Beyond the Madrasa: Muslim Communities and Educational Institutes in India Today

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Madrasas in India boast a storied past, serving as beacons of Islamic education and cultural values since the medieval era. Central to this tradition is the Madrasa Nizamiyya, a revered educational model that originated in the Seljuk Empire. These schools were not mere religious centers; they were esteemed hubs of multifaceted learning, where students delved into subjects as diverse as philosophy, medicine, mathematics, and astronomy.

In the 18th century, Shah Waliyyullah of Delhi, recognizing a deviation from the core values of the Madrasa Nizamiyya, took upon himself the task of reinvigorating Islamic education in India. Disturbed by the stagnation he perceived in Islamic scholarship, he embarked on a mission of curriculum reform. Drawing inspiration from the Nizamiyya ethos, Shah Waliyyullah championed a more comprehensive Islamic study approach. His reforms went beyond just subjects, promoting a pedagogy rooted in understanding Islamic teachings' core essence, fostering critical thought, analysis, and discourse. As a testament to his visionary efforts, the current madrasa system in India marries traditional Islamic teachings with subjects like mathematics and science, making education both religiously rooted and contemporarily relevant.

Yet, the contemporary journey of madrasas in India is a tightrope walk between veneration and skepticism. While they are lauded for preserving Islamic heritage, they often grapple with perceptions marred by media and political narratives, as exemplified by the statements made by politicians linking madrasas to extremism. Furthermore, the Indian political arena sometimes casts madrasas as electoral tools, amplifying their position in sociopolitical debates. However, recognizing their indispensable role, initiatives like the 2017 government program strive to harmonize madrasa education with modern subjects, ensuring students are adept at both preserving traditions and facing today's world challenges.

Offering a concise overview of the state of madrasas in India, Nilanjana Gupta's "Beyond the Madrasa: Muslim Communities and Educational Institutes in India Today" stands as a significant and timely addition to the discourse surrounding Madrasas in the country. In an era where the role and relevance of Madrasas in India are subjects of intense discussion and

sometimes misconceptions, her book offers a fresh perspective. The title itself suggests a deep dive into the evolving world of Muslim education in India, extending beyond the conventional image of Madrasas.

The book concentrates primarily on the present but also delves into historical contexts to provide a comprehensive understanding. It emphasizes that madrasas, historically, were never uniform entities. Instead, their characteristics and nature varied significantly based on regional influences, prevailing political regimes, and the specific socio-political dynamics of their time and location, a trait that continues to be evident in contemporary observations.

This book stands out for its foundation, which is derived from in-depth interviews with those actively involved in the daily operations of madrasas rather than from the writings of others. It provides a thorough overview of madrasas across India, from Gujarat to Assam and Kashmir to Kerala. The book explores their curricula, graduates' higher education and how they're being operated. The author explores these institutions and finds a quite different story, in stark contrast to charges that they are "harboring terrorism." Every institution the author visits aims to inculcate in the thousands of students who walk through its doors each year the principles of responsible and productive citizenship.

In the first chapter, the author explores the unique history of the madrasa system in Kerala, shaped by the state's distinct cultural and religious context. These Islamic educational institutions date back to the early days of Islam in the region, a development closely linked to Kerala's historical trade ties with Arab nations. Initially, these madrasas primarily taught Islamic theology, jurisprudence, and the Arabic language. However, they have undergone significant evolution, setting them apart from their counterparts in other parts of India. A key aspect of this evolution is the incorporation of local culture and traditions, especially the Malayalam language, into both the curriculum and teaching methodologies. The author takes the reader through various notable madrasas in Kerala. The Samastha Kerala Jam'iyyathul Ulama stands out for advocating an integrated education system. The author also explores the Tanmiyathul Uloom madrasa in Vazhkkad, which is affiliated with the University of Calicut, accredited by the UGC, and supported by the Government of Kerala. Institutions such as The Rouzathul Arabic College and Farook College are highlighted for their appeal to non-Muslim students, especially those seeking to enhance their career prospects in Gulf countries through learning Arabic. The book provides a detailed analysis of the Darul Huda Islamic University,

discussing its vision, curriculum, and everyday operations. It also looks at the perspectives of various Muslim sects in Kerala, exploring their views on each other and their respective approaches to religious education.

Chapter two provides a comprehensive history of madrasas in Gujarat, a western Indian state, tracing their origins to the 11th and 12th centuries with the spread of Islam in the region. The Sultanate of Gujarat (1391–1573) marked a significant period for these Islamic educational institutions, as they received royal support and flourished. However, the introduction of Western education during British colonial rule posed challenges to the traditional Islamic education system. Despite these hurdles, madrasas remained vital for the Muslim community's education. Some adapted by integrating secular subjects into their curriculum, while others continued to focus on traditional religious teachings. The book pays special attention to the Dawood Bohras community and its efforts in advancing madrasas, thereby strengthening the Muslim community in Gujarat. It highlights Aljamea-tus-Saifiya, founded in 1809, which has evolved into a renowned institution providing both secular and religious education, with a challenging curriculum that encourages students to participate in government examinations. A notable distinction is made between Anjman-i-Islam, established in 1876 by Badruddin Tyabji, and other Muslim educational initiatives, and the Dawoodi Bohras' educational tradition. The Dawoodi Bohras primarily use Lisaan ud Dawat as the medium of instruction, unlike the more common use of Urdu. The book also sheds light on the success of the Anglo Urdu High School, another initiative by Badruddin Tyabji, which significantly contributed to improving the educational status of Muslims in Gujarat.

In the third chapter, the book explores the Muslim communities and madrasas in the state of Maharashtra, with a particular focus on Mumbai, the state's capital. Mumbai, a city born out of the British Empire's needs, has become a melting pot of diverse Muslim groups, encompassing Arabs, Turks, Iranis, Turanis, Sindhis, Hindis, Madrasis, Malabaris, Gujaratis, Lahoris, Kashmiris, Multanis, Dakanis, and more. This chapter sheds light on the Bohra community's significant role in the development of Mumbai, emphasizing the mutual influence between Mumbai and the Bohras. Notably, the chapter discusses the ambitious Saifee Burhani Upliftment Project initiated by the Bohra community. The Bohras' contributions also extend to education, as evidenced by the establishment of Burhani College in the 1970s, offering degrees in commerce and arts subjects to students from diverse religious backgrounds. Furthermore, the chapter highlights

a shift in the practice of donating Zakat, with a transition from religious leaders to private charitable trusts approved by Imams. There are also detailed insights into two prominent madrasas in Maharashtra: Darul Uloom Mehboob E Subhani in Kurla, representing the Barelwi sect, and the Markazul Ma'arif Education and Research Center (MMERC) in Jogeshwari (West), associated with Mohammed Burhanuddin Qasmi and representing Deobandi thought. A key distinction between these sects lies in their views on the concept of Piri-Muridi (Master-Disciple institution). Deobandi considers it alien to the early Islamic religious universe and advocates for its abandonment, while Barelwis defends and establishes it as a justified institution. These madrasas are navigating a complex path, balancing the preservation of traditional religious education with the evolving educational needs and societal dynamics of contemporary India.

The book's fourth chapter examines the history of madrasas in Assam, a state renowned for its rich and varied cultural and historical heritage in Northeast India. Notably, Assam has recently taken the decision to close down all government-funded madrasas with the intention of transforming them into conventional schools. Additionally, the state has gained prominence for implementing the National Register for Citizens (NRC), a process that led to approximately 1.9 million of 33 million residents being deemed illegal due to their inability to provide sufficient documentation to establish their citizenship status. The book reviews the complexities of Assamese identity, its political dynamics, and its impact, particularly in the chapter's early sections. It reveals that Islam reached this region in the early seventh and eighth centuries, bringing diverse educational practices for children. A significant focus is on the modernization of madrasas in Assam, a process that began during British rule. This shift is traced back to the aftermath of the H.E. Stapleton report of 1908–1909, which led the Madrasa Committee in Decca to mandate the inclusion of English, history, and geography in madrasa curriculums, aligning them with junior and middle Schools across the region. These institutions were favored for their orthodox environment, believed to be crucial in shaping the minds and characters of the young. Following India's independence in 1947, the Assam Madrassa Education Act of 1955 brought all madrasas in the region under government supervision, along with financial support. In 2005, further integration into the educational framework occurred with establishment of the Directorate of Madrasa Education, granting it authority akin to the Secondary Board of Education in Assam. The book also highlights some of the state's notable madrasas, such as Darul Uloom Baghbari in

the Surma-Barak Valley, established in 1873, Darul Uloom Bashkandi founded in 1897, and Al-Jamiat-ul Islamia, also known as Deorail Title Madrasa in Badarpur, which was established in 1938 and is privately funded. Currently, the future of madrasas in the state appears uncertain and challenging.

Chapter five explores the origins and evolution of madrasas in Bihar and Jharkhand, two regions in Eastern India with rich cultural and historical backgrounds. Jharkhand, once a part of Bihar until 2000, shares many historical narratives with Bihar, except for the developments in the last two decades. Jharkhand, with its relatively smaller Muslim population, initially saw madrasas playing a localized role focused primarily on religious education within the community. In both Bihar and Jharkhand, madrasas also functioned as centers for cultural preservation and community gatherings. Bihar established one of the first Madrasa Boards in India, despite having the lowest educational status in the country. The chapter also discusses the influence of Syed Ahmad Khan's movement for Western education. This movement led to the founding of the Bihar Scientific Society in 1886, offering education in Urdu across various subjects. Other similar associations, such as the Anjman-i-Ilmiya in Arrah (1866), the Anjuman-i-Tahzib, and the Anjuman-i-Islam in Desna (1899), promoted modern education alongside Islamic subjects. Figures like Maulana Manazir Hasan Gilani and Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, graduates of the Anjuman Al-Islah in Desna, advocated for an integrated curriculum. The chapter further details the Madrasa Board's role post-independence, noting its continued operation with approximately 1,942 state-supported affiliated madrasas.

Chapter six delves into the history and evolution of madrasas in Hyderabad, a city deeply ingrained with Islamic cultural heritage. This exploration provides a unique perspective on the development of Islamic education in India. Governed by the Nizams from the 18th to the mid-20th century, Hyderabad emerged as a center of educational and cultural progress. The Nizams, renowned for their support of education, were instrumental in the development of madrasas in the area. The chapter highlights the synergy between Syed Ahmad Khan and Salar Jung I, who shared a vision for modernizing the Muslim community. In 1888, Nizam Mir Mahmoud Ali Khan initiated the Dairatul-Maarif-it-Osmania, a project to translate Arabic manuscripts into Urdu. His successor, Mir Osman Ali Khan, established Osmania University in 1918, offering courses in Urdu, a move praised by Rabindranath Tagore for its emphasis on native languages. The university aimed to blend ancient and modern wisdom, aligning with the

region's culture and heritage. Traditional madrasas also thrived in Hyderabad, with Jamia Nizamia, founded in 1872 by Mohammed Anwaarullah Farooqui, being particularly notable. The chapter also acknowledges the significant Shia cultural impact in Hyderabad, which has harmoniously integrated various Islamic schools of thought. The author's visit to the Houzatul Mahdi Al Ilmia, a Shia madrasa, is detailed, along with a discussion on Al-Huda International Institute, which champions women's education. However, the institute's interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith, viewed as ultra-modern and liberal, have sparked controversy among scholars for challenging traditional male authority.

Chapter Seven explores the educational institutions in Kashmir and Ladakh, with a focus on their historical and contemporary significance. The chapter begins by tracing the origins of Islamic scholarship in Kashmir, a region known for its rich history and strong Sufi influences. It highlights the pivotal role of the 14th-century Sufi saint, Bulbul Shah, in introducing Islam to Kashmir, particularly through the conversion of Rinchan, the ruler of Kashmir, whose family had connections to the Ladakh region. The establishment of the Madrasta-i-Quran in the 14th century is noted as a significant development in nurturing Islamic scholarship in the area. The chapter then shifts to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, examining the formation of Anjuman-i-Islamia in 1899. This organization emerged as a response to the deteriorating conditions of Muslims during British rule, focusing on protecting Muslim rights and improving their socio-economic and educational status. It established its first school in 1905 in Sri Nagar, which later expanded to various areas. The chapter provides statistical insights into the educational landscape, citing the Ministry of Human Resource Development Report for 2019–20. It details the number of schools in the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, including the breakdown of government, government-aided, and private schools. Further, the chapter discusses the impact of the absence of a Madrasa Board in Kashmir. It notes that only a small number of madrasas benefited from the government's Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrasas, with many affiliated with Darul Uloom Deoband or Nadwa choosing not to accept government funding. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the diverse educational approaches of madrasas in Kashmir and Ladakh. It emphasizes their significant role in not only providing religious education but also serving as centers for moral and ethical learning, with some adapting modern curricula and others maintaining a focus on traditional Islamic education.

Chapter Eight delves into the history and evolution of madrasas in Lucknow and Aligarh, set against the backdrop of Uttar Pradesh, a state in India known for its rich cultural and historical heritage. Uttar Pradesh, where Muslims make up 19.2% of the population, has been a pivotal center for Islamic learning. The chapter first highlights the establishment of Darul Uloom in 1867 in Deoband, a small town in Uttar Pradesh. This renowned madrasa was founded with the objective of preserving the purity of Islam and protecting the community from modern, local, and contemporary influences, particularly those of British origin. Darul Uloom focused on traditional Islamic knowledge and played a crucial role in shaping Islamic education in the region. In contrast, the chapter also examines the founding of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College in 1875 by Syed Ahmad Khan. This institution, located in Aligarh, represented a shift toward Western-inspired education. It aimed to attract young men from the Muslim community and prepare them for professional and community life, marking a significant departure from the traditional educational philosophy of Darul Uloom. The book also explores other influential madrasas such as Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulema, established in 1898, and the Mazahir Uloom in Saharanpur. These institutions largely shared the philosophical approach of Deoband, emphasizing traditional Islamic learning. Additionally, the chapter looks into the establishment of madrasas in the 1890s in Lucknow, including the Jamia Nazimia, which is regarded as the oldest Shia madrasa in the city, along with the Sultanul Madrasa and the Jamia Sultana. Moving to contemporary times, the chapter discusses the establishment of modern educational institutions such as Unity College in 1987 and the Eram Unani Medical College in 2006. The chapter provides a detailed analysis of various educational philosophies and institutions in Lucknow and Aligarh, showcasing the rich and varied landscape of Islamic education in Uttar Pradesh.

Chapter nine delves into the madrasas of Delhi, integral to the capital's historical and cultural fabric. These institutions symbolize the evolution of Islamic education, influenced by the city's history under the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. Ghaziuddin Khan, a military figure under Emperor Aurangzeb and father of Hyderabad's first Nizam, established a madrasa, incorporating his tomb into the complex. The British colonial era introduced Western educational systems and diminished traditional patronage, posing challenges to madrasas. The East India Company's 1813 Charter, mandating educational funding, led to the establishment of oriental learning centers in 1820, which unfortunately resulted in underfunded

madrasas. Notably, Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia, initially founded in Aligarh, emerged as a significant educational institution. The chapter also reviews the formation and growth of prominent Muslim organizations like Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind and Jamaat-e-Islami-Hind. A key milestone in combining Islamic vision with modern education in the 20th century was the establishment of Jamia Hamdard, initially the Institute of History of Medicine and Medical Research. Inaugurated in 1962 by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, it aligns with WHO's International Conference in Delhi. Now renowned, especially for its Pharmacy College, Jamia Hamdard symbolizes the community's aspirations beyond nationalistic frameworks.

The book provides significant insights into the nature of madrasa education in India. It challenges the common belief that Madrasas are solely focused on religious teachings, revealing that they actually offer a diverse curriculum that includes contemporary subjects. This highlights a shift toward integrating madrasa education with modern academic content, a process subtly led by certain individuals without excessive publicity. However, it is crucial to emphasize the need for continuous efforts to dissolve the divide between religious and secular, as well as traditional and modern education, dichotomies not recognized in Islam. Additionally, it is of utmost importance that madrasas should adopt a unified curriculum across various sects to promote unity among students. This is particularly important in India's varied landscape, where the threat of extremist groups looms.

In summary, *Beyond the Madrasa: Muslim Communities and Educational Institutes in India Today* stands out as a pivotal addition to the body of research on this subject. Gupta's book is indispensable for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the changing dynamics of Muslim education in India. It offers a comprehensive and insightful exploration of the current state and future prospects of educational practices within Muslim communities, making it a valuable resource for educators, scholars, and anyone interested in educational developments in India.

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