
In Search of Complete Education



-Priyanka Dubey

Iqra It is said that this was the first word uttered by Prophet Mohammed, which means 'to read' and to 'gain knowledge'. But the Muslim community is still in a state of conflict within as well as outside about reforming their traditional education system and religious schools - 'Madarsa' which are home to lakhs of children in India. A proposed board wants to modernize the textbooks, exams and teaching systems in Madarsas. But will it work or not, still remain the big question.

"After all, we do not want our children to come out in this world and feel alien. We also want them to have modern education, read physics, learn geography and speak fluent English like other children", said senior research scholar and educationist Yusuf Nadvi with shimmering eyes which reflected hope. He was speaking about the Central Madarsa Board (CMB) Bill-2009 and its acceptability in selected segments of Muslim community in Bhopal.

With a big chunk of Muslim population and around 6000 madarsas on the roll, Madhya Pradesh has an important stake in commencement of this bill which is still in circulation. But an inquiry into madrasas of all shapes and sizes of Bhopal city signals towards the reluctance of these religious educational institutions in modernizing themselves.

A panning journey to the interiors of different madarsas of the city including women's madarsa Darul-Ulum madarsa, Nadvi madarsas and state madarsa board affiliated madarsa puts a assorted picture in front of

us. Mixed opinion and emphasis on standstill stability is there. Actually, central government wants to modernize the textbooks, teaching methods and exam system of the Indian madarsas through this CMB bill. But it seems a difficult task as the community in question is not ready for the change, by and large. Although segments of progressive educated Muslims still are very much in favour of passing the bill.

“We do not want government’s interference in our Madarsas. The Central Madarsa Board (CMB) Bill-2009 is just an attempt to handicap the traditional Muslim education system”, Said Maulvi and principal of the Darul -Uloom Tajul Masajid madarsa, Abdus Subhan Nadvi. He further said that we all are now accustomed of working at low salaries. There is a section of people that voluntarily gives financial aid to us. Now if government starts giving aid to us then our habit of working on low salaries and running madarsas on alms will end forever. He further elaborated, if one fine day government decides to pull off this aid then what will we do? This Central Madarsa Board Drama is just a trick to make our religious educational system handicapped. This is a secular country; if the government funds us then any day they can ask us to change our patterns or to sing Vande Matram in madarsas!!”, he added furiously and sternly.

But opposite views also prevail alongside. A substantial section of progressive Muslim scholars are in selective support of the bill. We want to preserve our tradition but not at the cost of our growth, he added. As far as formation of Central Madarsa Board is concerned, it should be formed but without political appeasement motives, added Mr. Yusuf nadvi. Two young madarsa students, Moh. Ahkam and Moh. Sohel told that they want to become Alia after they complete their studies. “Hum Insha allah allia banenge” said Sohel with sparkling eyes. They further said that they learn Persian, urdu and Arabic as primary subjects but they also read about Islamic history.

Another Muslim scholar and senior teacher at Tajul Masajid Madarsa Sayed Naushad Ali Naqvi told that such an act will facilitate government’s interference in Madarsas. It will make inroads for dominance of others in

our territory, he added. Principal of womens' madarsa 'Madarsa Hayatul Ulam Niswa Deenyat' told that small girls come in large number to study at madarsa. Usually they come up to 13-14 years of age and after that they mostly read at home.

A society with no leaders demanding status quo:

The government and the madaras are both blaming each other for not starting up the modernization. It reflects their intentions of just letting the fuel burn and the talks going on. This tendency of emphasizing on maintaining stand stillness and unwillingness to lead the change is evident from the following facts. The chairman of Madhya Pradesh Madarsa Board Mr.Ghani Ansari said that such kind of talks are very old but the government never goes beyond controversial discussions. "Talks related to modernization of madaras are on the cards from very long time. Although there is slackness on the government's part as we have disagreements within the community. But we are ready to welcome the bill as far as it is meant for growth and upgradation of the Muslim education system and not merely for gaining votes."

Chairman of National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions Justice M. Siddiqui who drafted this law says that the government's intention is to help in bringing about the change in the madarsa education system. We want them to learn Islamic law as well as Indian Penal Code, Persian as well as English. "Madaras currently pay their teachers a very low amount; will they be able to attract good teachers in that small pay scale? The idea is to give a seed funding to the madaras and then let them allow function independently. Also, the board will ensure them pay equivalent to what is given in government schools. Our job is done, now the ball is in the government's court", he added.

Central Madarsa Board Bill-2009: Highlights

This bill is drafted on the recommendations of the Sachar Committee report. It is drafted by the office of National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions.

The Board will consist of a Chairperson and 15 members. One religious scholar from each of the maslak – Deobandi, Barelvi, Ahl-i-Hadith, Shafai, Shia, Dawoodi Bohra will be part of the board. Central Government will appoint these religious scholars from a panel of three names. One religious scholar who is an expert in traditional Madrasa system will have a seat. The board will also have an equal number of representations from the “secular” section of the Muslim community. Six Muslims who have made outstanding contributions in social sciences, humanities, sciences, vocational training and education will be nominated. At least two of the six members will be women.

The primary tasks of the Central Madarsa Board will be :

The board’s primary task will be to devise a curriculum for non-theological education in madarsas. It aims at the comprehensive, systematic and integrated development of the madarsa education system. It will promote and popularize the education of Muslim girls so as to eradicate gender-based educational disparity. Recommend introduction of modern text books on any subject, other than religious texts, as extra reading to complement students’ knowledge of such subject and enhance overall modern scholarship. Conceptualize and initiate programme for the consolidation of the inclusive society, marked by religious and cultural diversity, through proper interfaith understanding in society.

Review the infrastructure requirements, including faculty position, to evaluate the academic health of the Madarsa and to make appropriate recommendations to the Madarsa concerned. Annual report of the Board shall be presented in the Parliament. Preparation, publication or sale of text-books and books, other than books on theology or religious texts. Affiliation to it will be purely voluntary. Board will not have any rights to interfere in theological aspect of Madarsa education system. n

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