Ali Nadwi' in *Qalander* at <http://www.islaminterfaith.org/aug2002/article.html> and more at http://www.dartmouth.edu/~alnur/ISLAM/GRMUSLIMS/Ali_Nadwi.htm; <http://www.rauf96.supanet.com/syed.htm> and <http://www.nadwi.net/e/introdata.htm>

their choice. During this period they also do a course on Comparative religions. The number of students at this level is small compared to the other stages of study. Selected students go on to studying up to the doctoral stage (*takmil*). The normal duration of such researches is 2 years full time work under a supervisor from the Nadva.

In addition to these regular programs, the Nadva also offers special courses. A 5-year condensed course in Arabic and Theology who have previously received an Intermediate or a BA from a recognized university in first or second division. This program entitles them to a degree of *'alim*. Those students whose mother tongue is English are taught in English. The Nadva houses a Department of Islamic Thought and Comparative Religions for those who wish to major in this field. In addition to these, the Institute of Teachers Training at the Nadva offers a special teachers' training program to those who wish to go into teaching. Many of the Nadva graduates have gone on to study and teach in Western, Arab and South East Asian universities. The Nadva receives student from the whole of the Muslim world.

The Nadva library houses over 100000 books. Several research institutions set up by the Nadva promote ongoing research and publication. Its monthly and fortnightly journals are called *al-b'aas-al-islami* and *al-raid*. Its Urdu fortnightly is called *tameer-e-hayat*. The Majils-i-Tahqiqat-o-Nashriyat-i-Islam (The academy of Islamic research and Publication) is one particular institute which was started by Mawlana Syed 'Abul Hasan 'Ali Nadvi in 1959. This academy has so far produced over 200 works, some of which have been translated into many languages. The Nadva was instrumental in the genesis of the Majlis-i-Tahqiqat-i-Shariah (The Academy of Research in the Shari'ah) was set up to study, review, adapt the Muslim Personal Law (part of the traditional Shari'ah law which addresses the family and inheritance of Muslims in India) and Islamic Shari'ah in general. This academy was founded over a decade ago under the leadership of Mawlana Syed 'Abul Hasan 'Ali Nadvi. The members of this academy are drawn from all over the vast country of India.

Through all of these additional efforts, the Nadva seeks to bridge the gap between the religious scholars (from the old school of thought) and modern Muslims. Its character is revolutionary in that it calls for reform of Islam recognizing the changing currents operating within Islam and in wider society.

Dar al-'Ulum, Deoband

Origins

Dar al-'Ulum is located at a small town called Deoband, approximately 5-6 hours drive from Delhi. It is the oldest (of the new type) and the best known of the Madrasas of India. Next to Al-Azhar in Cairo, Dar al-'Ulum is considered the most important center of Islamic learning in the world. Majority of the independent Madrasas in India, as also in the other parts of South Asia, are modeled on it and follow the curriculum set by it. It has, since its origins in the 19th century played a significant role not just in training and equipping highly qualified leaders, but has played a central role in nation building, not least of which was the Indian freedom movement.

Mawlana Burhanuddin Qasmi's work²⁶ shows that Dar al-'Ulum represents the very quintessence of the perfect balance between the formal and spiritual currents within Islam. Its spiritual component is rooted in the legacy of a well known Sufi-reformer Shah Waliullah Dehlwi (1703-1762) and, hence, goes back over 100 years before its foundations were laid in Deoband. Shah Waliullah was ahead of his time. He led an intellectual campaign years before the 'first war of independence' and 'the quit India movement' and drew the attention of those who would hear him to the extensive moral and spiritual corruption of the company and the values of the West, the East India Company represented. His basis for the critique of the Company and its values essentially stemmed from the spiritual experience he is said to have had while on a pilgrimage to Mecca. The hall-mark of his message was the commitment to establishing equality and justice in India – objects widely perceived to be lacking in British India then as also during the period when Dar al-'Ulum became a participant in the freedom movement. His son, Shah 'Abdul Aziz Dehlwi, continued his critique of the British rule at the beginning of the 19th century and began a long drawn Indian struggle for Freedom in which the spiritually inclined 'Ulama' provided significant leadership. The 'sepoy mutiny' led to the death of over 50000 'Ulama', and in Delhi alone nearly 500 of them were hanged. So actively were these engaged in the freedom movement that the 'Ulama', known popularly as the *mawlawis*, became synonymous with the term 'rebel'.

It was in the aftermath of this tragic state of affairs (apparently, it took years for the 'Ulama' to recover from the shock of the policy of 'Ulama' hunting'), that the Dar al-'Ulum came into existence. The original objective of this institution was to establish a spiritual-intellectual base for revolution against what was generally perceived by this group of the elite as injustice, oppression, suppression of culture, knowledge and endowments.

The early impetus for the establishment of this Madrasa was provided by a Sufi, Haji Muhammad Abid of Deoband. He was appointed as the honorary patron and manager of the Madrasa when it was first established. Maulana Muhammad Yaqub, a leading educationist, was the first headmaster of the Madrasa. Hazrat Mawlana Muhammad Qasim Nanatawi (1833-1879) and Hazrat Maulana Rasheed Ahmed Gangohi are recognized as the two principal founding fathers. The three components of the Madrasa's objective were: Central role of religion in individual and social life, freedom from slavery within and without, and simplicity and hard work.²⁷

The Dar al-'Ulum began small and in utter simplicity at an open mosque in Deoband on 30 May 1866. This was reminiscent of the earliest period of the genesis of Islam in Madina. The first teacher to be appointed was a spiritual leader, Mullah Mahmud Deobandi. The school had a single student named Mahmud al-Hasan. This student who later came to be known as *shaykh al-hind* (leader of India) led a resistance movement that cut across the Hindu-Muslim divide. He formed a government in exile headquartered in Madina with Mahmud al-Hasan as its *amir* (chief), Barkutullah Bhopali as its minister, and Mahraja Pratap Singh as its President. This government in exile began then to seek international support against the British rule. One of the

²⁶ Burhanuddin Qasmi *Darul Uloom Deoband: A Heroic Struggle against the British Tyranny* (Mumbai: Markazul Ma'arif, n.d.)

²⁷ It is interesting to note how close Gandhi's own philosophy of life, in the early 20th century, involved some of these principle objectives

internal communications between these leaders was written on a silk cloth giving details of the conspiracy against the British. This letter fell into the hands of the British in 1916 and gave rise to the well known *tahrik-e-reshmi rumal* (the silk kerchief conspiracy). Over 200 ‘Ulama’ were arrested as a result (many of whom later released). Muslims, related to this Madarasa, continued to participate in the various other movements led by the Indian National Congress (established in 1885), such as the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements.

The Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, a Muslim organization based in India, was started in 1919 by the ‘Ulama’ of this Madrasa. Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad, a well known freedom fighter and a product of Madrasa education, along with the Indian National Congress played an important role in the freedom of India. This Madrasa inspired organization opposed the two nation theory of the Muslim league on grounds that culture, not religion, defines a nation’s identity. A split occurred however in 1937, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam came into existence. After the partition it came to be in Pakistan. Though the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind claims to represent all Indian Muslims, majority of its members are from Dar al-‘Ulum, Deoband.

This Dar al-‘Ulum in Deoband is known today as ‘the Al-Azhar’ and ‘the Mother of all Religious Institutions’ in India. It seeks to combine the divergent intellectual and spiritual streams within Islam with the selected items from the modern western system in order to equip generations of Muslim leaders in India.

System of Education

In reaction to the introduction and wholly uncritical adoption of modern western education, Dar al-‘Ulum laid its special emphasis on traditional subjects, but it also absorbed some of the features from the modern institutions such as the division of students in classes, attendance registers and written examinations etc. Its open attitude is attributable to the moderate foundations on which it is said to be based. Of these foundations, the following are significant: The knowledge of the *shari’ah* (law) and conformity to the *sunnat* (traditions),²⁸ the following of the Sufi path, the moderate vision of religious Law (Hanafi school)²⁹ and theology (Maturidi school).³⁰

During the time of the Prophet the primary ‘text’ of education was the Holy Qur’an to the extent it was in circulation largely orally. The sources of knowledge expanded to include the traditions of the Prophet during the period of the early Caliphate when the Qur’an also came to be written. To these were added the expanding science of jurisprudence and to some degree, also poetry as Muslim communities spilled beyond the confines of Arabia. 400 years on, newer subjects of learning were added which included the science of Qur’anic interpretation, principles of jurisprudence, Arabic grammar, lexicon, and history. With Islam’s encounter with Greco-Persian cultures, newer sciences of Medicine, Astrology, Astronomy, Mathematics, Philosophy etc were also introduced. By the turn of the 11th century Scholastic Theology and

²⁸ Understood in their broadest sense to include both the inner and external dimensions – a legacy of the high-mindedness of Sufis brotherhoods

²⁹ Four traditional schools of law are: Hanafi (eponymous founder - Abu Hanifa, c.700-767 from Iraq), Maliki (Malik Ibn Anas, c.715-795 from Medina), Shafi’i (Muhammad Ibn Idris ash-Shafi’I, 767-820), Hanbali (Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, 780-855); Both Moghul and Ottoman empires were officially subscribed to the liberal Hanafi school

³⁰ Al-Maturidi followed the liberal Abu Hanifa’s legacy in theology.

philosophical Mysticism came to be firmly established as the necessary components of Islamic education.

According to Maulana Hakim Sayyid Abdul-Hayy Lakhnavi, the education history of Islam can be divided into four distinct periods.

The first period begins roughly in the 12th century and ends in the 14th century. The following subjects were considered mandatory as part of Islamic learning: Grammar, Literature, Philosophy-Logic, Jurisprudence, Scholastic Theology, Sufism, Science of Interpretation and Hadith. The study of Jurisprudence was considered the highest level of learning, since it was especially useful in sorting legal problems of the court and commoners alike.

The second period begins from the late 14th century ninth century. Apart from other sources, the study of the Hadith acquired a special place in the curricula during this period.

The third period begins from the start of the Mughal era. During the reign of the Emperor Akbar owing to the eclectic attitude of the Emperor several newer additions were made to the syllabi. This period of eclecticism continued through to the time of the great reformer and Mystic, Shah Waliullah of Delhi. Mughal Empire's special relations with Persia, lent Persian flavor to Indian culture and learning. Philosophy in particular of the Mystical sort came to be recognized as the queen of sciences and expressed through poetry.

The fourth period began from the middle of the 18th century with the efforts of Mulla Nizamuddin Sahalvi, a contemporary of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi. During the latter part of the Mughal era, the centre of learning and culture shifted from Delhi to Lucknow³¹ culminating in the liberal tradition of combining learning with Sufism of the 'Ulama' of the famous Farangi Mahal.³² Emperor Aurangzeb (1658 to 1707) is said to have visited Lucknow and ordered the construction of the mosque on Lakshaman Tila (a Hindu religious site).³³ Aurangzeb also transferred a complex of four buildings [(originally belonging to a French (farangi) trader] called Farangi Mahal to Mullah Nizamuddin. Mullah Nizamuddin founded a famous school which produced several important scholars famously known as 'the 'Ulama' of Farangi Mahal'. The curriculum adopted by the school was named as 'Nizami's Syllabus' (*dars-e nizami*). The main feature of this curriculum was that it was rationalistic.

Dar al-'Ulum follows this syllabus in spirit, as it brings together the excellence of all of the previous centers of learning and their syllabi in addition to the changes demanded by the new situations and times; in this sense Dar al-'Ulum claims to be more comprehensive.

³¹ Lucknow (capital of Avadh) is known to have been an important center of the Sultanate of Delhi in the 14-15th centuries and continued into the Mughal Empire from the early 16th century. With the decline of the Mughal Empire, a succession of 11 governors ruled over Avadh until 1858. The British took over the administration after Navab Wajid Ali Shah (1847 – 1856) in 1858.

³² See F Robinson *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture* (Delhi: Permanent Black 2001)

³³ Shaikh Pir Muhammad, a contemporary scholar and Sufi, lies buried here. During his stay here, he attracted large numbers of student and scholars from different part of the country. The school founded by him was an important center of learning for about a century after his death in 1668/69.

Its syllabus consists of four levels: Primary, Intermediate, Graduate, and Post-graduate. Primary to Graduate level program is mandatory and takes 8 years to complete. The Post-graduate program is not mandatory. It includes the biography of Muhammad, Grammar, Syntax, Arabic Literature, Chirography (writing and dictation), Jurisprudence, Logic, Exegesis, Hadith (Traditions), Ethics and moral law, General History, Rhetoric, Modern Sciences, Geography, Systematic Theology, History of India, Urdu language. The optional Post-graduate degree offers specialist training in the fields of the science of Interpretation/hermeneutics, Theology, Jurisprudence, Literature (Arabic/Persian/Urdu), Teaching methods, Calligraphy, Journalism, Computer Science, English Literature, Missions

Bridging the Chasms between Madrasas and Secular Institutions and Conclusion

Waris Mazhari, recently interviewed by Y S Sikand,³⁴ is perhaps the principal example of the highly educated Muslims of South Asia who, in themselves, bring together not just the Nadva and Deobandi systems but also span the supposed gulf between the so-called secular and traditional systems of education. His views are representative of the host of alumni of the Dar al-‘Ulum, Deoband since the Urdu monthly *tarjuman al-Qur’an* he edits is an official organ of the *Deoband Madrasa Old boys Association* in Delhi.

The Deoband Madrasa Old boys Association is an apolitical organization of the graduates of Deoband concerned with Dar al-‘Ulum’s vision to Islamize the Muslim masses and promote harmony between the different faction within Islam and in wider society.³⁵ It aims to assist the Madrasas, on continuing basis, in reforming the syllabus consonant with the changing times and needs.³⁶ Mazhari agrees that conservative ‘Ulama’ resist change largely on account of their respect for past authorities. He thinks of this as nothing short of ‘the veneration of the elders’. This is precisely the reason why Muslims should not remain bound to the past authorities. He believes that the great majority of the ‘Ulama’ both in and outside the Deobandi Madrasa system favor change and modernization without sacrificing the essentials of faith. He believes the major obstacle in the road to further change in Madrasas is not the resistance of some traditional ‘Ulama’, but rather the paucity of funds.³⁷

Modernization is understood primarily in relation to the need for modern subjects in Madrasas - not just for their own sake, but also in order to further understand the deeper implications of the Qur’an. A deeper study of history of the wider world for instance, is one such area of improvement. Likewise, the study of social sciences, Hindi (national language of India), English (the language of the world) is necessary in order that the graduates feel at home in the world they live in and interact with. At the primary and intermediate levels, the pupils need to be exposed to key subjects taught in the alternative system of education.³⁸

³⁴ My source of the copy of Y S Sikand’s interview with Waris Mazhari, 20th January, 2003 sent to me by the Interviewer; See the published version of Y S Sikand’s interview in *Qalandar* August 2003

³⁵ See Q.1 in *Qalandar* August 2003

³⁶ See Q.2 in *Qalandar* August 2003

³⁷ See Q.7 in *Qalandar* August 2003

³⁸ See Q.8 in *Qalandar* August 2003

Modernization is also understood in terms of promoting employment oriented programs. These are programs through which the pupils are given technical and professional training as well as religious, in order to be able to maintain themselves and their families. Some madrasas, following Deoband and the Nadva do teach Computers, Journalism, Technical training in watch repairing, book binding and Calligraphy³⁹ in addition to requiring students to engage in social and community development related project while in training.⁴⁰

Though still a long way to go, the Madrasas instituted with a view to providing education to Muslims girls are beginning to make a significant impact today.⁴¹

Mazhar also critiques the emphasis on rote learning in Madrasas. He believes more changes need to be brought in to promote critical thinking, comprehension and debate in addition to inducting and fully integrating the available modern teaching methods.⁴²

In response to YS Sikand's question on the issue of the role of Madrasas in aiding and abetting violence, Mazhar makes a distinction between the Madrasas of India and Pakistan. He believes some Madrasas of Pakistan do justify violence; although, this view does not appear to be entirely correct, he shows no awareness of the same happening in any of the Indian Madrasas. Consistent to the history of the Partition movement, he believes that Dar al-'Ulum at Deoband, in particular, has been in the forefront of Indian nationalism and continues to remain bound by the vision of pluralistic India. He believes that this philosophy characterizes the present Deoband Madrasa and the host of institutions inspired by it.⁴³

Mazhar bemoans the fact that the 'Ulama' are not doing enough to promote inter-faith harmony in India. The challenge to preserve peace, however, is too great to be achieved simply by the 'Ulama' alone. He believes common Muslims need to participate in a wider Islamic movement for dialogue and peace.⁴⁴ Besides this, there is also a need to maintain peace between the different sects within Islam. Dar al-'Ulum, as the premier Muslim Institution in India, he believes, will provide a strong leadership in these areas.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Do we have hard evidence of Dar al-'Ulum or the Nadva providing leadership in defusing Hindu-Muslim tensions, particularly during times of active violence? It is difficult to give any firm answer to this question, but one can take heart in the fact that Muslim leadership is rising to the occasion and is seeking to commit itself to the great Deobandi tradition of Indian nationalism, recognition of plurality and pursuit of inter and intra-religious peace. The leadership is also concerned about making its system of education relevant to modern times. One hope not just that this movement of change continues, but also that, in time, a host of Madrasas inspired by it follow suit.

³⁹ See Q.9 in *Qalandar* August 2003

⁴⁰ See Q.10 in *Qalandar* August 2003

⁴¹ See Q.13 in *Qalandar* August 2003

⁴² See Q.14 in *Qalandar* August 2003

⁴³ See Q.15 in *Qalandar* August 2003

⁴⁴ See Q.20 in *Qalandar* August 2003

⁴⁵ See Q.21 in *Qalandar* August 2003