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Madrassa Education in Pakistan and Bangladesh

Modernization in the Islamic world has been characterized by an unusual tension which, if not the result, is at least the concomitant of the contradiction between the persistence of a highly institutionalized tradition and the emergence of vigorous reformist challenges from both within and outside Islam. In the context of South Asia, two interrelated features of modern Islam remain significantly relevant to the current debate on the role of Islam in public affairs. First of these is the inordinate regard in which traditional Islam is held—a regard that manifests itself in the continued social and political influence of the *ulema* and their madrassa system. The second feature is the so far very limited legitimacy achieved by most attempts to re-think and re-state Islam—as opposed to attempts to reform society by simply neglecting Islam.

The persistence of traditional Islam as a significant cultural alternative and as the intellectual mode of still vital religious institutions in South Asian Muslim societies is nowhere more salient than in the madrassa system. Madrassas have long been the centers of classical Islamic studies and the guardians of the orthodoxy in South Asian Islam.

They are the social sites for the reproduction of Islamic orthodoxy. Hence, to say that the ideological orientation of madrasa education is conservative is to state the obvious: they are supposed to be conservative, as their very *raison d'être* is to preserve the integrity of the tradition. Indeed, it is fair to argue that madrassas constitute the core of the religio-cultural complex of Islam in South Asia.

The ulema, as the bearers of the legal and religio-political tradition of the latter Abbasid period, have four primary concerns: 1) the unity and integrity of the Islamic Ummah as a universal religious community; 2) the integrity of orthodox beliefs and practices of Islam as represented in Asharite theology and the consensus of the classical jurists; 3) the preservation of the *shari'a*, especially in matters pertaining to family laws and religious rituals; and 4) the dissemination of the Islamic religious knowledge under their supervision and guidance. As interpreters, they resolve religious disputes and issue *fatwas*, providing the faithful with religious guidance on all kinds of issues. As religious functionaries, they organize and lead congregational prayers, supervise the celebration of Islamic religious occasions, and conduct marriage ceremonies and burial rituals. The madrasa education is critical for all of these concerns and functions.

The madrassas in today's Pakistan and Bangladesh, as in India, represent the legacy of the spectacular resurgence of Islamic religious education in India during the late nineteenth century, beginning with the establishment of the Deoband Madrasa in 1867. Since then, the madrasa system has played an important historical role by preserving the orthodox tradition of Islam in the wake of the downfall of Muslim political power; by training generations of Islamic religious scholars and functionaries; by providing vigorous religio-political leadership; and, more importantly, by reawakening the consciousness of Islamic solidarity and the Islamic way of life among the Muslims of South Asia.

The madrassas in Muslim South Asia teach a curriculum known as *Dars-i-Nizami*, first introduced by Mullah Nizamuddin Siharvi (d. 1747) who was a scholar of some repute in Islamic jurisprudence and philosophy in Lucknow. This curriculum is not the same as that associated with the name of Mullah Nasiruddin Tusi (d. 1064) and the Madrasa Nizamia, which he established in eleventh-century Baghdad. Almost all Sunni madrassas, irrespective of whether they

are of Deobandi, Bareilvi, or Ahl-i-Hadith persuasion, follow the same standard Nizami course of studies adopted by the Deoband seminary in 1867. It consists of about twenty subjects broadly divided into two categories: *al-ulum an-naqliya* (the transmitted sciences), and *al-ulum al-aqliya* (the rational sciences). The subject areas include grammar, rhetoric, prosody, logic, philosophy, Arabic literature, dialectical theology, life of the Prophet, medicine, mathematics, polemics, Islamic law, jurisprudence, Hadith, and Tafsir (exegesis of the Quran). It is important to note that out of the twenty subjects, only eight can be considered as solely religious. The remaining subjects are otherwise secular and were included in Nizami curriculum both to equip the students for civil service jobs and as an aid to understanding religious texts. Also, facilities for teaching all of the subjects and books are not usually available in all madrassas. This is particularly true in the case of subjects such as medicine, mathematics, history, philosophy, prosody, and polemics. The result is that the students often have to move from one madrassa to another to complete their curriculum. This also results in the failure of many madrassas to institutionalize their grading and promotion procedures.

As is well known, most of the books taught in this curriculum are very old. Books used in philosophy and logic, for example, were written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Medicine is taught through an eleventh-century text that is still considered an authentic study of human anatomy and pathology. In what we have described as purely religious subjects, the books used date back to the seventeenth century at the latest and the eleventh century at the earliest. Books prescribed for astronomy, mathematics, and grammar are more than five- to seven-hundred-year-old texts.

In most of the madrassas there are no formal admission procedures, and academic schedules are often flexible. Some major madrassas have, however, institutionalized their admission, grading, and promotion procedures and have established some degree of rigor in their academic schedules. The complete Nizami curriculum runs from seven to nine years after the completion of the elementary level. The entire system has been traditionally supported by the community through trusts, endowments, charitable donations, and *zakat* contributions. However, since the introduction of the compulsory collection of *zakat* and *ushr* by the Zia ul-Haq government in 1980, a large

number of madrassas receive regular financial assistance from the publicly administered zakat funds. Not only do the students not pay any tuition, they are provided with free textbooks, board and lodging, and a modest stipend.

In terms of levels of education, the madrassas in Pakistan are categorized as: (1) *ibtadari* (elementary), where only the Quran is memorized and taught; (2) *vustani* (middle level), where selected books from *Dars-i-Nizami* are taught; and (3) *fauquani* (higher level), where the entire *Dars-i-Nizami* is taught. In some madrassas where competent ulema are available, students after their graduation take up post-graduate courses of study in *tafsir*, *hadith*, or *fiqh*.

With the exception of a few madrassas managed by the provincial government *Auqaf* departments, madrassa education in Pakistan is mainly in the private sector. In the majority of cases, madrassas are personal enterprises of prominent ulema who own and manage the madrassas and make arrangements for their finances. Usually, the founders of the madrassas are ulema of good standing who have a degree of influence in the local community, which enables them to acquire land, housing facilities, and financial resources for the madrassas. Most of the madrassas are registered with the government as charitable corporate bodies and have acquired tax-exempt status, thus receiving an indirect subsidy from the public treasury. Some larger madrassas have their own board of trustees or executive committees, which consist of local business elites, landed gentry, and prominent ulema. In most cases, these are merely ceremonial bodies, meant largely to provide decorum and legitimacy to the respective madrassas. Major policy decisions regarding doctrinal preferences, curriculum, and selection of teachers and students remain the exclusive prerogative of the ulema.

Unlike Pakistan, Bangladesh has two kinds of madrassas: *Quomi* madrassas—estimated at more than 6,500 at the secondary, intermediate, and higher levels with about 1,462,500 students and 130,000 teachers. These *Quomi* madrassas in Bangladesh, which are predominantly of *Deobandi* persuasion, teach the standard *Dars-i-Nizami* prevalent in all South Asian madrassas. The *Quomi* madrassas are private, receive no financial support from the government, and are supported by religious endowments or by zakat, *sadaqa*, and donations from the faithful. This financial autonomy of the madrassa system has been a major source of the independent religio-political power

base of the ulema in Bangladesh and Pakistan. It has also enabled the ulema to resist the efforts of state authorities to introduce reforms in the madrassa system and to bridge the gap between the traditional system of Islamic education and modern secular education.

The other category of madrassas in Bangladesh is the government-controlled, or Alia madrassa system, a unique system of Islamic religious education with few parallels in the Muslim world. Divided into five distinct levels—ibtedai (elementary), dakhil (secondary), alim (higher secondary), fazil (B.A.), and kamil (M.A.), these madrassas teach all the required modern subjects such as English, Bangla, science, social studies, math, geography, history, etc., along with a revised version of Dars-i-Nizami. Although they are privately owned and managed—with the exception of five major Alia madrassas that are wholly controlled by the government—the Government of Bangladesh pays 80 percent of the salaries of their teachers and administrators as well as a considerable portion of their development expenditures. The 2000–01 budget, for example, allocated TK 4.91 billion for salary support of the non-government madrassas. The government also allocated considerable funds for the construction of 1,741 new madrassas in the private sector.¹ These Alia madrassas are registered with, and supervised by, the government-appointed Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board, which also prescribes the curriculum and syllabi and conducts examinations. However, the government has approved equivalence of only dakhil and kamil to Secondary and Higher Secondary certificates, respectively.

According to the latest data (2000–01) available to the madrassa education board, there are 6,906 non-government Alia madrassas in Bangladesh with the largest number, 4,826, at the dakhil level. The total number of students at all levels in the Alia system is 1,879,300. The number of teachers in these madrassas is 100,732. Unlike the graduates of Quomi madrassas, whose degrees are not recognized by the government and who pursue their careers in religious establishments and private businesses, the majority of the graduates of Alia madrassas merge into the general stream of education by continuing their education in colleges and universities. It is no wonder that a recent survey found that 32 percent of Bangladesh university teachers in the humanities and social sciences were graduates of Alia madrassas.

1. *Daily Star*, 9 June 2000.

There are also elementary level madrassas known as maktabas, or ibtedai madrassas, first formally approved by President Zia-ur-Rahman in 1978. The Madrassa Education Board has approved only 5,150 of all independent ibtedai madrassas, with 23,176 teachers and 377,749 students. But a report in the *Daily Dinkal* suggested the existence of 18,000 independent ibtedai madrassas with 85,000 teachers and close to two million students.² This latter figure should be closer to reality since a 1992 Ministry of Education estimate puts the total number of ibtedai madrassas at 17,279. At any rate, the important thing to note here is: a) the significant contribution of ibtedai madrassas in providing elementary education in areas where no government primary schools are available; and b) that these ibtedai madrassas are now acting as feeder institutions for both the Alia and Quomi madrassas. More than 50 percent of students in Quomi madrassas and more than 70 percent of students in Alia madrassas come from an ibtedai background.

Let us at this stage examine some numbers to see the magnitude and the expanse of the civil society space covered by the religious sector in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Table 1. Profile of madrassa education in Pakistan

Number of secondary and higher madrassas	6,000
Senior and graduate level madrassas	4,335
Deobandi madrassas	2,333
Barelvi madrassas	1,625
Ahl-i-Hadith madrassas	224
Shia madrassas	163
Number of all students	604,421
Local students (Pakistani)	586,604
Foreign students	17,817
Afghan students	16,598

2. *Daily Dinkal*, Dhaka, 2 March 1998.

Table 2. Growth of higher madrassa education in Pakistan: 1947–2001

Year	Number of madrassas	Number of teachers	Number of students
pre-1947	137
1950	210
1960	472	1,846	40,239
1971	908	3,185	45,238
1979	1,745	5,005	99,041
1984	1,953
1986	2,261	12,625	316,380
2001	4,345 *	...	604,421

* This does not include 655 other madrassas that do not offer complete Dars-i-Nizami curriculum.

Table 3. Profile of madrassa education in Bangladesh

Number of private (Quomi) madrassas	6,500
Number of government-funded (Alia) madrassas	6,906
Number of teachers in Quomi madrassas	130,000
Number of teachers in Alia madrassas	100,732
Number of students in Quomi madrassas	1,462,500
Number of students in Alia madrassas	1,878,300
Total number of madrassas (Quomi + Alia)	13,406
Total number of teachers (Quomi + Alia)	230,732
Total number of students (Quomi + Alia)	3,340,800

Table 4. Ibtedai madrassas and maktabas in Bangladesh, 2001

Number of Ibtedai (elementary) madrassas	18,000
Number of teachers in Ibtedai madrassas	85,000
Number of students in Ibtedai madrassas and maktabas	1,377,749

This is some civil society!

The madrassa system is supporting close to six million students in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. An overwhelming majority of these students come from poor families who cannot afford to send their children to modern schools because, first, in most cases modern schools do not exist at an accessible distance, and second, the schools are either too expensive or too crowded. In the case of Pakistan, the majority of madrassa students belong to the rural areas of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Azad Kashmir, and the economically depressed regions of Punjab. They are mostly drawn from the low strata of society. In a survey conducted in 1976, more than 80 percent of the madrassa students in Peshawar, Multan, and Gujranwala were found to be sons of small or landless peasants, rural artisans, or imams of the village mosques. The remaining 20 percent came from families of small shopkeepers and rural laborers. A more recent survey, conducted in 2000, found that 55 percent of madrassa students came from peasant families and petty traders. The interesting thing to note is that the number of students whose fathers were employed in lower level private sector jobs rose from 5 percent in 1976 to 35 percent in 2000. Only 3 percent of students in the 2000 survey said their fathers were imams of the mosques. The majority of students come from large but low-income families. The 2000 survey found that 63 percent of madrassa students had five or more siblings, and 28 percent of them had seven or more brothers and sisters. In the case of Bangladesh, an overwhelming majority of Quomi madrassa students (82 percent) come from poor families of rural areas and small towns. Sylhet, Chittagong, and some northern districts have traditionally been the main base of recruitment for the Quomi madrassas. The student body of the Alia madrassa system is much more diverse and includes a large number of students from the lower middle classes as well. In India, madrassa education has been the only education available to Muslims who now face discrimination along with poverty and illiteracy.”

One must also note that madrassa education has been and remains one of the surest paths of social mobility for the lower level occupational castes and artisans of the rural areas of Pakistan. Whatever occupational backgrounds the students have, upon the completion of their madrassa education, they are certain to take a step forward in the hierarchy of social stratification, in terms of both income and social

status. Thus the social significance of the madrasa education lies not only in the fact that it imparts religious education to a large number of students, but that it also ensures access to employment. It has been observed that while there has been considerable unemployment among the youth educated at secular schools and colleges, the graduates of madrassas have rarely faced such problems and usually find jobs commensurate with their training. A survey in 1979 showed that among the graduates of the 1978 class of two major madrassas in Karachi and one in the NWFP, only 6 percent were still unemployed by the middle of 1979.

Although the ulema have vigorously resisted efforts by the state to introduce changes in their madrassas, it would be wrong to assume that madrassas have become petrified forever. Contrary to general belief, traditional orthodoxy has never stagnated into a kind of intellectual-theological rigidity. Although the madrasa system of education remains an exclusive and relatively isolated phenomenon, there are, nevertheless, powerful economic, social and political forces and institutions that cut across socio-economic and cultural strata and tend to create new linkages, howsoever weak, between the traditional and modern sectors.

These processes and institutional changes have become more significant in the post-independence era, as the changed political context has created a series of symbolic and institutional linkages (e.g. shared religious symbols; government and private-sponsored Islamic educational and cultural activities, projects, and advisory institutions; political parties and elected assemblies; and communication media, particularly the growing vernacular press) that facilitate interaction between the ulema and the modern educated elite. It is rather surprising that these interactions (especially in the context of an increasingly mature democratic political process in Bangladesh) have not so far created a measure of shared intellectual space and a common language of religious discourse between the ulema and the modern-educated Muslim intellectuals.

Two recent attempts to establish what was described as "modern type" madrassas may pave the way for some integration, even at a very small scale. One is the establishment of Madrasa Darur Rashad in Mirpur, Dhaka, which gives admission only to college graduates and has a condensed five-year course of Islamic studies. The other is

Dhaka Cadet Madrassa, which combines all subjects of college education with the usual Islamic sciences, using English as the medium of instruction for general subjects and Arabic for Islamic religious subjects. The quality of the English language teaching in these two madrassas is far better than that of public or private sector colleges. Market forces, it appears, have done something here that government would not, i.e., these madrassas seemed to have emerged in response to the increasing demand for English-speaking, modern-educated ulema to act as imams and khatibs for the Bangladeshi expatriate communities in the United Kingdom and North America.

Another such example is that of a Nadva-linked madrassa in Chittagong, where both Arabic and English are used as the medium of instruction and more than 90 percent of the students merge in the modern educational stream upon graduation from the madrassa. A similar example is from Bhera, near Sarghoda in Pakistan, where the madrassa established by Pir Karam Shah provides all facilities to its students to pursue college and university degrees.

It is important to note that whatever changes have taken place in the madrassa education have been initiated from outside of the madrassa education, or have come as a response to challenges posed by the state. One such challenge was posed by Ayub Khan's modernizing regime as to the centrality of the role of the ulema in Pakistan's religio-cultural life. The ulema responded to this challenge in a most creative way. Not only did the number of higher madrassas double during the Ayub period but also, in order to expand the recruitment base of students for these madrassas, hundreds of "feeder" madrassas were established in small towns. Management practices and educational procedures of madrassas were rationalized, and all major schools of thought—Deobandis, Barelvis, Ahl-i-Hadith, and Shias—organized federations of their respective madrassas. These federations helped introduce reformed syllabi, rationalized the examination system, and afforded the ulema an effective platform for coordinating their strategies aimed at countering the government's efforts to reduce their social and political influence and social autonomy.

The bureaucratization of the madrassa system also included the rationalization and expansion of its financial resource base through the recruitment of the business community into its management structures, a measure that later proved to be an important source of

funding for the madrassa system. The expanding economy of the 1960s provided ample funds, and the new urban development schemes provided easy and cheap land for building new madrassas and expanding the existing ones. The spectacular expansion during the Ayub Khan era of Oarul Ulum, Madrassa Arabiya Islamiya, and Dar-ul-Ulum Amjadiya of Karachi; lamia Ashrafiya, lamia Nayimiya, lamia Madina, and Dar-ul-Ulum Hizbul Ahnaf of Lahore; Madrassa Khairul Madaaris and Madrassa Qasimul Ulum of Multan; and Oarul Ulum Haqqaniya of Akora Khatak and Dar-ul-Ulum Sarhad of Peshawar, gives clear evidence of the relationship between economic growth, urban development, and religious revival.

The rapid expansion of the economy during the decade of development provided the ulema with new and large sources of income for their madrassas. This not only mitigated the economic crisis experienced by the religious establishment during the 1950s, but also lessened its dependence on the rural-based feudal class. Its new financiers were the bazaar merchants, small- and middle-level businessmen, commission agents, wholesalers and, in Karachi, people like Valika, Bhawani and Adamji, members of the top twenty-two families in Pakistan. This meant the religious establishment now had the financial wherewithal not only to face the challenge of the state, but also to adjust its financial base in accordance with new socio- economic realities.

The mid-1960s also witnessed important curriculum reforms in the madrassas. Among other things, the most important reform in major madrassas was the introduction of the English language and other modern subjects, especially in the fields of comparative religion, history, and law. Some prominent madrassas in Punjab linked their courses of studies with the general education curriculum, thus enabling their students to acquire degrees from the government schools and colleges and obtain jobs in the "secular" sector also. The younger generation of prominent ulema families was especially encouraged to acquire modern (English) education to prepare them to deal with the state authorities on the one hand, and with their modernist and fundamentalist adversaries on the other. This paid enormous dividends during the Bhutto and Zia periods. Maulana Taqi Usmani (son of Maulana Mufti Muhammed Shafi) of Karachi, Pir Karam Shah of Sarghoda, and Maulana Samiul Haq (son of Maulana

Abdual Haq) of Akora Khatak and others among their cohorts, by dint of their exposure to modern education and facility with the English language—besides, of course, their traditional madrassa education—were appointed as federal Shariat Court judges, and as members of the Council of Islamic Ideology and many other newly created Islamic institutions, commissions, and committees during the Zia period.

In the case of Bangladesh also, the ulema have shown remarkable flexibility in adapting to the changing social, economic, and political conditions, as is evident in the important changes in the social organization of madrassa education. The Alia madrassa system is a spectacular example of how modern and traditional systems of education were combined, notwithstanding its well-known inadequacies and shortcomings. But what is not widely known and appreciated are the important changes that have been introduced in Quomi madrassas during the past three decades. The following changes are worth mentioning:

1. Bangla has replaced Urdu as the medium of instruction. This is an important step in the process of “indigenization” of Islam and Islamic scholarship and their de-linking from their North Indian Islamic wellsprings.
2. Bangla has been made a compulsory subject up to the secondary level (Marhala-i-Sanvia). It is interesting to note that Quomi madrassas did not teach Bangla at any level before 1972.
3. Subjects such as politics, economics, and history of Islam in the Indian subcontinent up to the establishment of Bangladesh have been added.
4. English has been added as a compulsory subject in the primary section, and several madrassas now provide facilities for English education at higher levels as well.
5. Elementary school education has now been integrated within the Quomi madrassas, incorporating all subjects of general education along with the usual Islamic education.
6. Comparative religion has been added to the curriculum.

7. Bureaucratization of admission and administrative procedures, and professionalization of management practices, especially in large madrassas, are being undertaken. Personal computers will play an important role in this process, and soon several large madrassas will have their own websites.
8. A major breakthrough has been the standardization of academic performance evaluation by instituting a centralized system of curriculum, syllabi, and examinations under the auspices of two major federations of Quomi madrassas: Wafaqul Madaaris, which has 1,500 affiliated madrassas, and Anjumun Ittehadul Madaaris, which has more than 500 affiliated madrassas.
9. Funding resources have been diversified. Although traditional sources—zakat and sadakas raised from local communities and local and Pakistani business communities' donations—are still important, the expatriate Bangladeshi workers in the Gulf states, Western Europe, and North America have now become a substantial source of funding for Quomi madrassas. Similarly, Europe and North America-based Muslim non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as some individual Muslim philanthropists in the Gulf and South Africa, are also providing funds, especially for elementary religious education. In the case of a few Ahl-I-Hadith madrassas—the largest being in Rajshahi—the Saudi-based World Muslim League (Rabita Alim Al Islami) has also been a generous donor.

A great deal has been written on madrassas in the West in the wake of the September eleventh tragedy and the U.S. war on terrorism. Several reports on CNN and PBS, as well as Jessica Stern's article in *Foreign Affairs* and Jeffrey Goldberg's article in the *New York Times Magazine*, besides several dozen columns of Thomas Friedman, have suggested that the madrassas in Pakistan have become a hotbed of Islamic extremism and the breeding ground of terrorism. They have been variously described as "dens of terror," "jihad universities," "jihad factories," and, as the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee described them, "factories of terror." In general perception, madrassas have become synonymous with terrorism and terrorist training camps. Many journalists and commentators have suggested

that these madrassas teach “jihadi literature” in their course of studies and that their entire curriculum is intended to produce “holy warriors.” It has also been suggested by many Western scholars that there is an inherent relationship between what is taught in the madrassas on the one hand and religious extremism, Talibanism, militancy, anti-Americanism, and even terrorism, on the other. It is also argued that madrassa students, through their reading of religious texts, become “soldiers of God” and engage in militant activities against those they consider enemies of Islam. Let us critically examine these assertions.

First, if the madrassa education is the only or the main cause of Islamic militancy, radicalism, and anti-Americanism, why did these tendencies not manifest themselves before the 1990s? The curriculum of the madrassas has remained the same for about 150 years. Second, those who suggest an inherent relationship between the madrassa curriculum and Islamic militancy and describe madrassas as “jihad factories” are probably unaware of the fact that this curriculum is the most pacifist in its orientation. Its approach to Islam is ultra-conservative, literalist, legalist, and sectarian, but definitely not revolutionary, radical, or militant. It is interesting to note that in the standard syllabus on the study of Hadith, chapters on jihad in all the six standard collections of the Prophetic tradition are not discussed at all. During the study of fiqh (jurisprudence) texts also, the entire time is spent on “problems of menstruation,” laws relating to marriage and divorce, and other legal hairsplitting rather than on political or jihadic issues.

There is absolutely nothing in the madrassa curriculum that can be deemed as promoting or encouraging militancy, not to mention terrorism. Radicalism that we see in some madrassas in Pakistan today is an extraneous phenomenon brought into madrassas by some international and domestic political actors who wanted to use the religious capital and manpower of these madrassas for their own objectives.

An overwhelming majority of madrassas in Pakistan—as in India and Bangladesh—are engaged in traditional Islamic studies and are NOT involved in any militant activities, or even sectarian strife. In fact, most of them shy away from politics in order to concentrate on their primary mission. It was only after the Soviet invasion of

Afghanistan in 1979 that some madrassas on the northern and southern border areas of Pakistan—which always had a majority of their students from Afghanistan—came to be associated with the Afghan jihad movement against the Soviet Union. One also has to remember that there were five million Afghan refugees in hundreds of refugee camps in the NWFP and Baluchistan. It is estimated that 40 percent of them were school-age children, many of them orphans. These madrassas provided them with free food, shelter, and basic skills of how to read and write, along with some Islamic education.

Most of the madrassas associated with militancy and terrorism after the mid-1990s were established in the 1980s. But what were established for the particular purpose of fighting against the Soviets were in fact military training camps where some religious education was also imparted, obviously to strengthen the spirit of jihad against the Soviets. The point is that they were not the institutions originally conceived as madrassas that later turned into terrorist training camps; they were, from their very inception, conceived as militant training camps and were given a cover of a madrasa to Islamically legitimize their operations and to solicit funds from all over the Muslim world. The story of these madrassas is thus integrally linked with the story of Afghan jihad of the 1980s and of the Cold War that created the political conditions for this jihad. Therefore, the answers to the questions being asked these days in the media and in scholarly and policy circles—who established these madrassas? why they were created? who provided them generously with funds? and more importantly, who revived the so far dormant tradition of jihad as an armed struggle against the infidels?—lie not only in Kabul or Islamabad or Peshawar or Riyadh, but also in Langley, VA.

As we all know, after the Afghan jihad was over, the “facilities” created for the Afghan jihad in these madrassas came in handy for another jihad in Kashmir, again with the involvement of the Pakistan Government. What the Kashmir operation and the proliferation of jihadi organizations in the mid-1990s did was to bring this madrasa-based militancy from the tribal belt of the NWFP to the plains of the Punjab, where it was linked up with sectarian violence and anti-Indianism.