



## Religions and Development Research Programme

### The state and madraas in India

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Madrasas in India appear to be caught between the need to maintain their identity as centres of Islamic studies and culture and to remain relevant to the present-day needs of the communities they serve. This research focuses on the relationships between madrasas and the state, as the former attempt to negotiate between these competing pressures and the latter seeks to support and 'modernize' them. It throws light on the motives and strategies of madrasas and their associations, the central government and two State governments (Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal), and assesses selected aspects of madrasa modernization.

The research in India was undertaken as part of an international comparative study that sought to develop a better understanding of state-madrasa relationships and the ways in which they influence and affect attempts to reform madrasa education. Based on a review of secondary materials, interviews with government officials and religious leaders at both central and State levels, and visits to selected madrasas in the two case study states, it provides a balanced and empirically based analysis of a complex and sensitive issue.

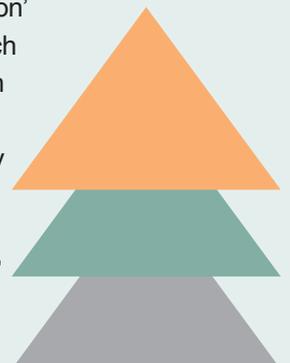
About a fifth of the population of India is Muslim, although the proportion varies at State and local levels. Overall, Muslims are a disadvantaged group, with educational levels lower than the population as a whole. Although fewer than four per cent of Muslim children attend madrasas, both central and State governments have developed programmes designed to 'modernize' their curriculum. However, their real motives for doing so are not clear and the interventions are regarded with suspicion by many Muslims.

From being the main education system during the Mughal period, producing administrators as well as religious scholars and teachers, madrasas' response to the establishment of a schooling system on the British model to produce local staff for the colonial

administration was to retreat from their close relationship with the state to the provision of religious education.

State-madrasa relationships are shaped by constitutional, political and educational factors:

- Muslims in India have official minority status: their right to practise their religion and establish institutions (including educational institutions) is safeguarded in the constitution, enabling them to resist excessive state interference.
- The nature and extent of state engagement with madrasas is influenced by the political ideology and electoral interests of national and regional political parties. When madrasas feel threatened, they may seek to protect themselves by organising and seeking political backing.
- Data on the numbers of madrasas and maktabas (part-time schools for religious education linked to local mosques) and student enrolment are poor, although it is asserted that numbers have increased in some parts of the country in recent years.
- In addition to their primary purpose of providing religious education, many madrasas have long included a few other academic and vocational subjects in their curriculum, although the coverage and quality was generally very limited.
- At present 'modernization' of the content and quality of madrasa education is the stated objective of state interventions in the affairs of madrasas, but several critics expressed a belief that the government may be intending to make more extensive 'reforms' in the near future.
- Although participation in the 'modernization' process is voluntary, in some States, such as West Bengal, extensive secularization of the curriculum of state-supported madrasas offering primary and secondary education, control over the recruitment of teachers and increased government monitoring in some states confirm critics' fear that the state intends to increase its control over madrasas.





- Madrasas as a whole are not organized to negotiate with the state for support on their own terms. Therefore, while the better-resourced madrasas choose to stay out of state-funded programmes, a significant proportion of the poorly funded are happy to engage and to comply with the conditions imposed in return for the financial and other support provided.
- A variety of support programmes are on offer (often centrally funded but delivered by State governments), but a variety of implementation problems were identified, especially in Uttar Pradesh.

Given the general environment of mutual suspicion and opposition from some quarters to the state-led process of modernization, both the state and the madrasas are treading cautiously. Some possible policy implications of the findings of this study are:

- Serious attempts to improve the educational levels of the Muslim minority in India must focus on the vast majority of Muslim children who attend government schools. In addition, measures to achieve equivalence between madrasas and government schools to enable Muslim students to progress to higher levels of education are desirable.
- Madrasas' and maktabas' constitutional right to provide religious education must be upheld.

- Improvements to the range of subjects and quality of teaching in madrasas providing primary and secondary education are needed.
- Where madrasas themselves lack the resources for improvements, there is a role for government to contribute through funding, quality control etc, but problems in the design and implementation of the current programmes need to be addressed.
- Madrasas seeking to modernize and obtain government support appear to have more positive and constructive relationships with the government if they form an association that can interact with a government equivalent such as the West Bengal Board for Madrasa Education.
- Further research is needed to identify the motives and socio-economic characteristics of parents who send their children to madrasas, and to evaluate the outcomes of madrasa modernization policies for madrasas and their associations, as well as students and their wider communities.

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