



IMPACT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE MADRASSA EDUCATION: ITS CONTRIBUTION AND THREAT TO THE TRADITIONAL SYSTEM

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Article Info:

Article Received:17/05/2015

Revised on:19/06/2015

Accepted on:25/06/2015

ABSTRACT

The word Madrassa is known in Arabic as any type of educational institution, whether secular or religious. But, in the west, it usually refers to a specific type of religious school or college for the study of the Islamic religion, though this may not be the only subject studied and not all the students in Madrassa are Muslims. The students here also learn Law, Philosophy, Mathematics, Astronomy, Geography, Medicine, etc. English has also been introduced with the change in curriculum. But, in Madrassa, the teachings of the fundamentals of the Islamic faith, the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, recitation and rote learning of the Holy Quran are the focal points. Hence, the attempt to modernize the Madrassa educational system has become a recent topic of debate as it incites the religious sentiments of the Muslims. This paper will focus on the impact of English language in the Madrassa education; its contribution and threat to the traditional system. Madrassa has existed in Assam for centuries and has played a vital role in shaping the spiritual thought of the Muslims in Assam. Madrassas in Assam have also included English as an important subject which should be taught to the pupils. English, being the language of the world serves as the link language. Its importance cannot be denied, be it in the field of science and technology, education, trade and commerce and so on. So, the paper will be a discussion on the importance of English language, it will question on whether English is a threat to the traditional system of Madrassa or a boon to it.

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INTRODUCTION

Madrassas are institutions of higher Islamic education which first originated in the medieval period. Madrassa has existed in Assam for centuries and has played a vital role in shaping the spiritual thought of the Muslims in Assam. And further it has also succeeded in providing education of various factors such as social, psychological, economical, political, etc. The term "Madrasah" is derived from an Arabic word "Dars" which means "a lecture or a

lesson". Eminent scholars or learned teachers conducted their teaching works in different subjects through lectures. Besides acquiring religious education the students learned various subjects like Arabic, Philosophy, Law, History, Medicine, Arithmetic, etc. But, in Madrassa, the teachings of the fundamentals of the Islamic faith, the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, recitation and rote learning of the Holy Quran are the focal points. Hence, the attempt to modernize the Madrassa

educational system has become a recent topic of debate as it incites the religious sentiments of the Muslims. In recent years, several debate and discussions have arisen regarding the inclusion of modern subjects as part of the Madrassa curriculum and these have resulted in the conception of distinction between religious and secular within the domain of Madrassa education. The former includes the teaching of the Holy Quran and the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad. While the later includes the teaching of languages and literature of Arabic and Persian, Logic, History, Philosophy, etc. Even in Assam there are two types of Madrassas— Government run Madrassa and the Qaumi Madrassa. The Government run Madrassa has its curriculum like the other non-madrassa schools but it includes the religious teaching of Islam, teaching of languages and literature of Arabic and Persian along with the teaching of Mathematics, English, Science, etc., whereas, the Qaumi Madrassas are not run by the Government. They are controlled and managed by the All Assam Tanzim Board and they follow the general education of Elementary standard.

So, the paper is an attempt to highlight the Importance of English Education and the Impact of English Language in the Madrassa education. Most of the Madrassas in Assam have also included English as an important subject which should be taught to the pupils. English, being the language of the world serves as the link language. Its importance cannot be denied, be it in the field of science and technology, education, trade and commerce and so on. So, the paper seeks to question whether English is a threat to the traditional system of Madrassa or a boon to it. To discuss the impact of English language in the Madrassa education we need to look into both the contributions and the challenges that the English language created towards the traditional system. So, firstly we shall discuss the importance of English language in general and also in specific keeping in terms with the Madrassa education. Then we shall discuss the reasons why English language is considered as a threat to the traditional system of Madrassa.

IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Today English language teaching at Madrassa is a part of the modernization programme introduced by the State as an initiative to improve the future prospects of the Madrassa graduates. To get a glimpse of the significance of the English language in the education system of Madrassa, let us evaluate the importance of the English language itself. English language in the present day context cannot be ignored. Its importance can be realized in the fact that it is a world class language as F.G. French has said; "Because of rapid spread of industrial development, science and technology, international trade and commerce and the close interdependence of nation, English has become world language". (Pahuja,N.P., 1995). Even the UNO has given English the status of being an official language. And to quote Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru; "English is our major window on the Modern World". (Pahuja,N.P., 1995). Moreover, for maintaining the standard of education and getting higher knowledge, the students and scholars need to access the libraries. Good reference books are found in English whether for Science, Arts or Commerce. Therefore, English is the key to the storehouse of knowledge. English language is also essential for creative knowledge. Today, English is the principal means of spreading ideas and values through the media of television, radio, internet, books, newspapers, magazines etc. We know that maximum number of books on library shelves of Colleges and Universities in India are in English. To move on with this knowledge we need to retain English. Even to translate the books that are available in English language we need mastery over English language. Without knowing English well it is not possible to translate those books into our regional languages. Today, there is a great need to interpret India's thoughts and cultures abroad. So, English language helps us in interpreting India's thoughts and rich cultural heritage all over the world. Even the Holy Quran has been translated into English and many languages which have helped the common people to understand the principles of Islam and its teachings. And Education has been given the topmost priority in Islam. The word 'Ilm' which means 'knowledge' occupies an important

place in Islamic education, because acquisition and spread of knowledge is very highly commended by the Prophet. Quoting the Prophet, "He who goes forth in search of knowledge engages himself in the cause of God." (Hussain, S.M.Azizuddin(Ed.), 2005). Hence, by all these accounts it can be safely concluded that acquisition of knowledge is regarded as the central reality in Islam. So, learning or acquisition of English language in the context of the Madrasa education is not against the Islamic teaching rather, it can be viewed as a major means to acquire knowledge.

IMPACT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

English language along with the other subjects like mathematics, science, history, etc, form the curriculum of the government run Madrassas in Assam. But most of the Qaumi Madrassas do not include English language and other modern subjects like the government run Madrassas. It only gives emphasis on the fundamentals of Islam and Holy Quran. Therefore, an increasing number of individuals and organisations are now seriously thinking in terms of restructuring the Madrasa education by including modern subjects while keeping the religious syllabus intact. Even the Human Resource Development Ministry has launched a scheme of modernising Madrasa. Not only HRD ministry, but also, Narendra Modi, the present Prime Minister of India has emphasised on modernising the Madrassas.

Every year students who pass out from different Madrassas after getting the highest degrees like, Alimat, M.M., etc, have very few opportunities to adjust themselves in the present competitive world. Most of them have to settle either in a local Mosque as Imam or teacher in a Madrasa. Therefore, the employment opportunities for Madrasa educated persons, particularly from Qaumi Madrassas are very limited. So, English language along with other modern subjects have been introduced in the Madrasa curriculum by keeping in view the current educational needs, to keep pace with the recent development in science and technology, to avail job or employment opportunities, to fulfil societal needs and aspirations, and to pursue further education in other Universities, because few Universities accept the

certificates of Madrasa. In Assam, only Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University accept Madrasa certificates and permit MA in Arabic.

WHY AND HOW IS ENGLISH LANGUAGE A THREAT TO MADRASSA?

In spite of all the efforts of the government as well as individuals and organizations to modernize the Madrassas by introducing English and other subjects, many Madrassas find the teaching of modern subjects such as English, Science and Mathematics alongside the Quran too much of a dichotomy. Section of Ulema and politicians belonging to the community also view the move as government intervention that will dilute the essentially theological nature of the Madrasa. Again, the administrators of Madrasa think that through modernisation and accepting the government grants their autonomy will be finished because, "Right from their inception in medieval period, all big and small Madrassas have enjoyed full autonomy in all aspects of their functioning. They have been independent in framing their own curricula, using their own modes of teaching and training and examining their students internally in their own ways. Even in the medieval period when many of them received grants and endowments from the rulers and nobles they were never brought under the control of a common regulating or examining body." (Siddiqui, M.Akhtar, 1998).

Other views regarding the modernization of Madrasa are quoted below:

According to Khalid Hamidi, Professor of Arabic at Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi, "The hurry with which the government is trying to implement things, it appears that it wants to regulate Madrassas." (Singh, Pallavi. 2009)

He also views "A Madrasa means Islamic school. Universities like Aligarh Muslim University and Jamia recognize Madrasa certificates. Then, what is the need for such modernization programmes?" (Singh, Pallavi. 2009)

So, from the above quotations we can understand the reasons that create doubts in the Muslim minds and that they see every step taken by the government with fear and insecurity that the government might have been trying to deprive them

from their independence and autonomy in the name of modernization of Madrassas. Apart from these, the conservatist Muslims thought that modernization would alter the "Islamic nature" of the Madrassas with some Muslims viewing the school more as an expression of identity rather than as a place where the young generation should be trained to meet the challenges of tomorrow, no matter whether the common people starve in poverty without employment. It is an irony to witness a religion but to overlook the needs of the pupils, their future security. It is only due to the fixed mindset of some of the Muslims that English is considered as a threat. So, even when the Modi Government announces Rs.100 crores for the modernisation of Madrassas, the country's largest Islamic seminary, Darul Uloom, Deoband decided to avoid any Govt. aid for modernisation and to stay away from modern teaching. The Rector of Darul Uloom, Maulana Abul Qasim Nomani says, "We are not in favour of mixing religious teachings with modern teachings. We are devoted fully to religious teachings. We are for 'deen ka ilm' and 'deen ki hifazat' (religious teachings and protection of religion). For other modern subjects, there are other institutions." (Fareed, Mohd Faisal, March 26, 2015). We also learn from Mohd Faisal Fareed's article posted in the Indian Express that Nomani also said Dars- e-Nizamia- the pattern of teaching at Madrassas affiliated to Darul Uloom does not believe in seeking employment and making money after education. "We only make religious people. Other subjects such as English literature or computers can be pursued only after completing religious teachings." (Fareed, Mohd Faisal. March 26, 2015). Thus, these quotes clearly state the rigid system of the Madrassa Education and the leaders' conservative thoughts. And mere inclusion of a modern subject cannot erase one's spiritual devotion to God. Therefore, the very mindset of the people regarding modernization should be changed because, no amount of technological progress can lead to modernization, unless, the psycho-social ethos of a society is willing to adapt itself to change.

CONCLUSION:

Thus, modernization of Madrassa is related to the religious sentiment and feelings of the

Islamic people. So, change in the Madrassa system is therefore often considered as threatening the identity and intensity of the Islamic faith. Even the proposal for reform of the Madrassas by incorporating English and other modern subjects are sometimes seen as hidden ploys or even as conspiracies to dilute the religious characters of Madrassas. The reformists argue that since the conditions of the world are in constant change, so, too, must the curriculum of the Madrassas constantly evolve if Madrassas are to continue to maintain their relevance and keep pace with the mainstream education and modern development. But a society steeped in tradition and characterised by rigid social structures may find it difficult to make the necessary changes required for modernization. So, the process of modernization of the Madrassa curricula should be carried out in a peaceful manner not by force:

As a leading Indian Muslim social activist and intellectual, Nejatullah Siddiqui, writes in his recently published Urdu work, *Dini Madaris: Masa'il Aur Taqazey (Religious Madrasas: Problems and Prospects)* as cited in Muhammadullah Khalili Qasmi's *Madrassa Education : It's Strength & Weakness* that there is a growing realization among the Muslims for Madrassas to reform their syllabi to enable their students to face the challenges of modern life and to evolve a more relevant understanding of their faith. But many Muslims insist that this cannot be imposed by force. So, it is only in an atmosphere of peace and security and when Muslims are free from perceiving the English language and other modern subjects as threats to their faith and identity that Madrassas can begin a process of reform. Thus, we have come across the importance of English education and can argue that its inclusion in the Madrassa education shall not erase the traditional subjects but will contribute to it a new dimension in a new way.

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