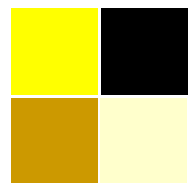


Madrasah Education in Bangladesh

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Madrasah Education in Bangladesh

Introduction

Madrasah education is a system whereby Islamic branches of knowledge are taught besides the teaching of general branches of knowledge. Madrasahs are generally known as “religious schools”. According to Dr. Manaros B. Boransing, “*Madrasah* (pl. *madaris*) generally refers to Muslim private schools with core emphasis on Islamic studies and Arabic literacy.”

Madrasahs are usually privately-operated schools, which rely on the support of the local community or foreign donors and Governments, particularly from Islamic or Muslim countries.

There are two types of Madrasahs in Bangladesh. One is known as *Alia Madrasah* and the other is known as *Qawmi Madrasah*. The first Alia Madrasah was established in this sub-continent in 1780 by the British Government¹. Eventually, the Madrasah Education Board of Bengal was established that formed the foundation for formal Madrasah education in this part of the sub-continent.

Prior to the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, Alia Madrasahs in East Pakistan used to focus only on Arabic Literature and subjects related to Islamic knowledge. After the independence of Bangladesh, some steps were taken to modernize Madrasah education system. General subjects like Bengali, Mathematics, English, Social Science, and General Science were made compulsory. In 1978, the Madrasah Education Board was formed under the Ordinance for the Modernization of Madrasah Education².

Qawmi Madrasahs, on the other hand, are not guided by the Government. This parallel system is entirely controlled and operated by the private sector that actually relies on the support of the local community or foreign donors. In the Qawmi Madrasah system, students are taught only Arabic and subjects pertaining to Islamic knowledge³.

Curriculum of Madrasah Education System

The debates relating to Madrasah education in Bangladesh have been ongoing for decades but the debates were more strengthened in the

¹ Source: <http://www.bmeb.gov.bd>

² Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladesh_Madrasah_Education_Board

³ Madrasahs in Bangladesh by Tiffany Ellis. IPCS Special Report, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. August 2007.

intervening years of 2008 to 2013. Although the Madrasah issues have been discussed among the Muslim community for an exceedingly long period of time, it is unfortunate that till today, significant revolutions and achievements have not yet been attained.

The curriculum of Alia and Qawmi Madrasahs is different from each other. The Quran Majeed, Ilmu Tazbeed, Hadith Sharif, Fiqh, Usul al-Fiqh, Arabic literature, Arabic Grammar, Ilmu al-Balagat, Ilmu al Mantiq, etc. are the main subjects of Alia Madrasahs. However, besides these subjects, there are also combinations of general studies like Bengali, Mathematics, English, Social Science, General Science, Physics, Chemistry, Geography, etc., which have been made compulsory. It is to be mentioned that all students do not need to complete all the mentioned subjects. Like general curriculum, Madrasah curriculum is also divided in various disciplines, such as Arts, Science and Commerce.

On the other hand, the curriculum of Qawmi Madrasahs only contains the subjects related to Arabic literature and Islamic Knowledge. The students of Qawmi Madrasahs learn only the Quran Majeed, Ilmu Tazbeed, Hadith Sharif, Fiqh, Usul al-Fiqh, Arabic Literature, Arabic Grammar, Ilmu al-Balagat, and Ilmu al Mantiq. But the curriculum does not include the general subjects like Alia Madrasahs. Therefore, the students of Qawmi Madrasahs usually do not get the opportunity to gain knowledge about modern science and technology and other aspects of the modern world. This is the reason why students from Qawmi Madrasahs usually have less likelihood to get admission into general universities, or having employment in the Government departments.

In August 2006, the Government of Bangladesh recognized the degrees of Qawmi Madrasahs. As a result, the graduates from Qawmi Madrasahs now at least have the opportunity to apply for the Government jobs. This was a significant step forward for the students of Qawmi Madrasahs. At that time, the former Education Minister Dr. M Osman Farruk urged modernizing the system by saying, “Madrasah education is less qualitative. We need to modernize madrasa education, not campaign to repeal it.”⁴

⁴ Madrasahs in Bangladesh by Tiffany Ellis. IPCS Special Report, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. August 2007.

Degrees Offered under Alia Madrasah System

Bangladesh Alia Madrasah education system consists of the following degrees/certifications:

- Ibtadayee or Junior Dakhil Certificate & Junior School certificate (JDC/JSC);
- Dakhil (SSC Equivalent);
- Alim, (HSC Equivalent);
- Fazil (BA Equivalent), and
- Kamil (Masters Equivalent).

At present, there are many registered Alia Madrasahs under Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board. The following table contains the total number of Alia Madrasahs under each degree/certificate programme in 2013:

Type of Madrasahs	Units
Ibtadayee	6,869
Dakhil	9,322
Alim	2,799
Fazil	1,256
Kamil	200
Total	20,446

Source: The Controller of Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board & Islamic University, Kushtia.

Note: Fazil and Kamil are now under Islamic University, Kushtia.

This is to highlight here that besides the above mentioned Madrasahs, there are also many Madrasahs, which have not yet been registered under the Madrasah Education Board. These Madrasahs are newly established in different parts of the country. Students from these Madrasahs usually sit for examinations under the registered Madrasahs.

The total numbers of examinees in different degree programs in the last three years were as follows:

Years	Ibtadayee	Dakhil	Alim
2010	2,75,591	2,12,472	43,728
2011	3,24,225	2,40,590	45,117
2012	3,56,036	2,76,569	85,515
2013	-	-	88,814

Source: The Controller of Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board

Regulatory Bodies of Qawmi Madrasahs

The education system under Qawmi Madrasahs originated from the traditional Muslim culture. At present, in Bangladesh, there are many regulatory bodies that control the education of Qawmi Madrasahs. The most recognized one is called "*Befaqul Madarrisin*". Under this governing body, there are about 2,300 or more Qawmi Madrasahs in the entire country. In 2006, this number was around 1,500 and all those were teaching the *Deobandi* School of thoughts⁵. Another well-known recognized regulatory body for Qawmi Madrasahs is known as "*Shamsul Haque Faridpuri*". Under this body, there are about 150 Qawmi Madrasahs in Bangladesh.

The Objectives of Madrasah Education

Islam has encouraged acquiring knowledge. The first such guidance is found in Sura al-Iqra of the Holy Quran where Allah orders believers, "اقرأ باسم ربك الذي خلق (Read in the name of your Lord)".

In one of Hadiths, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "*The seeking of knowledge is incumbent for every Muslim.*"⁶

In another Hadith, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) mentioned, "*If anyone travels on a road in search of knowledge, Allah will cause him to travel on one of the roads of Paradise. The angels will lower their wings in their great pleasure with one who seeks knowledge. The inhabitants of the Heavens and the Earth and (even) the fish in the deep waters will ask forgiveness for the learned man. The superiority of the learned over the devout is like that of the moon, on the night when it is full, over the rest of the stars. The learned are the heirs of the Prophets, and the Prophets leave (no monetary inheritance), they leave only knowledge, and he who takes it takes an abundant portion.*"⁷

Since Allah SWT has encouraged all of us to read, now one might ask the question, "What should we read?" The answer is not provided in this verse. Now the question might arise should we read only the Holy Quran? Or does it also refer to other source of knowledge?

⁵ After checking information on Wikipedia, the author personally obtained these data from reliable sources. The data on the Qawmi Madrasahs are not easily available.

⁶ Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 74, compiled by Imam Abu Zakariya Yahya bin Sharaf an-Nawawi. First Edition, Hardback, International Islamic Publishers, Karachi, Pakistan. 1983.

⁷ Sunan of Abu-Dawood, Hadith 1631, translated by Aisha Abdarahman at-Tarjumana and Yaqub Johnson. 1st Edition, Hardback, International Islamic Publisher, Karachi, Pakistan. 1983.

The scholars have different views regarding the above concept of acquiring knowledge. There are also different approaches regarding which types of knowledge are obligatory for a believer. One of the most important views was put forward by the following Hadith narrated by Anas Ibn Malik (r):

طلب العلم فريضة علي كل مسلم و ان طالب العلم يستغفر له كل شيء حتي الحيتان في البحر

“Seeking Knowledge is a Duty upon every Muslim, and everyone in the heavens and on earth prays for forgiveness for the seeker of knowledge, even the fish in the sea”⁸.

In its interpretation, majority jurists are on the views that every Muslim is obliged to acquire Islamic knowledge up to which a person can make a difference between *haram* and *halal*⁹ and he becomes able to lead his life according to the right path. On this point of view, it can be said that seeking Islamic knowledge is *Ibadah*¹⁰.

It is very well known to all of us that the Holy Quran and Hadiths are the main sources of all types of knowledge. Scholars have agreed upon that it does not only refer to the Holy Quran. It also refers to the knowledge, which is useful for human being.

Therefore, every Muslim must acquire sufficient Islamic knowledge so that he can lead his life according to the teachings of Islam. However, the majority Muslim parents wish to see their children attending and completing mainstream secular schools where religious teachings are very limited.

The Madrasah system is planned to produce the religious leaders to lead the community on religious matters while the general schools provide basic Islamic education i.e. *fardhuain* to students who attend main stream schools¹¹.

Madrasah education system combines all sources of knowledge whereas the curriculum of general education does not consist of adequate Islamic knowledge. Although there is one subject under “Islamic Studies”, but I

8 Sahih Al-Jami', Hadith Number: 3914. The actual title of the book referred to as *Sahih al-Bukhari*, according to Ibn al-Salah, is (*al-Jaami' al-Sahih al-Musnad al-Mukhtasar min Umur Rasool Allah wa sunanihi wa Ayyamihi*).

9 'Haram' means prohibited and 'Halal' means allowed or legal.

10 'Ibadah' means worship.

11 Teaching Methodologies in a Weekend Madrasah: A Study at Jamiyah Education Centre, Singapore by Nora Rustham, Arifin Mamat, and Adnan Abd Rashid. International Journal of Arts and Commerce, Vol. 1 No. 2, Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia.

believe the scope of this subject is very narrow and this subject alone is not enough to understand Islam comprehensively.

The Superiority of Madrasahs over General Schools

Now an argument might arise on who is better in knowledge, a student of General education system or a student of Madrasah education system?

The answer is obvious - a student from Madrasahs. This is because the same general subjects are being taught by both General and Madrasah education systems, but the students from Madrasahs are getting more opportunities to acquire Islamic knowledge, which is not available under the General education system.

As a Muslim, everyone is obliged to understand Islam comprehensively in order to differentiate between *Haram* and *Halal* and to lead one's life in the right path. This is the area where a student of General education system lags behind.

Obstacles for Madrasah Students

There is always a debate on the issue that since a Madrasah student does not complete 200 marks in both English and Bangla at Alim/HSC level, so they are considered poor in both these subjects. It is the result of the fact that Madrasah Education Board has reduced the total marks from 200 to 100 for both English and Bangla.

However, this debate will be resolved if we look to the results of the admission tests conducted by various public universities. I heard from my friends that during recent years, several Madrasah students obtained high ranking in admission tests, especially in the University of Dhaka, Medical Collages, BUET, etc. BUET is considered as the most competitive University in Bangladesh. Now the question is, if a Madrasah student is poor in their general skills, then how those students could obtain leading positions in the admission tests?

The most unfortunate thing to note that Madrasah students still do not get the opportunity to enter into their desired subjects such as Law, Economics, English Literature, Bengali, etc., especially in the University of Dhaka just because they did not complete 200 marks in both English and Bangla. Now the question is if they do not have merits and are not competitive enough to enter into these subjects, then how could they obtain such excellent results in the admission tests?

In 2008, the students of Madrasahs who had obtained high ranking in admission tests of Dhaka University, but were later refused by the authority to get admission into their desired subjects, subsequently filed a lawsuit in the court. Fortunately, the court's verdict was in favor of the Madrasah students.

However, after that incident had happened, the students were allowed to enter into subjects, such as Law, Economics, etc., but recently I heard that they are still being refused by authorities to enter into the Departments of Law, Economics, English, and Development Study, since the entrance requirement for these departments is at least 200 marks in English.

Underestimating the Value of Madrasah Education

In Bangladesh, it is quite common that if parents have three children, they send the most meritorious one to the General school and the relatively weaker child is sent to the Madrasah. The child who is the weakest amongst the three is eventually sent to the Qawmi Madrasah.

If such a trend continues, then how this weak student will study more subjects than the General education system? Naturally he is weak in merit, yet he has to take more burden than a student of a General school. Despite this adverse situation, still the Madrasah students are able to overcome these obstacles and eventually make themselves bright in the society.

Three Streams – Three World Views

As three of them have entered into three different schooling systems, they will have three different worldviews, and the ultimate results will be observed at the end of their school career. The most meritorious one gets a highly paid job, although he has a very little knowledge about Islam. After he gets married, he does not even instruct his wife to cover her *awra*.

However, the other brother, who has entered into a Madrasah, will have a completely different world view. The weakest one who has gone to Qawmi Madrasah, on the other hand, will have another world view, which will be distinct from his other two brothers as well.

Usually, they stay together in one home under the same roof. After few days it can be observed that a conflict will emerge amongst the three brothers. One says you have done *haram* (prohibited) things, the other one says you have learnt too much; so you are on the wrong path, etc. And then they become separate from each other. This conflict arises because of three different worldviews.

Once a student finishes at least Alim/HSC level and eventually enters into a university, he or she should be able to become a successful engineer, doctor, lawyer, accountant, journalist etc., when the student life is over. He should also be able to analyze the existing system from Islamic perspectives. This particular quality is very important because, as a Muslim, everyone has to abide by the Islamic rules and regulations. In this world, everyone has his own worldview; for instance Secularism, Communism, etc. Muslims need to modify the existing system with Islamic perspectives. In order to achieve this, they must have to acquire adequate Islamic knowledge.

If we look into the history of Rightly Guided Caliphs, we will see that when they used to go to the mosques to perform their prayers, they used to become Imams of such prayers. Every Muslim should be like this. Wherever they will go, they should become or they should have the ability to lead the Ummah.

Now if an individual graduates from a General school, he or she would not be able to become an Imam in the prayers. May be he is a true Muslim, but he is not able to lead the prayer because he did not have the opportunity to gain sufficient Islamic knowledge. He might acquire such knowledge by his own or through his family, but it is very difficult to find such individuals now a days.

Conclusion

The aim of the present article is to provide further insights about the status of Madrasah education in Bangladesh. Obviously this could act as a ground for further investigation. Madrasah students obviously play an important role in every aspects of social life.

The Hadith by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in respect of loss of sacred knowledge could be used here as a source of reference. Abdullah Bin Amr Bin Al-Asi (r) narrated that, the Messenger of Allah said, *"Allah does not take away the knowledge by taking it away from (the hearts of) the people, but takes it away by the death of the religious learned men till when none of the religious learned men remains, people will take as their leaders ignorant persons who when consulted will give their verdict without knowledge. So they will go astray and will lead the people astray."*¹²

¹² Sahih Al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 100, translated by Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan. Volume 1, Darussalam, Saudi Arabia. 1997.

With the help of the above mentioned Hadith, it can be said that, Islamic knowledge will be taken away from the people with the demise of great scholars of Islam. Madrasah education system produces these scholars. Therefore, in order to keep the sacred knowledge alive, Madrasah education system must be protected as well as encouraged. The Government must provide such education high priority and proper value to enhance true Islamic knowledge in the society. Otherwise, people will rely on ignorant individuals and will seek Islamic legal opinions from them, and as a result, these individuals will give wrong opinions without any knowledge and thereafter misguide the people.

About the Author



Muhammad Boni Amin was born in Jessore, Bangladesh. He is now a student of the Faculty of Laws (LL.B Honors) in the International Islamic University, Malaysia. He has finished his Dakhil (SSC) in 2007 from a local Madrasah in Jessore, and in 2009, he finished Alim (HSC) from Tamirul Millat Kamil Madrasah in Dhaka. He secured CGPA-5/5 in Dakhil and CGPA-5/5 (Golden) in Alim examination.

In 2011, he served Bangladesh Army for six months as an Arabic-English interpreter for “Officers Basic Course” (OBC-34) in “Signal Training Center & School” (STC&S). During free times, he likes to travel and read Bengali and English newspapers. He is a recipient of IDEAS FOR DEVELOPMENT (IFD) Scholarship.