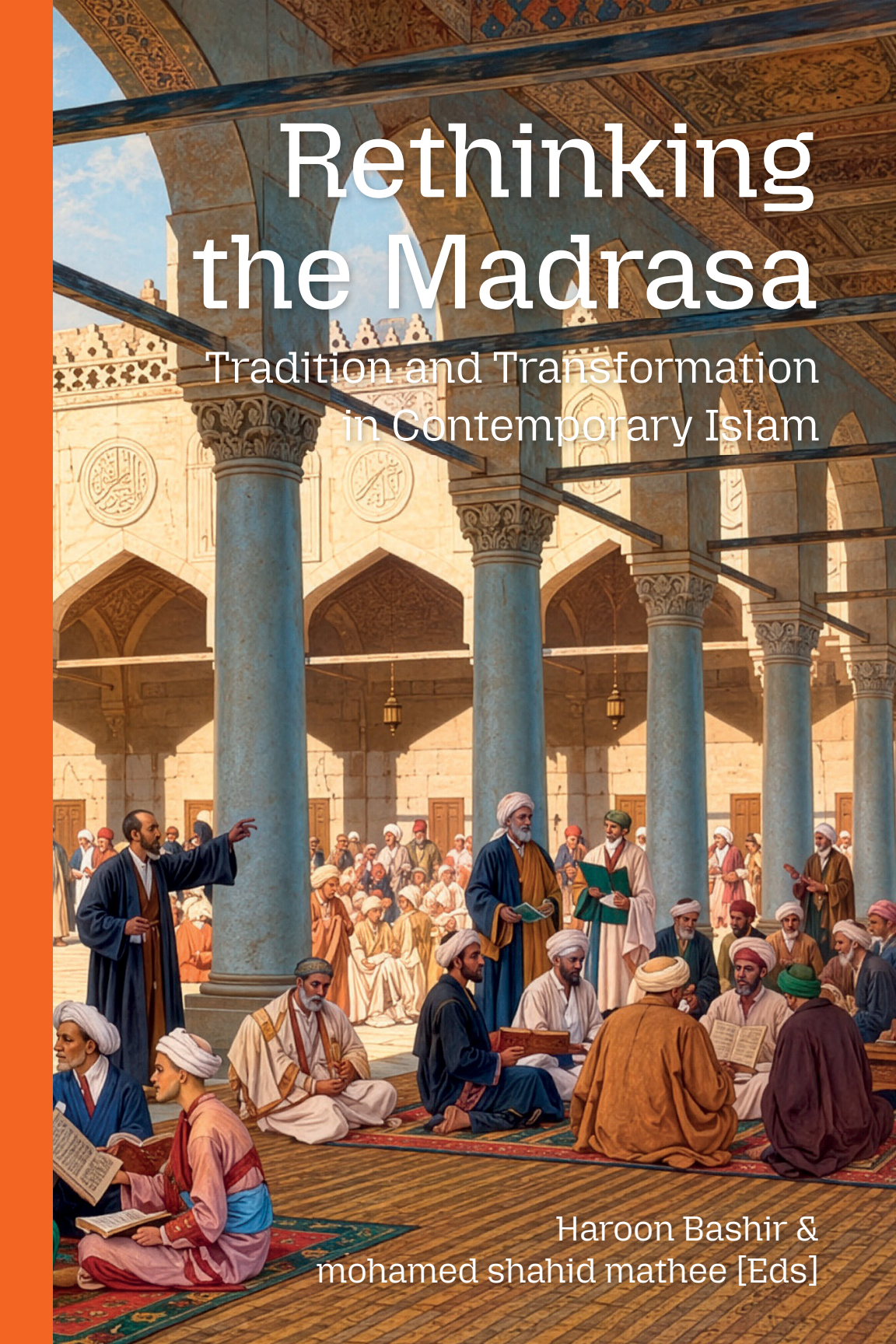




Rethinking the Madrasa

Tradition and Transformation
in Contemporary Islam

Haroon Bashir &
mohamed shahid mathee [Eds]

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UJ Press

Rethinking the Madrasa: Tradition and Transformation in Contemporary Islam

Published by UJ Press
University of Johannesburg
Library
Auckland Park Kingsway Campus
PO Box 524
Auckland Park
2006

<https://ujpress.uj.ac.za/>

Compilation © Haroon Bashir and mohamed shahid mathee 2026

Chapters © Author(s) 2026

Published Edition © Haroon Bashir and mohamed shahid mathee 2026

First published 2026

<https://doi.org/10.64449/9781991539212>

978-1-991539-20-5 (Paperback)

978-1-991539-21-2 (PDF)

978-1-991539-22-9 (EPUB)

978-1-991539-23-6 (XML)

This publication had been submitted to a rigorous double-blind peer-review process prior to publication and all recommendations by the reviewers were considered and implemented before publication.

Proofreading: Mike Leisegang

Cover design: Hester Roets, UJ Graphic Design Studio

Typeset in 9/13pt Merriweather Light



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Dr Zahraa McDonald is an Associate Professor in the Study of Islam in the Religion Studies department at the University of Johannesburg. Her research niche is situated in the intersecting fields of the Sociologies of knowledge, education and religion. On the one hand, she works on Islamic Education. On the other hand, her research has focused on mainstream education, from basic to higher education. Her research is driven by the fact that education is a crucial social institution shaping how society changes. Religious education, moreover, shapes what we think about teaching and learning possibilities. Islamic education is a critical other in the education landscape and helps to shed light on taken-for-granted assumptions about knowledge and its production. Connecting these different educational spaces via recognition of prior learning can significantly contribute to the intersecting fields of knowledge, education and religion. Her publications span this intersecting field as well.

Professor Ebrahim Moosa, University of Notre Dame

Ebrahim Moosa is the Mirza Family Professor of Islamic Thought and Muslim Societies at the University of Notre Dame, where he also co-directs Contending Modernities, a global research initiative examining the interactions of religious and secular forces across Muslim, Catholic, and other traditions. A leading scholar of Islamic thought, Moosa's work bridges classical Islamic learning with contemporary ethical, legal, and theological enquiry. He is also the founder of Madrasa Discourses, an international project engaging traditional Islamic scholars in critical conversations on religion and modernity. Moosa's *What Is a Madrasa?* (UNC Press, 2015) draws on years of fieldwork and personal experience in South Asian seminaries, offering an insider's account of traditional Islamic education. His earlier book, *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination* (UNC Press, 2006), received the American Academy of Religion's Best First

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Book Award. He also edited Fazlur Rahman's posthumous *Revival and Reform in Islam* and co-edited volumes on Islam in Africa, Muslim family law, and modern Muslim intellectual traditions. Born in South Africa, Moosa studied at Darul "Ulum Nadwatul" Ulama in India and holds a PhD from the University of Cape Town. Before joining Notre Dame in 2014, he taught at Duke, Stanford, and the University of Cape Town.

Introduction

The term *madrasa* is derived from the Arabic root *d-r-s*, meaning to study, literally taken as a place of study (Makdisi, 1981; Moosa, 2015). Throughout Islamic history, it has been the space in which Islamic education has been cultivated and developed at numerous levels, whether primary, secondary or higher education. The topics taught within madrasas ranged from the study of the Qurʾān (exegesis and other sciences), the Ḥadīth, Islamic substantive law (*fiqh*), legal hermeneutics (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), theology (*kalām*), as well as the linguistic sciences. This continues to be the case in contemporary times. Historically, and often less known is the fact that madrasa curricula also included the study of Mathematics, Astronomy, Philosophy and Medicine (Nasr 1987:126). In this volume, the madrasa refers to the institution of higher learning within the Islamic tradition.

The madrasa has been central and indispensable to the making of the Islamic world, and as a result, has contributed to the development of not only Islamic education, but because of the influence of Islam on other civilisations, of global education practices more generally. Therefore, the legacy of the madrasa extends beyond geographic and confessional boundaries – stretching across Africa, Asia and the West. It represents a transregional and transhistorical tradition of learning that has adapted, and continues to adapt, to changing historical circumstances while retaining a core identity and markedness. Understanding the madrasa in this light, as both a local and a global educational institution, highlights its historical significance and contemporary relevance.

As with all institutions, the contemporary world and the transformations within societies have also impacted madrasa education. There have been critical questions raised regarding the extent to which traditional education can be sustained within the modern world. These questions centre around curriculum renewal, pedagogical innovation, and engagement with contemporary social and intellectual currents. To what extent can madrasas preserve inherited knowledge spanning

centuries while meeting the ever-evolving demands of modern educational needs? What is gained and what is lost from engaging in such a process? And to what extent does madrasa education retain its identity if it attempts to transform and adapt? Through examining these themes, this volume attempts to contribute to the growing number of critical works on Islamic education in the modern world.

Consequently, the madrasa has come under sustained critique as a space that is characterised by stagnation, fundamentalism and potentially even extremism (Bano, 2012). Because of the privileging of these narratives, the madrasa as a creative site of dynamism and adaptation have occasionally been overlooked. This has been especially true after 9/11 and the subsequent decades that have followed. Such approaches are reductive across many levels. Firstly, they project caricatures produced by Orientalist scholarship (Said, 1978) regarding the Islamic world. Furthermore, they strip the madrasas of their agency and ignore the lived realities of students and teachers who operate within them (Moosa, 2015; Zaman, 2002; Daun & Arjmand, 2018).

Equally important to note, however, are significant contributions centring Muslim epistemologies and life-worlds have been developing resources regarding madrasas in recent decades. Recent works on Islamic education have signalled an informed and conceptually grounded approach to madrasas that shift away Eurocentric accounts. Works from scholars such as Muhammad Qasim Zaman (2002), Ebrahim Moosa (2015), Masooda Bano (2012) and Hefner (2007) all highlight important contributions that recognise the plurality and historical situatedness of madrasa development. Additionally, key works engaging questions of curriculum renewal have been developed by Abdullah Sahin (2014), Suddahazai (2023) and Abu Bakar (2018). These types of works centralise practitioner-led curriculum recommendations and shift away from generalised debates regarding “modernisation” according to external frameworks. Additionally, a number of scholars have produced informed studies that situate madrasa developments in regional contexts. For example, in the South African context, Muhammed Haron and Yusef Waghid have produced significant studies pertaining

to Islamic education within South Africa, exploring reform, curriculum renewal and engagement between madrasas and secular institutions in the South African context (Haron, 2016; Waghid, 2017), and similar works have been conducted in the Asian context by Buang and Chew (2014).

These selected works highlight a growing field of critical madrasa studies that rejects Eurocentric depictions of madrasa education and centres Islamic epistemologies and traditions. One of the key methodological shifts is the centring of Muslim voices and explicit engagement with Muslim practitioners and Muslim educational theory. The result of such is informed scholarship that shifts away from Orientalism and takes seriously Islamic paradigms of knowledge production to properly situate the developments across Islamic educational spaces.

This volume engages with the madrasa as an evolving epistemic institution that embodies a distinctive way of negotiating modernity. The chapters in this volume cover a range of differing themes, which include genealogy and reform, curricular and epistemic negotiation, social and technological developments and future imaginaries. The volume as a whole advances a framework for understanding madrasas as dynamic sites of knowledge translation, where inherited Islamic epistemologies engage, resist, and reconfigure the hegemonic logics of modernity.

In line with this, this volume also contributes to the growing field of critical madrasa studies, developing a theoretical framework that highlights madrasas' own modes of reasoning and epistemologies. In doing so, the volume recognises that madrasas are continuously evolving institutions that engage with questions of knowledge and education in ways that demand situated study. In doing so, there is an acknowledgement that madrasas are products of specific historical trajectories, shaped by colonial encounters, postcolonial state formations, and local community dynamics. The various chapters, therefore, demonstrate how madrasas have adapted to political and social pressures.

The chapters in the volume cover a variety of different key themes and topics. In his chapter entitled *Genealogies of Madrasas 18th–21st centuries: Between Revitalising Tradition and Reform*,

Ebrahim Moosa provides an overview of madrasa reform in the last three centuries. Focusing primarily on South Asia, Moosa explores competing projects of traditionalist revivalist education, tentative reformist agendas and descriptions of how particular groups of ‘ulamā’ envisioned change and transformation by resorting to the teaching of prophetic traditions.

Following this, mohamed shahid mathee’s chapter entitled *From the Madrasa to the Western Academy: Al-Azhar and the University of Cape Town* highlights his experiences at Al-Azhar. He provides an overview of the reforms at al-Azha, while also exploring his experiences at the Faculty of Islamic Law and Modern Civil Law. The chapter provides a detailed account of the curriculum interspersed with anecdotes that both outline the structure of education at Al-Azhar and proceeds to explore his experiences at the University of Cape Town. The chapter then explores the possibilities of convergences and the scope for collaboration between the differing modes of education.

Mujeeb Ahmad’s chapter, *Network and Curriculum Developments in Barelwi Madāris of Pakistan: A Historical Review*, explores the structure and history of the Barelwi madrasa system in modern Pakistan. To trace this history, Ahmad begins with a brief account of the Barelwi madrasa tradition since the days of British India. This serves as background for the chapter’s discussion of the Barelwi madrasa educational system in Pakistan from 1947 to 2024. Ahmad shows that Barelwis continued to establish and develop their *madrasahs* in their quest to face new challenges in Pakistan, an educational vision geared to producing a generation of people who would be able to represent Islam and work for the revival of Islamic norms in society. In their concern with the proper and faith-oriented education to be given in their institutions, Barelwis developed detailed terms, conditions, and duties for teachers, administrative and even for supporting staff. The chapter focuses on three institutions of higher studies, namely Minhajul Quran University, Dar-ul-Madina International University and Al-Karam International Institute to probe their impact and influence on Pakistani Society.

In her chapter, *Validating Learning Acquired at Islamic Education Seminaries Through Qualification Frameworks*, Zahraa

Introduction

McDonald explores madrasas in South Africa that offer higher Islamic education. She probes the learning that occurs there with the aim to determine what the processes of validating learning through mechanisms supporting the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in South Africa imply for Muslim Theological seminaries. How do validation processes in the context of the South African NQF allow for validating learning at madrasas? The chapter shows that while it is technically possible for the madrasas to comply with the validation processes supporting the implementation of the South African NQF, they have opted out of the processes because of practices that could be viewed as discriminatory. McDonald reflects on what this means for including alternative knowledge systems in the mainstream education system and the consequent implications for research. This empirical research on how Islamic education systems can be formally recognised in the context of national qualification frameworks in South Africa is a contribution to decolonial debates.

In her chapter, *Madrasa Education and the Social Sciences: Considering Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy*, Rahmanara Chowdhury approaches madrasa education as a psychologist focusing primarily on issues concerning minority communities and positions her reflections within a social sciences context. Her work predominantly centres on building bridges across communities and fostering greater understanding of the unfamiliar within society. She argues that there is both demand and need for developing new pathways within madrasa education systems—pathways that are accessible to all and capable of addressing pressing social circumstances in ways that align with the identities and holistic needs of the communities concerned. Drawing upon her experience teaching undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Islam and Pastoral Care, Dr Chowdhury highlights the needs expressed by prospective practitioners and students in training. She concludes with a series of recommendations aimed at facilitating bridge-building between traditional and modern educational frameworks. These include diversification of curricula through embedding real-world context and application, development of professional ethical practice and core skills competency, active consideration of representation

across all specialisations, research-informed practice and knowledge generation, and the creation of opportunities for personal development and growth.

In his chapter, *Contemporary Reception of 4:34 and “Wife-Beating”: Navigating Gender in the Madrasa*, Redhwan Karim explores how graduates of madrasas navigate the verse Q4:34, and classical interpretations of the gender dynamics found within exegetical works. The chapter explores the receptiveness of three approaches to *ḍaraba* amongst a group of Muslim participants. The three broad approaches are described as traditional, reformist and traditional reformist. Traditional refers to classical positions articulated in Sunnī exegetical works that are generally seen as authoritative. Reformist refers to re-interpretations of *ḍaraba*, disregarding the physicality of the word and adopting alternative definitions. Finally, traditional reformist revolves around the position of Muhammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ‘Āshūr (d.1973), who, although, would be considered as a modern representative of traditionalism, articulated a reformist position on *ḍaraba* in his famed commentary of the Qur’ān, *Tafsīr al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*. The chapter represents an exploration of the responses to these positions from a group of final year undergraduate students at the Markfield Institute of Higher Education (MIHE) undertaking a module on “Islam Gender and Sexuality”. These students, however, can also be considered traditional scholars in their own right, having graduated from traditional Islamic seminaries. The chapter consists of two parts. Firstly, there is a theoretical component which discusses the various approaches to *ḍaraba*, effectively summarising the content which was covered in the session. The second part consists of the fieldwork component which breaks down the perspectives of our participants on the three approaches to *ḍaraba* as well as their general thoughts on their experience at an Islamic seminary and then in the academy.

Following this, Omer Aijazi’s chapter *Madrasas and Disaster Relief in Pakistan: Why are Madrasas Excluded from the Global Humanitarian Movement?* explores madrasa networks’ involvement in relief work in Pakistan following the 2025 earthquake that struck Kashmir and Northern Pakistan. He highlights how the madrasa networks were amongst the first and most enduring providers of aid. Listening attentively to local

voices from madrasa staff and students involved in relief work and letting those voices speak, Aijazi explores how madrasa patrons view relief efforts as an extension of their religious education. Aijazi argues for the social relevance of madrasas as locally embedded grassroots organisations that offer multiple contributions beyond those of religious education and moral development. The rejection of madrasas by humanitarian organisations mirrors the perspectives of Pakistan's ruling elite, who see madrasas as contradictory to the developmental state, echoing the dismissal of religious institutions by British colonial rule.

In her chapter, *Between Spirituality and Scholasticism: Barelwi Education in Britain*, Dr Hafza Iqbal explores the legacy, educational philosophy and scholastic methodology of Aḥmad Riḍā Khān. Dr Iqbal links his teachings with the activities of Barelwi educational endeavours in Britain and explores their genealogy. In doing so, she explores how Barelwis are developing their means of education for contemporary Britain and its evolving religio-spiritual needs, demands and the contours of the complex landscape of British Islam and the lived experiences of British Muslims. By answering these questions, Dr Iqbal explores understandings of the modern madrasa navigates its evolving purpose, mechanisms and functions and how these might be reframed and re-understood in a contemporary Britain. Moreover, the chapter complicates perceptions of the Barelwi tradition itself and highlights conscious and considered mechanisms of dissemination of teaching, which in the contemporary context, include the use of modern technologies, demonstrating the evolving nature of "traditional education" in 21st century Muslim Britain.

In his chapter, *The Possibility of Analytic Philosophy in United Kingdom Madrasas*, Dr Abbas Ahsan explores why analytic philosophy, which predominates throughout higher education in the United Kingdom, does not feature prominently in UK madrasas? He provides two responses to this question. The first focuses on a possible intellectual conflict between the types of philosophy that are practiced in madrasas and in mainstream institutions of higher education. The second response considers the kind of philosophy that various organisations promote and

practice in communities of philosophic inquiry (CPI). These responses illustrate the conceptual and institutional reasons for madrasas' reluctance towards analytic philosophy. Finally, Dr Ahsan offers specific recommendations intended to help facilitate the introduction of analytic philosophy into madrasa curricula in the UK.

And finally, in his chapter *The Horizons of Madrasa Education: Rethinking "Islamic Knowledge" in the Modern World*, Haroon Bashir attempts to do three things. The first is to explore the history of madrasa education and the scope of "Islamic knowledge". In doing so, he highlights how the madrasa encompassed a flexible intellectual tradition that adapted and imbibed a variety of intellectual currents that transcend what would today be described as a solely "religious" focus. Section two turns to the colonial encounter and examines how the epistemic separation between the "religious" and the "secular" redefined the madrasa's role, reshaping its function and identity. Reflecting on this, section three discusses future directions for madrasa education, exploring how this tradition might be reimagined in ways that remain faithful to its intellectual heritage while also responding to the challenges and opportunities of modernity.

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Chapter 1

Genealogies of Madrasas 18th–21st centuries: Between Revitalising Tradition and Reform

Ebrahim Moosa 

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Introduction

Ulamā institutions, generally known as madrasas and *hawzas*, are well-endowed with resources to transmit traditional Islamic thought. The main discipline is Islamic law, supported by dialectical theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*) and supplemented with high doses of pedagogy in traditional ḥadīth studies, Qurʾānic exegesis and premodern philosophy. Expertise in the disciplines that enable scholars to access the traditional texts and archives of the Muslim tradition, such as high levels of competence in the Arabic language and its ancillary sub-disciplines are highly prized just as premodern studies in logic are emphasised. Apart from an emphasis on other languages such as Persian, Urdu, Hausa and Swahili and other vernacular languages in different regions, modern subjects are entirely absent from curricula, with rare exceptions. Sometimes English or another European language is taught, some computer skills and writing. In other words, traditional Islamic education for the *ulamā* is largely premised on premodern conceptions and worldviews that its adherents believe are still relevant for the purpose of religious formation. Yes, some individuals from such backgrounds do equip themselves with some modern learning but often it is merely to defend the traditional doctrines or to compete with other modes of revivalist and political Islam.

Much ink has been spent to argue that traditional Islamic education needs to reformulate its epistemology and by implication to alter its ontological premises that cohere and align with the life experiences of Muslims whom they serve around the world today. This has proved to be an impossible task, a dialogue of the deaf, and hence, very little significant movement.

What follows below are snapshots of some instances of curiosity, traditionalist revivalist education, tentative reformist agendas and descriptions of how some *‘ulamā’* envisioned change and transformation by resorting to the teaching of prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*, pl. *aḥādīth*).

Mughal India

It is reliably known that Mughal India in the 17th century hosted the Frenchman François Bernier who spent the years between 1655 and 1668 in Delhi (Bernier *et al.*, 1914:324–325).¹ During his stay, he translated sections of the work of the French philosopher and experimentalist Pierre Gassendi (d. 1655) and the philosopher Rene Descartes (d. 1650) for his acquaintance at the Mughal Court of the Emperor Awrangzeb, Mullā Shafiyā’ī, better known as Dānishmand Khān (d. 1080–1/1670) into Persian or to persons associated with the latter (Burke, 1999:126).

Yet, developments a century earlier, in the 16th century, Mughal India served as a catalyst for reformist activities. Modern secular writers view the reign of the emperor Jalāluddīn Muḥammad Akbar (d. 1605) and his proposed common civil religion (*dīn-i Ilāhī*) of shared values amongst India’s religions as a golden era of religious tolerance. Adversaries of the emperor Akbar viewed his efforts as nothing but a reign of heresy (Habib, 1997; Nizāmī, 1953). While the historiography of this period is highly contested, Akbar’s heterodox views, some historians claim with some exaggeration, reached the madrasas and ṣūfī lodges of Mughal India who were, in turn, ready for battle. It prompted Shakyh ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Dehlvi (d. 1052/1642) to promote a programme of reform after his three-year sojourn in Arabia.

¹ See the polemic about Muslim curiosity about the West (Goodrich, 1983:10–14).

‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s education centred around the “Muttaqī” scholars in Makka who were affiliated to ‘Alī ibn Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Muttaqī (d. 975/1567) and ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Muttaqī (d. 1337/1593). They operated in a geographical territory between the coast of Gujarat and the holy city of Makka (Kugle, 2021). Both were steeped in the Qādirī ṣūfī order (*tariqa*) that was affiliated to the great mystic of Baghdad Shaykh Abd al-Qādir Jilānī (d. 561/1166).

‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s key intervention was to open a madrasa in Delhi in which he reduced the influence of the rational sciences such as Philosophy, Logic and Astronomy with a syllabus that featured several texts in law and ḥadīth. Lurking behind this move was a suspicion that the rational sciences undermined devout practice and, thus, paved the way to free thinking that prevailed at Akbar’s court. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s syllabus, we are told, gave the Qur’ān and the Sunna a central role. Many believe that this intervention curbed the impact that Akbar wanted to make with his rationalist version of Islam. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s mentor and sufi master, Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1034/1624) virulently opposed Akbar. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq’s curriculum and scholarly focus was unique to the whole of north India (Nizāmī 1953:126).

Most ‘ulamā’ in the pre- and post-colonial period viewed as their desideratum to “raise the word of God” (*iʿlā kalima-t Allāh*), a synecdoche for propagating Islam and the need to renew the presentation of Islamic knowledge. This allowed for fresh experiences to be integrated into the Muslim knowledge sphere. They combined Islamic mysticism, the study of ḥadīth and theology together with political savvy to navigate a world that was opening to them. Not all of this was easy, but the dynamism was intense especially if one considers that these figures hoped to achieve their goals without revolutionary turmoil and civil upheaval.

Scholarly circles thought of their role as being limited in support of the political establishment and viewed their main duty as the need to propagate knowledge of Islam. But as local political powers faltered, in the Mughal Empire for instance, the agenda of some ‘ulamā’ became activist and reformist without being revolutionary. Under such circumstance the ‘ulamā’ addressed

the challenges to Muslim identity in a changing world, and in many instances, they viewed with skepticism the emergence of European knowledge traditions about which they were most unfamiliar, but not necessarily opposed. Certain circles of learning who were familiar Greco-Arabic science and philosophy and could relate to new developments in Europe.

Amongst the ‘ulamā’ institutions in India, the Farangī Maḥall stood above the others in the beginning of the 18th century and excelled in the Greco-Arabic tradition as part of its influential curriculum. Started by Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn (d. 1161 /1748) after the tragic death of his father, a new curriculum known as the Dars-i Niẓāmī was inaugurated, loaded with heavy doses of philosophy, logic and the cultivation of skills that were requisite for both scholars and those who might become administrators in government (Moosa, 2015:78–92). This educational model was acceptable to both the Mughal rulers and the British East India Company officials and later the representatives of the Crown. Committed to philosophy and rational theology the Farangī Maḥall served as a beacon of learning in north India and set a standard for Islamic learning.

Farangī Maḥall made no claim to align itself with reformist tendencies, but rather saw itself as a representative of the Indo-Persian and Transoxianan tradition of Ḥanafī scholarship. Scholars from its stable viewed their role in advancing the classical Islamic disciplines as part of the cosmopolitan Muslim Republic of Letters with nodes running through Central Asia, the Ottoman Empire and into the networks of scholarship in the holy cities in Arabia as well as Egypt and Syria. A few exceptional figures like the son of Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn ‘Abd al-‘Alī al-Anṣārī (d. 1225/1810) Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawi (d. 1304/1887) demonstrated that this school could also produce reputable scholars with expertise in ḥadīth and Ḥanafī law (Ibid). Over the centuries, the Niẓāmī syllabus has mutated according to changing needs. And perhaps the most visible change is its greater emphasis on the study of ḥadīth in line with the resurgence of this field of study from the 16th century onwards in multiple nodes of the Islamic world.

A figure like Tafaḍḍul Ḥusayn Khān (d. 1215/1801), a scholar of Islamic learning formed in the rational tradition gained renown

and only added to the prestige of this Lucknow-based institution.² Skilled in Geometry, Mathematics, and Natural Philosophy, he quickly rose above his peers. First educated in Delhi and then at the Farangī Maḥall school in Lucknow where his star rose. He caught the attention of the Nawāb Shujā al-Dawla. (d. 1188/1775), who employed him as a tutor for his son Sa‘ādat ‘Alī Khān (d. 1229/1814). Tafaḍḍul Ḥusayn frequently discussed the thoughts of European scientists with approval and gives an idea of the calibre of graduate Farangī Maḥall produced (Gīlānī, 2007:408; Robinson, 2001:50–54). Together with a European collaborator he translated Newton’s *Principia Mathematica* in 1789 into Arabic (Schaffer, 2009:51).

Almost contemporary with the Farangī Maḥall and a little more than a century after ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, another Delhi-based virtuoso made his mark on Indian Islam and beyond, named Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm, better known as Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762) of Delhi (Hermansen, 2010: xii–xxxiii). Few would not include Walī Allāh in the revivalist camp. In 1731 he travelled to Arabia to both perform the pilgrimage and to benefit from studies in the scholarly circles of the two holy mosques. He benefited from Shaykh Abū Ṭāhir al-Kurdī (d. 1145/1733) a Shāfi‘ī scholar with expertise in Islamic law and ḥadīth studies, but who had strong proclivities for the ideas of Ibn Taymīya. Walī Allāh also benefited from scholars affiliated to the Mālikī and Ḥanafī schools. In Arabia he learned a great deal from the written works of Ibrahīm al-Kurānī (d. 1101/1690), the father of the previously mentioned Ṭāhir al-Kurdī. Having hardly penned any works prior to his travel to Arabia, Walī Allāh now wrote prolifically after his return from Arabia and cemented his reputation as a renewer (*mujaddid*) and independent thinker (*mujtahid*). Although he inherited his father’s teaching position and continued to cultivate students from all over India and nearby regions, there remains some dispute as to whether there was an institution known as the Madrasa Raḥīmiya in his or his father’s lifetime. Speculatively, the original teaching venue was either a home or a nearby mosque. However, there is evidence that later, an institution by that name was one in which Walī Allāh’s son, Shāh ‘Abd al-Azīz (d. 1239/1824) taught.

² This conversation between different traditions of learning continued (Minault in Malik, 2000).

Walī Allāh too devised an educational syllabus to inculcate an appreciation of the sources of Islamic teachings, the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth. Walī Allāh was also deeply steeped in Persian thought and the philosophical metaphysics of Ibn Sīnā. (d. /1037), Muḥī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) and Mullā Sadrā (d.c. 1045-50/1635-40) all of which leavened his scholarship in myriads of ways. His most prized text *Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bāligha*-God's Conclusive Proof is a classic that enumerates the inner meanings of the teachings of revelation in a sophisticated manner and an interdisciplinary work par excellence. His other writings are complex interpretations of his own mystical experiences and intuitive perceptions of the world and the cosmos, mystagogical treatises that remain in circulation amongst those who have a predisposition for ṣūfism. However, these ṣūfī texts often repel more scripturally focused and tradition-minded scholars and even admirers. The other aspect of Walī Allāh's legacy that has received widespread reception is his advocacy of the study of ḥadīth. In particular, he favoured the book, *Muwatṭā*, compiled by Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) who for him represented the tradition of Madīna (Moosa).³ Walī Allāh did raise the issue and the need to undertake *ijtihād*, interpreting the Qurʾān and the Sunna, the prophetic tradition according to a new and updated interpretative framework. While he discussed the topic at length, he stopped short of advocating his approach against the existing canonical schools.

In India, the Ḥanafī school predominated in the north and Walī Allāh was viewed as a practicing Ḥanafī with an inclination to favour the verdict of the ḥadīth against less persuasive Ḥanafī interpretations. Walī Allāh's legacy has a complex reception. He also translated the Qurʾān into Persian and wrote a few treatises in that language allowing for a broader access to his teachings.

Late Ottoman Egypt

In late Ottoman Egypt, developments at Al-Azhar indicate that it hosted far-sighted and influential thinkers. However, the political sphere in Egypt was closely tied to educational matters,

³ See <https://ebrahimmoosa.com/blog/muwa%E1%B9%AD%E1%B9%ADa%CA%B>
E-roundtable-on-islamic-law-blog-harvard-law-school/.

and with state policy often came intrigue. An indication of the broad gauged learning espoused by some scholars can be gleaned from some of the writings of the scholars. Already in the early in the 18th century, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Damanḥūrī (d. 1192/1778), rector of Al-Azhar from 1768 to 1776, was a widely published scholar. An indication of his broad-gauged knowledge was a treatise that he penned in which he urged doctors to study dissection of human bodies and anatomy (Fahmy, 2018:68). A little more than a quarter of a century later, Shaykh Ḥasan al-‘Aṭṭār (d. 1250/1838), who was versed in medicine during the reign of Muḥammad ‘Alī Pāsha, “came close to extolling dissection” in 1813/14 at a time when the Frenchman Clot Bey (d. 285/1868) was encountering objections from Shaykh al-Azhar al-‘Arūsī (r. 1818-1829) for the very same practice (Ibid; Gesink, 2010:26). Clot Bey was tasked to advance modern medicine in Egypt. Two graduates of Al-Azhar trained in theology, Aḥmad al-Rashīdī and Muḥammad al-Shāfi‘ī, pursued medical training in France and contributed academically to medical science by publishing in Arabic and taking leadership roles at the Qaṣr al-‘Ainī hospital in Cairo (Fahmy, 2018:43-44).

Developments in the sciences spurred by the Napoleonic invasion in 1798-1801 exposed many Egyptians to new scientific traditions. Shaykh al-‘Aṭṭār was curious about European inventions but also disliked the invasion. Under Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha, the country acquired imported skills in Medicine, Engineering, and Science from France. Building a new military also meant a change and transformation of the educational landscape. The impact of Rifā‘a al-Tahtawī (d. 1290/1873), a graduate of Al-Azhar who spent time in France, played a significant role. He translated European ideas in Politics and Philosophy into Arabic. It is significant that someone from a traditional religious background became such a pioneer of transmitting new ideas on Egyptian soil. Education was clearly the key, and many important players played a role in advancing education and reform, especially in what is known as the human sciences.

One such influential figure was Shaykh Ḥusayn al-Marṣafi (d. 1307/1890) an Egyptian luminary of traditional Arabic and Islamic thought. Blinded at age 3, Marṣafi’s father Aḥmad Ḥusayn,

who was also amongst the leading lights at Al-Azhar, played a big role in his education. Marṣafī quickly demonstrated his brilliance and mastered the script of Braille and learnt the French language. He rose from amongst his peers to first teach at the Al-Azhar (1840-1845) and then Dār al-‘Ulūm, the theological institution established at Cairo University to teach a new generation of Al-Azhar graduates Islamic thought together with an engagement with modern knowledge. Marṣafī then taught from the opening of Dār al-‘Ulūm in 1872 at the behest ‘Alī Mubārak Pāsha, the leading modern Egyptian educational reformist until 1888.

Marṣafī’s virtue and intervention was focused on classical Arabic and the role that it played in the formation of modern Arabic-Islamic thought. Until then, Arabic literature was hardly properly acknowledged for playing a role in advancing the *nahḍa*, the Arab renaissance, but it was because of Marṣafī’s keen interest in classical Arabic as the archive of Arabic-Islamic thought that allowed him to successfully impart a broad tableau of Arabic humanistic thought to his students. His book *Literary Means to the Arabic Sciences—al-Wasīla al-Adabīya ila ‘l-‘Ulūm al-‘Arabīya*, is a masterpiece of pedagogic style and a display of a sharp literary acumen. Marṣafī pointed to the close connection the Arabic language, especially that the disciplines of Arabic poetics had with the various disciplines that would constitute Islamic thought. What the Arabs called the “science of eloquence” (*‘ilm al-balāgha*), consists of those disciplines that focus on “literary aesthetics and rhetorical figures” (*‘ilm al-badī‘*), “the science and forms of elucidation” (*‘ilm al-bayān*), and “the science or modes of conveying meanings appropriate to context” (*‘ilm al-ma‘ānī*). For Marṣafī, these disciplines, and more, were integral to the proper understanding of language first, and then secondly, to religious thought that was birthed in that literary substrate from the 17th century Arabia onwards in the form of Islam’s scripture, the Qur’ān and the teachings of the Arabian Prophet. Any deficiency in one’s literary ability would result in a serious misunderstanding of the sources of the religious texts of Islam. Marṣafī instilled in his students the value of such literacy to demonstrate the complexity, as well as the hermeneutical potential and ambiguity embedded in the religious tradition (Ziyāda, 2019:7-33).

Featuring prominently in his work is the centrality of ethics in the study of literature. He saw the entire project of knowledge as a reflection of divine qualities sublimated in humans, such as the qualities of life, knowledge, power, will and action. “Understand that literature (*adab*),” wrote Marṣafī, “is to know the conditions under which a human being of moral character (*al-insān al-mutakhallaq*) is approved by people of insight and thought (*ulū ’l-albāb*) who are, in turn, God’s trustees over the people of His world” (Al-Marṣafī, 2012:36). For Marṣafī, this meant that all speech required close attention to its modes of delivery and reception with special attention to the space of speech and the form of speech.

Marṣafī’s educational philosophy was to ensure that human beings achieve their full potential (*kamāl*) in a gradual manner (Al-Marṣafī, 2019:103). If human formation attains excellence, in his view, then all else improves. The first milestone of education, in his view, was to grasp “the nature of existents” (*ṭabī’a-t al-mawjūdāt*) and, the “need of humans” (*ḥājat al-insān*) to preserve themselves and to optimise life. To understand nature means to grasp how human beings must overcome challenges and obstacles in order to attain stability. Marṣafī’s educational philosophy was premised on an understanding of human nature: “humans are caught between competition (*muzāhama*) that produces hostility and cooperation that produces affection (*maḥabba*)” (Ibid). The latter should be advanced with the serious practice of sociality (*al-ijtimā’*) that enhances cooperation and human well-being.

Sociality articulates the divine wisdom as to why God regularly dispatched prophets to the world with a “wisdom-filled revealed order” (*dīn ḥakīm*). Amongst the fruits of prophecy was amongst other things, to divert hostility from individuals to larger entities and groups (*aḥzāb*); to optimise the good and lessen the harmful; and to strengthen cooperation (*musā’ada*) amongst competing groups. Amongst the effects of God’s wisdom was the fact that larger entities like empires and dynasties were formed to lessen the hostility amongst each other. This stability in human environments results in the flowering of human potential which ultimately manifests itself in the daily increase in the diversity

of knowledge and human actions. When cooperation increases between entities and humans, especially when they consciously and unconsciously work with each other, then harmful competition is reduced. Understanding these drives of competition and cooperation, hostility and affection in humans was crucial to his theory. Marṣafī advocated that this understanding be embedded in social legislation and in the rational understanding of the revealed order (*dīn*) from his perspective. “If you truly understand the revealed order, it will make it possible for you to love *dīn* in your heart and it will boost your intellectual labor (*ijtihād*) to properly grasp the underlying wisdom of the rules of *dīn* from every aspect” (Ibid 104-105).

Marṣafī was inspired by the Qur’ān (2:36-38) in his ethics of sociality demanding that social cooperation must be scaled up. He railed against preferential and patrimonial cooperation in society, arguing that it was not constructive, a feature that even animals will rebuff, for it would only add to the fruitless fragmentation of society. Once hostility amongst humans is erased, only then, he believed, would nations flourish. Marṣafī had an underlying social vision embedded in his educational philosophy: society must advance social welfare. Even the various obligatory ritual practices of Islam, he argued, were designed to create a certain unity of the hearts of believers and a focus on their harmonious collectivity. His research, he acknowledged from most likely French sources, taught him that “the happiness of a people (*umma*) and its prosperity is intimately tied to childhood education” (Ibid 106).

He was later moved to edit an *Epistle on Ethics (Etiquette) for Beginners at Elementary School* written by Maḥmūd ‘Umar Afandī Bājūrī in a conversational style addressed to young children to ensure that they were nurtured at an early age (Bājūrī, 1883). As a product of Al-Azhar’s elementary school for the blind, Marṣafī knew first-hand the need for such early educational interventions. Marṣafī’s careful ideas represent a certain reform of the Muslim educational tradition by drawing on some of the cornerstone elements in the Islamic discursive tradition. While he was aware of the importance of the Western tradition and showed an interest in it, he still had confidence in the historical Islamic tradition to prepare the next generation of intellectuals for the challenges that lie ahead.

Late 19th Century and Early 20th Century Egypt

Some of Marṣafī's students, most notably Muḥammad 'Abduh (1266/1849-1323/1905), Ḥusayn al-Jisr (1261/1845-1327/1909), were all exemplary figures amongst others, who could engage with the new challenges posed by Western thought. With limited access to first-hand knowledge of Western thought in governance, politics, science, and ethics they were, nevertheless, able to turn to the wisdom of their inherited tradition and articulate a response that was accessible to educated Muslim elites. 'Abduh's inspiration was Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1314/1897), himself a product of traditional education in Afghanistan and Iraq. Afghānī and 'Abduh drew extensively on their transnational networks to share their ideas and tap into human resources. Afghani like Marṣafī could deal with the political and intellectual challenges of his day with his traditional Islamic philosophical skills. 'Abduh's attempted interventions in reforming the curriculum of Al-Azhar in terms of its orientation in Islamic thought, at first paid very few dividends. He had better success at the new institution known as Dar al-'Ulūm where there was some receptivity for ways of integrating traditional Islamic thought with modern scientific and social ideas.

During his exile in Lebanon 'Abduh paid special attention to education. He wrote essays diagnosing the challenges in education in Syria, the Ottoman empire and Egypt and then proposed solutions. In his view, the decline in morals and values in the various Muslim societies that he studied were the direct product of the deficits in the educational system in each context. He was especially critical of the influence of foreign educational systems in various Muslim majority contexts and deemed these to be a threat to the welfare of Muslims. The prominence given to foreign schools came at the expense and neglect of Islamic education. But he was equally critical of the ways and methods used by traditional 'ulamā' in advancing Islamic education and severely reproached the methods adopted by Al-Azhar.

'Abduh believed that the absence of proper education and formation of the next generation resulted in a decline in moral and spiritual character. The lack of character resulted in youth who were unwilling to serve in the military when it should have

been an honour for them to serve, he complained. Wealthy Muslims, on their part, were also not willing to share the burden of establishing institutions of excellence. The overall effect was a damning and growing ignorance amongst the lay public. The kind of beliefs that prevailed amongst lay people were a direct outcome of illiteracy and impoverished educational content. He railed against beliefs that propounded that humans had limited will and power. Theological illiteracy only reinforced a psychological commitment to predestination, an attitude that completely undermined moral values. Both the neglect of public duties or the inability of the public to perform in productive work could be attributed, in his view, to mental and psychological attitudes born out of theological ignorance and impoverished education. He was unsparing in his critique of the religious functionaries whose literacy was slightly above that of laypersons but whose primary interest was to instrumentalise religion to earn their livelihood. Most of the people who he identified in this category were people who occupied the professions of jurisprudence, who self-servingly issued religiously inspired legal opinions (*iftāʾ*), served as judges or teachers despite their impoverished education, Abduh mused sarcastically.

The purpose of educational reform was not to introduce books on Islamic law to the curriculum. Rather, the need was to provide proper pedagogical content that was based on sound Islamic doctrines. Education must, in his view, bolster conviction in doctrine (*ʿaqīda*), affirm rationality, and lead to the understanding of the inner dispositions (*al-fiqh al-bāṭinī*) so that it makes an impact on the psyches of individuals. Only then can one advance ethical conduct, avoid destructive traits such as lies, deception, backbiting, jealousy and cowardice and adopt constructive traits that advance human salvation.

20th Century Al-Azhar

Al-Azhar continued the system of studying the relevant texts in the various disciplines for much of the 19th century. In 1872, the first law of reform was passed regulating examinations and the appointment of teachers. One of the oldest institutions of learning in the Muslim world was gradually shepherded into becoming a modern bureaucracy-driven institution of society

and an instrument of change in the service of the modern state. The rector, Shaykh Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī (d. 1364/1945) began implementing far-reaching reforms in his first spell 1928-1929 but resistance to his proposals resulted in him being deposed. In his second spell as rector (1935-1945), he had great success. His goal was to integrate the study of science at various levels of education at Al-Azhar. Subsequent rectors such Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Rāziq (d. 1366/1947), Maḥmūd Shaltūt (d. 1383/1963) and ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (d. 1397/1978) continued the work of educational reform that Marāghī started. The most far-reaching reforms of the Al-Azhar took place under Shaltūt during the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1961.

The establishment of Dār al-‘Ulūm in 1872 is viewed as the masterpiece and handiwork of ‘Alī Mubārak (d. 1311/1893) (Tāhir, n.d.). Mubārak was a foremost public works and education minister whose far-reaching policies transformed Egypt’s higher education landscape. Dār al-‘Ulūm was one of the most important developments with respect to Islamic thought, together with the Egyptian National Library and Archives. Selected students from Al-Azhar had to complete an entrance exam and then received an advanced education in Islamic thought together with modern subjects at Dār a-‘Ulūm. ‘Abduh taught there as did other forward-looking Azharī graduates. At some point it was incorporated into Cairo University and increasingly came under criticism for not meeting its original goals in the latter part of the 20th century (Reid, 1991).

Sites of 20th and 21st Century Educational Reform

Reform in Shī‘a Institutions: Iran and Iraq

While it is tempting to think that reform is only a Sunnī phenomenon, when it comes to the education of the clerics in the major Shī‘ī centers like Qum in Iran and Najaf in Iraq, the debates about the nature of the education of the scholars resemble the issues in Sunnī circles. The Iraqi scholar and graduate of a ḥawza ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Rifā‘ī is a strong advocate for the transformation of the Shī‘a ḥawzas. He strongly advocates that the ḥawzas be open to different knowledge traditions. The ḥawzas in their defence of tradition resist the human sciences in his view,

which is a disadvantage for the knowledge project of Islam in itself. The current output of teachings and doctrines by ḥawzas, in his view, have outlived their relevance (Al- Rifāʿī, u.d:45–56). Muḥammad Mujtahid al-Shabistārī, perhaps, has a most elaborate and far-reaching programme for the reform of the knowledge project in the ḥawzas because he is both a product of those institutions in Iran and a philosopher. In his view, the tradition-based reason, call it *fiqh*-centred project of the ḥawza is not reason-centred but rather stems from religious obligations.

The overall picture of religious discourse will only have the potential to change if the *fiqh*-centred project is preceded by an elaborate rational and theoretical discourse that aligns with our experiences (Shabistārī, 2009:292). Shabistārī (2009) is also fully aware of the intimate role between religious thought and political thought. Therefore, he argues that both the tradition and the present discourses of religion need to be analysed in terms of how they were shaped by political and other social forces in the past. Once this is achieved, then the possibility of crafting an appropriate religious discourse for our times has a greater possibility of success (Ibid 311). Ḥaydar Ḥubb Allāh, a Lebanese scholar teaching at a ḥawza in Qum argues more systematically for the need to allow a historical sensibility to enter into the discourses of the scholars at the ḥawzas (Ḥubb Allāh, 2010). If this sensibility prevails, then the religious scholars will automatically understand the need to provide for alternative and different solutions for Muslim societies in light of the prevailing realities. A silver-lining for the Shīʿa ḥawzas is that these important and far-reaching conversations are now actively promoted by “insiders” to these institutions and that robust conversation is challenging to sustain because so much is at stake.

Figures and Institutions in South Asia

The Deoband franchise

The educational institution started by Muḥammad Qāsim Nānotvī (d. 1297/1880) and his associates in north India, near Sahāranpūr called the Madrasa Arabīya Islāmīya, better known as Dārul ʿUlūm Deoband in 1867, does lay claim to his legacy and inspiration (Metcalf, 1982). Those involved amongst the founders

of the Deoband school were enamoured by Nānotvī's advocacy of the need to follow the prophetic Sunna and eschew customary practices that might dilute Muslim identity in a multi-religious modern India. Deoband, too, placed a strong emphasis on the prophetic Sunna to root out unsanctioned religious practices, known as *bid'a*, amongst the laity of Muslims. Deoband also defended some of the theological proclamations made by Walī Allāh's grandson, Shāh Muḥammad Ismā'īl (d. 1246 /1831) in his zealous bid to eliminate *bid'a*.

Deoband and the intellectual and spiritual tradition in which it was invested unapologetically used the terms *iṣlāḥ*, to reform distorted social norms and to bring these in line with prophetic norms drawn from the reports attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, ḥadīth. Renewal (*tajdīd*) for the scholars of Deoband meant to bring the practice and teachings of Islam into conversation with the founding spirit of Islam by making monotheism the touchstone of all doctrines. What made Deoband stand out was that it advocated the need to abide by the Ḥanafī interpretation of Islamic law and unapologetically practiced sufism in all its diversity. Nānotvī advanced his cause by establishing additional madrasas in Meerut and Murādābād, cities nearby Deoband (al-Qāsimī, :379). What is significant about the rise of the Deoband-aligned madrasa network compared to others that preceded them, was that the others “did not embody an activist orientation” and were exclusively committed to their traditional educational roles (Ibid 379). Successive generations of Deoband scholars engaged in the independence movement against British colonialism. At partition, Deoband was a house divided when some favoured a Muslim homeland in Pakistan and others proposed to stay in a multireligious India. The Deoband madrasa network is by far the most influential and globally the most visible madrasa franchise. It is internally diverse and periodically enjoys bad publicity because of the Taliban, the new rulers of Afghanistan since 2021. The Taliban view their doctrinal inspiration to be the Deoband school.

Ahl-al Ḥadīth

Those who identified as the Ahl al-Hadīth in India also claim to be heirs to Walī Allāh's legacy but favour the doctrinal teachings

of Shāh Ismā'īl, his grandson. The first madrasa of this franchise was the al-Madrasa al-Aḥmadiya in the town of Arrah in the Bhojpūr district of Bihar in 1880. Ahl-al Ḥadīth madrasas focus more on ḥadīth than on any one canonical law school's teachings in their syllabi. Their sources of reference in Islamic law, *fiqh*, are the juristic texts that are ḥadīth-centred like *Nayl al-Awtar* by Muḥammad 'Alī al-Shawkanī (d. 1255/1834), the Yemeni Zaydī scholar.

The Ahl-al Ḥadīth found a champion in Nawāb Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān Qannawjī (d. 1307/1890) (Preckel, 2013). Qannawjī hailed from a north Indian family of religious notables and studied with Mufti Ṣadr al-Dīn Āzurda in Delhi and later studied with the émigré Yemeni Qāḍi Zayn al-'Ābidīn b. Muḥsin al-Anṣārī (d. 1297/1880) who was a Qāḍi in the princely state of Bhopal (al-Ḥasanī, 1992, 8:202–210). Marriage into the royal household of Bhopal to Shāh Jahān Begum (d. 1319/1901) provided Qannawjī with a platform to advance his religious ideas, a moderate form of puritanism (*salafi*); and the privileges of marriage to an elite wife helped to promote his extensive transnational scholarly network, especially with Shawkanī's students. For him, as for all *salafis*, it is paramount to proclaim the conviction that the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions (*sunna*) are the *only* legitimate sources of religious inspiration in Islam. All else is a degradation of tradition and antithetical to true faith and practice. Especially suspect in *salafi* circles are ṣūfī practices and the requirement that lay Muslims commit to the authority of one of the canonical schools of Islamic law (*taqlīd*).

Defections from one orientation to another was rare but did occur. A graduate from Darul 'Ulūm Deoband, a strict Ḥanafī institution was Abul Wafā Thanāullāh Amritsarī (d. 1367/1948). However, he adopted an Ahl-al ḥadīth view of not adhering to any canonical law school and earned the ire of fellow scholars (Nānotvī & Gīlānī, c.1980 3:188). A reformist position always came with hazards. While Qannawjī enjoyed respect for his scholarship, his adversaries were also critical of his affiliation to an unsophisticated trend of salafism. Salafism in the Indian subcontinent went by the label of *Folk of the Prophetic Tradition*, (*Ahl-i Ḥadīs*). Qannawjī's stern critiques of the authority of the ancient canonical schools of law that many non-*salafis*,

broadly the Sunni mainstream, earnestly followed, earned him notoriety amongst his ‘ulamā’ peers.

Nadwatul ‘ulamā’

Sensing this growing gap between those who were traditionally educated versus the modern educated Muslims, a small group of traditional scholars established a reform movement known as the Council or Association of Scholars, better known by its Arabic title, Nadwatul ‘ulamā’. Its pioneer was Muḥammad ‘Alī Mongerī (d. 1346/1927) the founder of the institute in the north Indian city of Lucknow, India. Mongerī was himself a distinguished scholar and spiritual master, who grasped the challenges of his times and the need to form a new institution. And the pioneering intellectual force in addition was Shiblī Nu‘mānī (d. 1333/1914), who helped to shape that institution at least in the early stages. Troubled by internal sectarianism and a debilitating orthodoxy amongst rival Muslim groups in the face of daunting political and social challenges, Mongherī led the reformists. Joined by prominent religious scholars in a founding meeting in the north Indian city of Kanpur in 1893, a decision was taken to launch an institution (Malik, 1994:144).

Mongheri and his colleagues wished to train and educate Muslim religious scholars in the modern disciplines in order that they may be able to meet the enormous challenges of their time. Despite vocal opposition from conservatives, a new madrasa known as the Darul ‘Ulūm Nadwatul ‘Ulamā’, shortened as Nadwa, was established in the city of Lucknow on the cusp of the 20th century, in 1898. Armed with a reformed curriculum, Nadwa’s founders believed, they would produce a differently skilled group of religious leadership that could live up to its striking motto: “to combine the useful past with the beneficial modern.”

At the founding of the Nadwatul ‘ulamā’ is a very little-known fact that at the very inception of the institution the generous donations of aristocratic women were critical. “Some of the very first assets,” writes Shiblī Nu‘mānī, “given to [the Nadwatul ‘ulamā’] as donations from charitable trusts (*waqf*) were from the respectable women of the Muslim community (*qawm*)” (Nu‘mānī, 1999, 8:76-77). The fact that traditional elite Muslim

women from the royal households of Bhopal and Bhahāwalpūr used their charitable trusts to provide cash to run these institutions is significant. It points to their personal investment in these institutions, and without their critical support, the project of Islamic educational reform in early 20th century India might have been hobbled.

The primary purpose of Nadwa was to remedy shortcomings in the knowledge of science and the Arabic language amongst the emerging religious scholars in colonial India. The first goal was to familiarise religious scholars with the discourses of modern science with the aim to shape a new Islamic theology if they were conversant with the scientific discourses of the modern world. The second was to remedy the absence of depth and fluency in the Arabic language that hampered students' understanding of the classical tradition resembling developments in Egypt as advocated by Marṣafī. For this reason, Nadwa stressed the need for students to deepen their understanding of the Arabic language and the history of Islamicate culture. Such linguistic efficiency also had the added benefit of facilitating transnational Islamic collaboration and further greater coherence within the global Muslim community.

Nadwa might not have succeeded in its grandiose goals of making an impact on religious thought. It did, however, succeed in producing some very prolific authors who published in Arabic and local languages in their contributions to historical studies in India. More modestly, it managed to trigger curricular debates amongst the Deobandi, Ahl-i Hadīth and, to a lesser extent, amongst the Barelvī madrasa networks with mixed results. Some madrasas followed Nadwa's revised curriculum. More accessible and modern Arabic language texts were used in several disciplines but the core texts of the Nizāmī curriculum in law, theology, and the study of the Qur'an remained unchanged, except that most of the philosophy and logic texts were jettisoned. Throughout the 20th century, very modest curricular reforms took place in madrasas based in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, even though it never became sufficiently far-reaching to meet the social and political needs of the reform-minded section of the traditionalists.

Fin-de-siecle, Ḥadīth Studies in Bhopal

Closely aligned to the scholars who took a prominent role at Nadwa, is the little-known role of Shaykh Ḥusayn b. Muḥsin al-Anṣārī (d. 1327/1909) of Ḥudayda in Yemen and the impact that he made on the Indian landscape in terms of educational reform. Shaykh Ḥusayn arrived in Bhopal in 1862 during the reign of Begum Sikander (Khan, 2000). After a two-year stay in India, he returned to Yemen. In this interim period, Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Qannawjī visited Shaykh Ḥusayn abroad in Ḥudayda in Yemen, because he studied with his brother, Qāḍī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn b. Muḥsin al-Anṣārī who was a long-time distinguished resident and judge of the principality of Bhopal. Qannawjī recognised the intellectual genius of Shaykh Ḥusayn, especially his extraordinary memory and knowledge of the science of ḥadīth. He took authorisation (*ijāza*) to transmit reports from Shaykh Ḥusayn. Then he invited the Yemeni scholar to return to Bhopal, because by now Qannawjī's increasing influence in the royal household could facilitate a teaching position for the visitor. In 1869 Shaykh Ḥusayn returned to India once again, but after a four-year stay, returned to Yemen once more. Finally, in 1879, Shaykh Ḥusayn settled in Bhopal, by which time Qannawjī was Nawāb consort to the ruler Shāh Jahān Begum by marriage. Shaykh Ḥusayn made the Moti Masjid in Bhopal his principal seat of teaching. And in a few years "this small mosque met eye-to-eye with the illustrious Al-Azhar University" in terms of the quality of ḥadīth scholarship cultivated in Bhopal that rivalled Cairo, according to one account (Nadwī, 1975, 1:211).

The new madrasa in North India, known as the Dārul ʿUlūm Deoband, was barely two decades in existence when Shaykh Ḥusayn became the destination for all students interested in the study of ḥadīth. In the view of many observers, Shaykh Ḥusayn recreated an environment for the teaching of ḥadīth that readers only encountered in the history books, according to the renowned scholar and historian Abul Ḥasan ʿAlī Nadwī (Ibid 1:210; 1:207–228). Shaykh Ḥusayn b. Muḥsin al-Anṣārī's scholarly credentials could not be more distinguished. He was a student of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Shawkānī (d. 1281/1864.), the son of the illustrious Shawkānī, the elder. Shaykh Ḥusayn's scholarly

eminence made him a magnet for the leading scholars in the last quarter of the 19th century in India and many made it their duty to study with him. Even though he was Shāfi'ī in canonical school, affiliation with careful attention to the authority of the ḥadīth, many Indian Ḥanafīs travelled to Bhopal to study with him. These include Mawlāna Waḥīd al-Zamān al-Ḥaydarābādī, better known as Nawāb Waqār Nawāz Jang Bahādur (d. 1338/1920), Nawāb Sadar-ī Yār Jung Mawlānā Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān Khān Sherwānī (d. 1369/1950) and Ḥakīm Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥayy (d. 1341/1923), the eminent intellectual historian of Muslim scholarship in India and dean of studies at the famous Nadwatul 'ulamā' are all listed, amongst others, as his students. For three decades, his reputation and scholarship bolstered the study of prophetic reports in India.

Shaykh Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn (d. 1344/1926), son of Shaykh Ḥusayn, continued the scholarly legacy of his father for some time in Bhopal. He was renowned for his expertise in Arabic literature, a mastery of the classics and then taught at the Nadwatul 'ulamā' and was for some time the ranking scholar of Arabic literature and ḥadīth at that institution. Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn's son, Shaykh Khalīl b. Muḥammad, better known as Shaykh Khalīl 'Arab (d. 1386/1966), left major imprints on the study of the Arabic language in India. Appointed as professor of Arabic at Lucknow University, Shaykh Khalīl also taught private lessons at his home in the city. Amongst his most outstanding students were Abul Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī (d. 1420/1999) who attained global acclaim for his writings in Arabic and Urdu and whose spirited revivalist writings were translated into dozens of languages around the world. Shaykh Khalīl was a dyed-in-the wool salafī and often disagreed with some of the luminaries at Nadwa over their fascination with Islamic spirituality (*taṣawwuf*). Later, the famous Muḥammad Taqī al-Dīn al-Hilālī (d. 1407/1987), the Moroccan scholar who was educated in his native country and in Germany joined the faculty at the Nadwatul 'ulamā' for a few years and made an extraordinary impact in both India and in Arabia, given his strong salafī convictions that became evident in his Qur'ān translation project in partnership with Muḥammad Muḥsin Khān. He also translated the Ṣaḥīḥ of Bukhārī into English (Lauzière, 2015).

This transnational scholarly and educational network linking Yemen and Morocco with a cross-cutting network of influential Indian scholars has hardly been accounted for in the historiography of South Asian studies, let alone in the study of Islamic reform. While the Yemeni influence certainly gave a shot in the arm to the South Asian salafis it also tempered and created a stronger dynamic in the study of ḥadīth for Indian Ḥanafis to contend with in multiple institutions.

Barelwī School

Islamic reform and educational reform always expressed itself into a concrete issue or dispute. The distinguished Aḥmad Raḏā Khān (d. 1340/1921) was one such figure. From the city of Bareilly in today's Uttar Pradesh in India, Khan unleashed a theological fusillade on the scholars of Deoband and all admirers of Shāh Ismā'īl, the grandson of Walī Allāh and his theology. Aḥmad Raḏā was determined to expose the theological error of the Deoband scholars for their wrongful admiration of Shāh Ismā'īl and the latter's remarks on elements of intercession and the status of the Prophet as a mortal (Sanyal, 1999; Tareen, 2020). Some Deobandis enthusiastically, and others cautiously, defended Shāh Ismā'īl's views, while Aḥmad Raḏā relentlessly adopted a polemical posture of anathematising sympathisers of Shāh Ismā'īl. He especially reserved his ire for the Wahhābis of Arabia and lumped the Deobandis as allies of that group. Aḥmad Raḏā declared the doctrines of the Deoband school as amounting to denying that Muḥammad was the final prophet with a unique status in Muslim cosmology, and, therefore, they violated a fundamental doctrine of Islam. As apologists for unbelief, in Aḥmad Raḏā's view, Deobandis were worse. Invoking an early doctrine, he maintained: "toleration of unbelief is tantamount to subscribing to unbelief." Several prominent authorities in Arabia endorsed his verdict on the Deobandīs, an event that generated countless Deobandī responses and ongoing polemical and theological rows pitting followers and scholars of the Deobandīi against their Barelwī counterparts for a good part of the 20th century.

Aḥmad Raḏā and his influential school of followers view him as a reformer, while many of his admirers deemed him a

mujaddid, a centennial renewer in the Islamic tradition. But his idea of reform meant a return to the classical and post-classical Sunnī discursive tradition. Any molestation of the discursive tradition for him signalled a danger to the integrity of the Islamic tradition itself.

Aḥmad Razā strongly supported the advancement of Islamic education and the need to train scholars who were steeped in tradition. He also opposed unsanctioned practices (*bid'a*) that conflicted with the Sunna and enthusiastically advocated for madrasas to counter false beliefs and doctrines that circulated in Muslim communities. He deemed science to be part of Islam and required students to be devoted to Islam's fundamental teachings in their advancement of the knowledge tradition. An affection for knowledge should be the outcome of the educational process with love of the Prophet Muḥammad and devotion to the saints and pious scholars a point of great significance in the discursive practices.

In Aḥmad Razā's view, Islam is equal to a canonical orthodox tradition and any molestation of tradition is tantamount to heresy. Predictably, Aḥmad Razā also opposed anything resembling a contextual theology because, in his view, any departure from normative doctrine was just unthinkable. In that sense, he was ultra-orthodox, holding out little hope for the reconciliation of doctrine with social change. To this day, the vigorous Barelvī madrasa network remains fervently committed to furthering his theological ideals. Throughout the 20th century, representatives of both the Deobandī and Barelvī schools, their graduates and foot soldiers, all made it their goal to counter each other's views in public debates and religious mobilisation. At times, these polemics spilled over into violent conflict and destruction.

Conclusion

Educational reform has been one of the burning issues in Muslim societies for more than a century. In 1977, the World Conference on Muslim Education was held in Makka to mark the importance of both the place and the topic at hand. Education was seen as central to Islamic revival, meaning preparing the next generations

for the challenges that they will face on Islamic terms. Since then, a variety of experiments in Islamic education have taken place in different parts of the world. The Islamization of knowledge proposed by Ismail Raji al-Fārūqī held some appeal for a time (Al-Faruqi, 1982). Several Islamic universities were launched around the world to advance the goals of the Islamization of knowledge project. Its successor programme, the Integration of Knowledge, is now promoted. Islamic schools abound around the world from pre-school, elementary, middle, and high schools, marked as “Islamic schools” signed on to this programme with varying levels of success (Hasan, 2014).

Yet, absent at the Makka World Conference were the traditional religious leaders or their institutions, all of whom played a significant role in Muslim education, especially in the training of religious scholars. This is the most crucial sector engaged in religious ideas that serve large masses of Muslims around the world. The conversation of reforming the educational system dedicated to the training of Muslim religious leaders, has been widely neglected, but has shown some success in some isolated instances. A few institutions in India, Pakistan, Morocco, parts of sub-Saharan Africa and Indonesia are beginning to adopt the model that was once adopted at the Dār al-‘Ulūm in Cairo, namely, to teach modern subjects side by side with Islamic thought. But the greatest hesitation remains the engagement with modern knowledge as part of the intellectual toolkit and epistemology of religious scholars. Most see any such development to be threatening to Muslim identity. When science and some social sciences are admitted into the framework of Islamic education, its role is less about advancing the knowledge project but more as a defensive and apologetic posture. Modern thought remains on the outside of Islamic thought, merely to instrumentally explain some Islamic position, but hardly any epistemological integration is deemed as desirable. Islamic reform has succeeded in bringing a certain level of practice into Muslim societies but the task of reviving a complex knowledge tradition of the past and a substantial engagement with knowledge of the present is sorely lacking with dire consequences for Muslim religious, cultural, social, and political life. The tragedy is that

that the majority of ‘ulamā’ groups amongst both Sunnīs and Shī‘īs do not see any such knowledge exploration as a necessity. They remain convinced that the premodern tradition and its disciplines are sufficient for directing Muslim religious thought in the 21st century.

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Chapter 2

My Journey from the *Madrasa* to the Western Academy¹: from Al-Azhar to the University of Cape Town

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I left for Egypt as a nineteen-year-old, almost one year to the date of completing my secular high school education (matric) to study at Al-Azhar, one of the Muslim world's oldest pre-modern *madrasas* and often regarded the most prestigious of the Sunni world.² I flew with Olympic Airways (now defunct) over Egypt first to Greece and from Greece back to Egypt. As Egypt boycotted apartheid South Africa to isolate the racist white state there were no direct flights between South Africa and Egypt. Thus, South Africans, including oppressed black people like me could not travel directly to Egypt; to be sure, we supported this Egyptian (and Global South) position as correct; it was in solidarity with the anti-apartheid struggle. Moreover, we could not apply for

¹ The title from the *madrasa* to the academy must not be taken as indicating a progression from lower to higher. It is chronological insofar as my studying at Al-Azhar (1989–1998) precedes my studies at the University of Cape Town (2000 onwards). I appreciate both the *madrasa* and the university as institutes of learning with their peculiar histories, methodologies, assumptions and the products of unique *weltanschauungs* in history. I do not juxtapose them to privilege one over the other.

² Thus, Ali Mabruk described Al-Azhar, "... at all times increasing in its activity, and in its fame in distant lands. They come to it from all the lands of Islam ... Hijazis, Yemenis, Sindis, Indians, Sudanese, Javanese, Baghdadis, Maghribis, Syrians, Afghans, Turks, Kurds, besides a multitude from the Egyptian provinces ... It is probably the most notable place after the three holy mosques [of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem]. For it is the "universal mosque, the most brilliant Azhar ... the great madrasa, the home of beneficence ..." (quoted in Reimer, 1997:57).

an Egyptian visa from South Africa.³ So, I arrived at Cairo's international airport without a visa. I was immediately taken into a back room, remaining there for about an hour until South Africans who had arrived before me and already enrolled at Al-Azhar Egypt came with a letter confirming that I was a recipient of a scholarship to study at Al-Azhar. In the few weeks that followed, I found Cairo a bewildering experience not terribly unlike Ebrahim Moosa's experience of India as a student at the famous Deoband Seminary in India (Moosa, 2015:15).⁴ But I grew used to the place and began fitting in. The diverse ethnic make-up of students with different languages from countries over the world especially from Africa was a factor for strength and growth.

The Al-Azhar that I arrived at in 1989 was, in addition to a *madrasa*, a full-fledged university since 1961.⁵ However, in this chapter, I relate my study at Al-Azhar as a *madrasa* not a university.⁶ This, notwithstanding that the chapter will be

³ Post-revolutionary Egypt supported the liberation movements of Africa in their struggle against colonial rule. When I arrived in Egypt in 1989, the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress still had representatives there based at the infamous African Society that housed all of Africa's liberation movements since the 1950s.

⁴ Of course, the India of 1975 and Egypt of 1989 differed much, if for nothing else than the result of their respective political realities.

⁵ In 1961, the Egyptian parliament passed Law 103 that designated Al-Azhar a state university. With Law 103, modern faculties such as Medicine, Pharmacy, and Engineering, first in Cairo, and later in the big provincial cities were introduced alongside the traditional religious ones (see, Hatina, 2003:59; Hasan, 2006:160). Over the years, more modern faculties were introduced, the most recent being the Faculty of Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence, for both men and women (the genders are separated), and the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences for the 2025/2026 academic year; <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/3540764> (Accessed: 2 October 2025).

⁶ I problematise here the designation of university to *madrasas* (*madāris*, the correct plural form in Arabic) as institutes of higher learning, both those established in the pre-modern or modern era — including those in the West. The designation is anachronistic insofar as these centres of higher Islamic learning did/do not conform to university as a Western institute of learning and, therefore, incorrect. Timothy Cleveland shows that institutions of Islamic higher learning dating to the premodern era do not resemble the original meaning of the word *universitas*, which means cooperation, created and controlled in medieval Europe by the Catholic Church. These cooperations had curricula that generally offered secular medicine and law (Cleveland, 2008:77-78). Thus, *universitas* was not a centre of and for religious learning. This, in contrast to contemporary *madrasas*, including many in the West, where the same classical works of the premodern era are taught and

confined to the five years (the duration of the degree) which I spent in the Faculty of Islamic law and Modern Positive Law obtaining a BA/Honours degree. My majors were *Fiqh* (Islamic substantive law), *uṣūl al-fiqh* (Muslim legal hermeneutics) and *Fiqh al-Muqāran*.⁷ Prior to this time, I spent one year learning Arabic in a “Special Studies” programme and four years in the Al-Azhar High School (*Al-tānawīyah al-Azharīyah*).

Before I delve into my “stay” at the *madrasa*, I deem it to be in order to provide a broad sketch of reform at Al-Azhar over the last two hundred years. The first real attempt at reforming the Azharī learning system (*iṣlāḥ al-taʿlīm al-azharī*) commenced under the leadership (*mašāʾiḥah*) of Muḥammad al-ʿArūsī in the period 1818 to 1829. Between 1830 and 1834, al-Ŝayḥ Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār laid the new blocks for reforming the Azharī learning system. In 1872, a universal degree “*al-ālamīyyah*” was introduced defining the academic disciplines and bringing together the textual sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-naqlīyyah*): *Fiqh*, *Ḥadīṭ*, and *Tafsīr* and the literary / humanistic sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-adabīyyah*): *Naḥw*, *Bayān*, *Maʿānī* (Ḥasan, 2003:157-162; Gesink, 2013:18).

Also in 1872, a law promulgated under the shaykhhood of Muḥammad al-ʿAbbāsī al-Mahdī (1870-1886) named eleven areas as examination subjects. The areas comprised Islamic law, jurisprudence, theology, *Ḥadīṭ*, Qurʾān, exegesis, Arabic syntax and morphology, and eloquence and literary style, and logic, the three sciences of rhetoric (Gesink, 2013:21). During the era of Ḥasan al-Nawāwī as Ŷayḥ al-Azhar (1896-1900), a few laws

studied following the premodern methodologies and approaches. This is not to say that change is not at work in the *madrasa*. For example, in the chapter “Birth of the contemporary *madrasa*”, Ebrahim Moosa shows, starting from the 18th century, the careful selection of classical texts, waves of theological renewal, reform, and tweaking the curriculum (Moosa, 2015).

⁷ Lexically, *fiqh* means to understand, to precede others in understanding, or understanding coming naturally to a person (Abu Zahra, undated:4). Technically, it is the study of the practical rulings specifically for human action. *Uṣūl al-fiqh* is the aggregate knowledge of the proofs of *fiqh*: the Qurʾān, the Prophetic traditions, the consensus of Muslims and analogical deduction, the manner by which such proofs are adduced, and the status of the adducer (al-Ġazālī, 1995:9). It leads either to certain knowledge of a ruling or to at least a reasonable assumption (al-ʿAlwānī, 1990; al-Zuhaylī, 1996:19-23; al-Ŝāṭibī, undated:19).

to drive the strong reform of al-Azhar were issued (Rahman, 1982:67; Ḥasan, 2003). However, reform was not always welcomed by all Rectors of al-Azhar.⁸ Thus, when Muḥammad ‘Abduh requested the then Ṣayḥ al-Azhar Muḥammad al-Inbābī to order the *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Ḥaldūn and theological works of the more rationalist *Mu‘tazilah* School be included into the curriculum, he was met with refusal (Rahman, 1982:66–67).⁹

England formally occupied Egypt in 1882 (although it made Egypt a formal protectorate in 1914). Reform of Egyptian society was at the top of its agenda; Lord Cromer, the governor of Egypt, saw it as his mission to “save” Egypt (Moosa, 2009:162–163). The ‘*ulamā*’ of Al-Azhar, as custodians of the *Ṣarī‘ah*, undoubtedly had to contend with the colonial encounter introducing modern forms of knowledge and doing.¹⁰ Post-revolutionary Egypt, too, came with reforms that impacted Al-Azhar. As alluded to before, Law 103 of 1961 introduced faculties, but also departments, deaneries and heads, prescribed texts, formal exams, set curriculums, and the official conferring of degrees (Hatina, 2003:52–58; Ḥasan, 2003:157). However, Law 103 led to what Malika Zeghal calls reforms with ambiguity and consequences, amongst other things, the introduction of secular sciences into Al-Azhar’s curriculum.

⁸ In response to a plea to revive scientific education at Al-Azhar, readers wrote in to protest that students would become fascinated by them and gradually abandon the religious subjects that would thus lead students down a slippery slope to a denial of God’s omnipotent unity (Gesink, 2013:24).

⁹ For a more detailed account of reform at Al-Azhar including organisational, administrative, and curriculum reforms as well as resistance to curriculum reform in the period 1872–1930, the role and positions of the *Khedives*, Muḥammad ‘Abduh, and Rectors of Al-Azhar see Rahman (1982:64–70).

¹⁰ By way of illustrating the response of the ‘*ulamā*’ of Al-Azhar to the encounter, the Egyptian historian Khaled Fahmy refers to a painting (in a museum of medical history in Cairo) depicting the first anatomy lesson performed in Egypt in 1829. “Surrounding the cadaver is a group of ‘*ulamā*’ ... one of them gesticulating excitedly at what is taking place in front of him ... the group of religious scholars occupies center stage, and the painter arranges them in such a way as to obstruct both our view and that of the students, preventing direct access to the cadaver, ostensibly the source of knowledge about the internal structure of the human body. Autopsy ... is thus thwarted by religion ... religion stands in the way of science ...” (Fahmy, 2018:1–3). A few decades later, Khedive Ismā‘īl later requested the Ṣayḥs of Al-Azhar to write a book of civil and criminal law based on the *ṣarī‘ah* in the form of a positive law code suitable to the times. They declined citing their fear of public scorn and accusation of impiety. As a result, it was not *ṣarī‘ah* that became the basis for the new National Courts but French codes (*Ibid*:33).

Chapter 2

In June 1961, the Nasserist regime ... transformed al-Azhar with a two-pronged law. First this reform modernized then content of the knowledge transmitted in the institutes and the university of al-Azhar: new subjects such as natural sciences, mathematics, and geography were introduced into the curriculum alongside the religious subjects in the *ma'āhid*, the institutes that were to replace the structure of the ancient religious school, the *kuttab*. At the level of the university, the reform also introduced modern faculties (such as medicine, pharmacy, and engineering), first in Cairo, and later in the big provincial cities, alongside the religious ones (*ṣarī'ah*, or Islamic law; *usul al-din*, or the foundations of religion; and *lugha 'arabiyya*, or Arabic language) ... from 1961 on ... the institute gave modern and religious knowledge at the level of primary and high school and prepared its students to enter the religious or modern faculties of al-Azhar. The regime unified the Azharite primary and secondary schools. They became centralized under the administration of the institutes, which formed one of the five institutions of al-Azhar (Zeghal, 1999:372-377).

If Law 103 of 1961 placed Al-Azhar under tight state control, there was seemingly a relaxation during the rule of Anwar al-Sādāt (1970-81) who used Ṣayḥ 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd's (rector of Al-Azhar, 1973-78) *fatwās* against Communism in his campaign against Leftists in the media. Ṣayḥ 'Abd al-Ḥalīm in turn used al-Sādāt's "leniency" to strengthen Al-Azhar's role on the public scene and expanding its reach. He opened Al-Azhar primary and secondary institutes to an increasing number of students including from the non-Arab world and Muslim minority contexts. Nevertheless, the Islamic faculties in which I was a student retain many elements of the pre-reform *madrasa* legacy. There was no complete rupture from and abandoning of the pre-20th century *madrasa* tradition.

Indira Gesink (2010) shows that reform debates at Al-Azhar Madrasa in 19th-century Cairo were enormously influential for 20th-century Islamic thought. Moreover that "conservative" 'ulamā' engaged many of the same issues as

reformers and led committees that generated and implemented reforms. As leaders at Al-Azhar, they provided crucial legitimacy for the reforms to become rooted in public life. Nevertheless, the reform that began in the early 19th century culminating in Law 103 of 1961 and subsequent reforms had impacted the Al-Azhar that I arrived at in 1989 as a nineteen-year-old aspiring *‘ālim* from South Africa.

“Freshman” in the Faculty of Islamic law and modern civil law

I enrolled in the faculty first for the 1993/1994 academic year. Classes were from eight in the morning until two in the afternoon. There was no roll call, so it was not strange to meet classmates only at the time of exams. We sat in modern lecture halls in desks, a far cry from the study circles in mosques (*ḥalaqāt*) students still fifty years ago would have found themselves in.¹¹ Most of our teachers were dressed in modern clothing, suit and tie and without fist-length beards, what Ebrahim Moosa calls the proverbially-cast die (Moosa, 2015:224–227).

In class, only the teacher spoke, meaning that they directed the class discussion in line with the prescribed text and correct view of the scholars; one could not offer a differing view to that of the prescribed text, the authoritative view. Our participation as students was limited to asking questions and seeking clarity. An exam question would often be worded, “what is your *ra’y*/informed opinion on this question”? apparently allowing one to express one’s (informed) view. What really was requested was the prescribed text’s view, not the student’s own view, even if they arrived at it by engaging premodern texts and the views of premodern or modern Muslim scholars.

¹¹ For more on the study circles in mosques in the pre-colonial era, see Makdisi (1981:12–20); *Jāmi‘ al-Ḥākim* and *Jāmi‘ al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ḥasan* were two grand *jāmis* in which teaching took place (Makdisi, 1981:21). Still late into the colonial and even early post-colonial era, Al-Azhar classes were conducted in the *ḥalqah* format in the Al-Azhar mosques. I vividly recall students in the Faculty of *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, specialising in *Da‘wah* (propagation) sitting for their “class” in *ḥalqas* in Al-Azhar Mosque and even sitting for exams in the mosque.

The Faculty of Islamic Law had two sections. One, the General Section (*Qism al-‘ām*) created in 1961 as an outcome of the abovementioned Law 103 of 1961. In addition to *Fiqh*, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, and *Fiqh al-Muqāran* (Comparative Islamic substantive law) the section offers criminal, civil, personal law as offered in all Egypt’s secular universities and around the world. Two, the *Ŝarī‘ah* section (*Qism al-Ŝarī‘ah*) offers *Fiqh*, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, and *Fiqh al-Muqāran* and other sciences of the pre-modern Muslim intellectual-religious tradition only.¹² In both sections, *Fiqh*, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, and *Fiqh al-Muqāran* were majors on equal footing and students from both sections sat in the same class taught by the same Professor. The duration of study in the General Section, as alluded to above, is five years — in the *Ŝarī‘ah* section it is four years. Given that I enrolled in the General Section, this chapter deals only with its Islamic law (*madrasa*) curriculum, prescribed texts, and pedagogy that in any case overlap with that of the *Ŝarī‘ah* Section. Before I provide a breakdown of the subjects offered over the five years of study, I share two anecdotes that address my experiences as a student in this millenniums-old prestigious *madrasa*, my alma matter that I have profound love for to this day.

One, in my first year (1993/1994 academic year) with our professor who taught us *Uṣūl al-fiqh dirāsah naṣṣīyah* (textual study); a brilliant teacher who made a difficult subject palatable to students, explaining complex terms and ideas with ease. As a jurist, he was fittingly called *baḥr bi lā ŷāṭī* (a sea without shores). Nevertheless, he told our class of about seven hundred students that we Azharis are the best students as we do not dabble in politics, unlike our counterparts in Egypt’s “secular” universities.

¹² Other subjects of the Muslim religious-intellectual tradition taught include Exegesis, *Ḥadīṭ*, Syntax, Morphology, Rhetoric (the language sciences). However, these subjects are majors of two other faculties of Al-Azhar, namely the Faculty of Theology (*Kulīyah Uṣūl al-Dīn*) and the Faculty of Arabic Language (*Kulīyah Al-Lughah al-‘Arabīyyah*). The former has four departments: *Ḥadīṭ*, Tafsīr, Philosophy and Belief, and Islamic Propagation. The latter has three departments: History and Civilisation, Journalism, and Language in general (Linguistics including Syntax; Poetry, Prose, and Literature).

He then offered a critique of the 1994 film “*Al-Irhābī*” (“The Terrorist”), its apparent denial of the doctrine of punishment in the grave. It was a belief, he emphasised, that even the ancient Egyptians held. He said nothing to us about social conditions, economic hardship, state oppression, and exclusion from political processes in Egypt that lead many young people to joining Muslim religious groups in Egypt that resort to violence as a means of change. This was not, I venture to say, because he lacked the ability to read the reality critically, but rather because it would not be wise to speak to students to be *‘ulamā’* who understood the reality to discuss social issues implicating the ruling party and despotism.¹³ Two, during my third year (1996/1997 academic year) in the *Fiqh madhhabī* (*Shāfi‘ī*) class. The topic was on the Chapter of Spoils of War (*Bāb al-ḡanīmah*) in Jihad. The lecturer, in a suit and tie and manicured facial-hair, spoke about horses and swords in the context of the topic. I asked whether the teaching / learning require tweaking because war in our day is conducted with tanks and other modern weaponry. The teacher retorted that there shall be a return in the future to wars being fought with horses and swords. Many of the students laughed at me for asking the question.¹⁴

The two incidents made me think and feel profoundly about knowledge production, intellectual life and ethics at Al-Azhar,

¹³ I share this anecdote because the teacher was the President of the university at the time (1987–1995). It was claimed that he rejected political parties, notably the Muslim Brotherhood’s, attempt to participate in the developing of *Qānūn Al-Azhar* (the special legislation of reform of Al-Azhar), reportedly saying, “Al-Azhar, has its men and will not allow outsiders to trespass against it under the guise of developing it ...”. See, <http://daily.rosaelyoussef.com/43511/>

¹⁴ I tried to make sense of the teacher’s response; it cannot simply be dismissed as stupid. By thinking of the teacher as simply anti-modern or living in the past, wishing for its return, runs the risk of missing larger and hidden realities at play. The teacher’s response may have been informed by his concern of the ubiquitous and ever-presence of the oppressive state apparatus, its eyes and ears at work even in the classrooms of Al-Azhar. Some of my Egyptian classmates warned me of other Egyptian classmates who they alleged worked for the Egyptian state intelligence (*Mabāḥit amn al-dawlah*). Thus, an answer “stuck” in the past keeps one safe from the reaches of the state. On another note, as we witness Israel’s genocide on Gaza using missiles, F-35s, the works, one may as well hope for a return to fighting with spears, for perhaps then, death and grotesque destruction that we witness daily are not as with clinical perfection and on such a swift scale and scope.

this institute that survived the ravages of Western Modernity and its colonial enterprise and the modern Egyptian state. As an *‘ālim* with the knowledge that I gained, I had to navigate the modern lived reality with the will to be relevant. How do we understand modern warfare with its ethos, conventions, weapons of mass destruction, etc? What did that mean for an Azhari’s participation in public life? How relevant was *madrassa* education as higher learning to address social-political questions? But back to curriculum. Recall that Islamic Substantive Law (*Fiqh*) and Muslim Legal Hermeneutics (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*) are offered every year as majors:

- First year:¹⁵
 - *Al-Fiqh al-Maḏhabī*¹⁶
 - *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*
 - The History of Islamic Legislation (*Tārīḥ al-Taṣrī‘*)¹⁷
 - Ḥadīth Terminology and its Scholars (*Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīṭ wa Rijālīhī*)¹⁸
 - Introduction to the Sciences of Law (*Al-Maḏḥal li al-‘Ulūm al-Qānūniyyah*)
 - The History of Law (*Tārīḥ al-Qānūn*)
 - International Organisations
 - Constitutional and Political Systems
 - Criminal and Penal Science (*‘Ilm al-Ijrām wa al-‘Iqāb*)
 - Al-Qur’ān al-Karīm¹⁹

¹⁵ This breakdown of the first year of study shows eleven subjects as offered during my time. The subject, “Contemporary Fiqh Issues” (*Qaḍāyā Fiqhiyyah Mu‘āṣarah*) was added after my time.

¹⁶ Referring to the four Sunni legal Schools of Thought, namely *Al-Maḏhab al-Šāfi‘ī*, *Al-Maḏhab al-Ḥanbalī*, *Al-Maḏhab al-Mālikī*, and *Al-Maḏhab al-Ḥanafī* taught in the Faculty of Islamic Law. Choosing one of the four legal schools was mandatory for the purpose of study. For more, see <https://www.mlzamy.com/information-about-the-faculty-of-sharia-and-law-Al-Azhar-university-in-cairo>

¹⁷ Islamic Legislative History and Ḥadīth Terminology as subjects that fall within the premodern tradition were offered only in the first year of the General Section.

¹⁸ This subject is offered on a very light level. In fact, more basic than the level it is offered in the high school (*Thānawīyah Azhariyyah*)

¹⁹ Memorising of parts of the Qur’ān. In my time, this was mandatory across all Faculties including the Secular ones such as Medicine, Engineering, Education, Literature, etc. However, in different quantities. In the four Islamic (religious) Faculties the Qur’ān had to be completely memorised compared to the Secular

- Foreign Language
- Research Methodology²⁰
- Second year
 - *Al-Fiqh al-Maḍhabī*
 - *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*
 - *Al-Fiqh al-Muqāran*²¹
 - Foreign Language
 - Al-Qurʾān al-Karīm
 - Public International Law
 - Administrative Law
 - Civil Law: The Sources of Legal Obligation
 - Economy and Cooperation²²
- Third year
 - *Al-Fiqh al-Maḍhabī*
 - *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*
 - *Al-Fiqh al-Muqāran*
 - Foreign Language
 - Al-Qurʾān al-Karīm
 - Research Methodology (*Al-Fiqh*)

Faculties where memorising only parts (minimum) were required. However, within the Islamic Faculties, there was a differentiation made between Arab and non-Arab students; the former had to memorise the complete Qurʾān compared to non-Arab students required to memorise a third only. Thus, in the Faculty of Islamic Law, General Section, Arab students had to memorise six parts (*ajzāʾ*; singular *juzʾ*) per year, thereby completing the entire thirty parts of the Qurʾān at the end of the five years. Non-Arab students like me, had to memorise only two parts per year, meaning that on completion, they would have memorised ten out of thirty parts of the Qurʾān.

²⁰ Research Methodology was not a taught subject. It was only for exam purposes for which students were given a topic (for example, guardianship for women in marriage) to research and answer as a question in the exam. For detail, see Al-Azhar's Faculty of Islamic Law Webpage <http://fshariaandlaw.edu.eg/Home/DapartmentBranche/2> [Accessed: July 2025].

²¹ Although a major of both sections of the Faculty of Islamic Law, for the General Section, Comparative Islamic Substantive Law is offered from the second year only compared to the *Ṣarīʿah* section where it is offered from the first year. However, the General Section is allocated the same number of years for the study of Comparative Islamic Substantive Law as the *Ṣarīʿah* section, namely four years.

²² This subject is a potent manifestation of the Nasserite revolutionary government's modernising of Al-Azhar's curriculum (as discussed above) concretised by Law 103 of 1961.

Chapter 2

- Criminal Law – General
- Commercial Law
- Administrative and Constitutional Judiciary
- Civil Law – Sources of Legal Obligation
- Muslim Personal Law (*Al-Aḥwāl Al-Shakhṣiyyah Muslimīn*)
- Fourth year
 - *Al-Fiqh al-Madhabī*
 - *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*
 - *Al-Fiqh al-Muqāran*
 - Foreign Language
 - Al-Qur’ān al-Karīm
 - Research Methodology (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*)
 - Civil and Commercial Litigation Procedures
 - Criminal Law – Special Procedures
 - Legal Terminologies
 - Finance and Tax Legislation
 - Public Administration
 - Maritime Law
 - Personal Law for Non-Muslims (in Egypt)
 - Civil Law (Contracts)
- Fifth year
 - *Al-Fiqh al-Madhabī*
 - *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*
 - *Al-Fiqh al-Muqāran*
 - Foreign Language
 - Al-Qur’ān al-Karīm
 - Research Methodology (*Al-Fiqh*)
 - Criminal Procedures
 - Labour Legislation
 - Private International Law
 - Litigation (Execution)
 - Civil Law – Property and Insurance
 - Agricultural Law
 - English Legal Terminologies

As mentioned before, *Fiqh*, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, and *Fiqh al-Muqāran* are the majors of both sections of the Faculty of Islamic and Civil Law (*Kulīyyah al-Ŝarī‘ah wa al-Qānūn*). It is on these subjects to trace

trajectories of change in both content and pedagogies that we now focus. As a general point, the aim to reform Al-Azhar in line with the vision of the modern state Law 103 of 1961 — and all efforts to reform Al-Azhar during the modern era as far back as the French invasion of 1799 — failed to weaken the predominant status of the sciences of the premodern Muslim religious-intellectual tradition (Hatina, 2003:59–60). At best, it forced the ‘ulamā’ to deal with the dichotomy opposing modern and religious knowledge. The content and methods of teaching *Fiqh*, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, and *Fiqh al-Muqāran*, including Muslim Personal Law and even to an extent, the modern Civil Law subjects with their persistent reference to, and in fact deference, to the premodern intellectual tradition, reflect this failure.²³ We now come to the prescribed texts for *Fiqh*, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, and *Al-Fiqh al-Muqāran*.²⁴

Both *Fiqh* and *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* were/are presented in two parts, textual study (*dirāsah naṣṣīyah*) and topical study (*dirāsah mawḍū‘īyah*). There is no difference in the content of the two parts per se; rather, the difference is the format in which both are presented and taught. For textual study, the curriculum was a chapter from a classical text (*matn*) and its commentary (*ṣarḥ*). *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* is categorised into Ḥanafī and the three remaining

²³ Take, for example, Abd al-Razzaq al-Sanhuri, arguably Egypt’s most distinguished scholar of modern jurisprudence educated jurist in France. A casual perusal of his 6-volume *Maṣādir al-ḥaqq fī al-fiqh al-islāmī: dirāsah muqāranah bi al-fiqh al-ḡarbiy* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāṭ al-‘Arabī, 1997) shows his prolific knowledge of the premodern *Fiqh* corpus (in addition to Western Law) and more importantly his commitment to bringing premodern Islamic law into the public discourse in modern Egypt before and after the 1952 revolution. The abovementioned work was presented in lectures to Law students in secular Egyptian universities in 1953 and 1954 (Hill, 1988). However, in his *Between identity and redistribution: Sanhuri, genealogy and the will to Islamize*, Amr Shalakany questions Sanhuri’s will to islamise law in Egypt asking, “Is Sanhuri’s Egyptian civil code Islamic”, that he resorted to the Franco-American concept of the “social” only initially promoting the code as “Islamic” but eventually reneged on this claim as the “social” was displaced by revolutionary turns in Nasser’s Egypt (Shalakany, 2001:201).

²⁴ I skip the curriculum and prescribed text for Muslim Personal Law. Although the bulk of its contents are from the *Fiqh* corpus, it was offered as a separate subject insofar as it is very much the product of the modern era (there is no Personal Law in classical *Fiqh* as a category only the Book of Marriage, Divorce, etc.). It references the workings and structure of modern legislation.

legal schools (non-Ḥanafī). The non-Ḥanafī *uṣūl* curriculum over the five years in the *Qānūn* section — four years in the *Šarī‘ah* section — was/is the *Minhāj al-uṣūl ilā ‘ilm al-uṣūl* of al-Qāḍī Al-Bayḍāwī (d. 1285) as *matn* and its commentary the *Nihāyah al-sūl fī šarḥ ‘ilm al-uṣūl* of al-Isnāwī (d. 1370). The topical study of the *Uṣūl* curriculum was a compilation from various premodern *uṣūl* works by the lecturer, in reality a simplification of the subject.

For *Fiqh*, the curriculum for textual study was the work of a specific premodern jurist of each of the four legal schools. Brought up in a Šāfi‘ī family and community, I chose to study that legal school. The prescribed work for the textual study was the *Minhāj al-ṭālibīn wa ‘umdah al-muftīn* of al-Nawawī (d. 676) and the *Kanz al-rāğibīn* of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī as commentary. The lecturer compiled the text for the topical study, particular topics for each of the five academic years. In the first year, the curriculum covered fasting and alms (*al-zakāh*); second year, various topics of commercial transactions; third year, marriage and divorce; fourth year, penal matters; and fifth year, judiciary and oaths. For the teaching of Comparative substantive law (*al-Fiqh al-Muqāran*) over four years, lecturers compiled a text as the curriculum covering different topics of Islamic substantive law as a comparative study of the various Muslim legal schools and the opinions of individual premodern, and here and there modern, jurists.

A note on knowledge as spiritual praxis

The learned Qasim Nanautvi, one of the cofounders of the Deoband Seminary, was asked why he needed a spiritual guide from a mystic not trained in the high discursive tradition of Islamic learning. He replied, “I have knowledge of faith, but I have yet to experience they joy ‘tasting’ the practical application of that learning” (Moosa, 2015: 188). When I read Moosa’s account of training in the higher discursive tradition of Islamic learning in the Indian Subcontinent’s *madrasas* coupled to taking a spiritual guide, knowledge as embodiment through practice (*Ibid*, 196–8), the absence of it in the Al-Azhar of my day dawned upon me. This is not to say that there was no concern with spirituality or moral

dimensions of knowledge in Al-Azhar's structure, curriculum, and teachers and students. However, there was no apparent will for it. Certainly, we had reverence for our teachers but had no relationship with them beyond the class.

The disconnect between us and our teachers may be demonstrated by this anecdote. Once I was in Cairo's famous *Al-Fishāwī* coffee shop in the busy Khan Khalili Bazar not far from the Al-Azhar Mosque having a hibiscus beverage. The teacher who taught us "*Civil Law – Sources of Legal Obligation*" walked in and sat right opposite me ordering a nargileh and a beverage. He clearly did not know me and, therefore, would not have recognised me as a student in the subject that he taught. Ironically, I was happy that he did not know me, as I deemed it disrespectful to remain in the coffee shop (a respectable recreational public space patronised by families) with him present, so hurriedly finishing my beverage, I got up and left.

The immediate teacher-student relationship where teacher and students were part of a chain of transmission back to the Prophet Muhammad and epistemological esotericism at work at Al-Azhar in the early 20th century (see, Rafudeen, 2024:189-190) were apparently not present during my time at Al-Azhar. However, the nature of the teacher-student relationship at Al-Azhar in the 1990s cannot simply be ascribed to the 1961 and other reforms of Al-Azhar. The economy in Egypt over the long 20th century would have had a palpable impact on our teachers' (lack of) concern with being agents of moral cultivation, ethical instruction, and spiritual discipline. Many of them were from the working-class and peasant families living under a dictatorship. They had to confront the ravages and demands of everyday living to survive while being teachers.²⁵ Other than training to be '*ulamā*', the relationship that Al-Azhar students had with their professors was not different to the relationship that their counterparts at

²⁵ With the risk of over simplifying, the Marxist conception of base-superstructure may explain this reality, i.e., the economic situation in Egypt informed the nature of the teacher-student relationship. Marx conceived the structure of every society as constituted by "levels" or "instances" articulated by a specific determination: the *infrastructure*, or economic base (the 'unity' of the productive forces and the relations of production) and the *superstructure* (see Althusser, 1984:8). Althusser problematises the base-superstructure relationship in his *Essays on Ideology*.

Egypt's secular universities had with their professors; they faced the same lived realities. In fact, Islamism proliferated at Egypt's secular universities in ways that it did not at Al-Azhar.²⁶ Did our professors' alteration to bodily comportment from *ṭawb*, a loose, long-sleeved, ankle-length robe, *bisht*, a fine cloak worn over the *ṭawb*, and Felt Azharī hat to suit and tie and without fist-length beards signal a break from orthodox teachings? I think not.²⁷

Entering the Academy

After five years in the Faculty of Islamic Law — and four years in the institute, nine years in total at Al-Azhar — I returned home qualified as a traditionally trained *Ŝayḥ* with a BA/Honours degree. What was it finally like to be a *Ŝayḥ* in the nascent democratic South Africa? What challenges and difficulties would confront me (and others) fresh out of the *madrasa* after nine years that comprised hours of reading, memorisation (of the Qur'ān and passages from *fiqh* and *uṣūl* texts), bouts of joy and frustrations, and as many exams? I resolved to apply for postgraduate studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT). But first, I had to submit my Al-Azhar qualification (degree and transcripts) to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).²⁸ With my SAQA report, I applied to UCT. The Department of Religious Studies accepted my Al-Azhar qualification as a BA/Honours degree (NQF level 8) and admitted me into its Master's programme (in Social Sciences).

²⁶ Islamists, as Salman Sayyid puts it, place their Muslim identity at the centre of their political practice using the language of Islamic metaphors to think through their political destinies and envisage Islam as a political future (Sayyid, 2003:17).

²⁷ These questions have “troubled” Muslim scholars over the centuries. Sherman Jackson notes them in the case of the just qualified *mufti* (who is much more learned than a mere *Ŝayḥ* with just a BA/Honours degree). “Years of study, incalculable hours of memorization, tortuous bouts of disputation and months of apprenticeship, at long last, the coveted rank of jurisconsult is attained. What was it finally like to be a *mufti* in a medieval Muslim society? What were the most vexing challenges facing a jurisconsult? From where did these emanate, and how prepared was the *mufti* to deal with them? And how did all of this affect the actual practice of issuing *fatwas*? One major challenge to the *mufti* inhered in the policies of the state. The need to establish and preserve its legitimacy and fortify its position against would-be contenders engendered a relentless attempt on its part to coopt the *fuqahā*? ... But the state was not the only problem confronting the *mufti*. Two other groups, the laity and fellow jurisconsults, were also potential sources of consternation (Jackson, 1992:201).

²⁸ SAQA evaluated it equivalent to the old B-Proc degree.

A brief comparison of Al-Azhar and UCT's epistemologies is in order at this point insofar as I exit my story in the former and enter my journey into the latter. The comparison takes us back to the abovementioned and delineated curriculum, of the Faculty of Islamic law and Modern Civil Law over the five-years and will become clearer from the account of my stay in the academy that I now offer.

Just over one year after my return to South Africa dressed as a *azharī shaykh*, I set foot in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town in February 2000 enrolled for an MA in the Study of Religion.²⁹ The different pedagogies did not go lost on me.³⁰ The breed of teachers and students were a distant cry from those who I encountered at my *alma matter*, Al-Azhar al-*sharif*. Did the two pedagogies accomplish the same things, did they clash, or converge? A careful (not necessarily accurate) response will be all of the three to unequal degrees. The same accomplishment highlighted their commitment to the imperative to know and the imperative to transform, albeit for different goals regarding the latter.

This, in turn, explains the encounter (as opposed to Huntington's clash of civilisations or Bernard Lewis' "culture talk;" see, Mamdani 2004:15-16). I prefer a divergence in the epistemologies / methodologies in the production of knowledge

²⁹ It was not the first time that I set foot in a modern (secular/non-religious) university. In my final three years in Egypt, I attended the weekly meeting of the Department of Philosophy, Cairo University on a Tuesday. In these meetings, I learned different views, approaches, epistemologies and methodologies that were a departure from the dominant Muslim tradition taught at Al-Azhar, critical of it and even dismissive. Going there prepared me in many ways for the Western academy.

³⁰ Even in terms of structure/organisation, the discrepancy between the two centres of learning was abundantly clear to me. For the first time, I had to submit minor essays weekly, take-home exams, and term papers (a major essay) at the end of the semester. The only writing I did at Al-Azhar was for exams at the end of the academic year. In one month at UCT, I did more writing than the five years of my BA/Honours study; in the five years, we were assigned only two essays as part of Research Methodology. Writing was difficult; for the first time I learned about referencing, style, layout, and critical writing. This Western university introduced and exposed me to the critical study of Religion, including Islam and its intellectual tradition, unlike anything I experienced at Al-Azhar. Also, at UCT there was the worry with fees; at Al-Azhar knowledge was free for all, Egyptian and foreigner, a gift of the 1952 revolution.

and certainty in relation to belief and acting in the world. One centred God, the other the human being (humanism). There were clearly very divergent understandings and articulations of religion / religious, gender, person, belief, God, etc. as concepts and the relationship between the *madrasa* and the academy. This divergence was then pronounced in the curriculums, approaches and styles of teaching and learning, the literatures prescribed as sources of knowledge.

The contents and style of teaching caused me consternation but enriched me at the same time. The transition from the *madrasa* to the modern Western academy was fraught with difficulties, uncertainties and often frustrations. Learning at Al-Azhar was at its core metaphysical, connected to one's faith as a believer. No so at UCT as a Western academy where this approach was absent; nothing was "sacred"³¹, everything was open to question including the origin of the Qur'ān as a foundational religious text. I was challenged to my core and had to navigate the journey carefully while negotiating myself and the professors with bravery. It was difficult but navigate and learn I did. I am glad that I did so.

However, I found overlap and even unexpected convergence insofar as my learning at Al-Azhar helped me to cautiously yet productively navigate the academy and see common threads for future paths of knowledge production. I did not abandon the tradition as at the same time I taught the tradition at the Islamic College of Southern Africa (ICOSA), an institute of higher learning in Cape Town.³² Thus, I remained a *Šayḥ* while being in a Western academy. I will say that I knew with certainty that my exiting Al-Azhar and entering UCT was not an abandoning of the former.

Coursework Masters

The first half of the degree consisted of course work. I had to complete five modules, the mandatory "Critical Terms" offered in

³¹ Talal Asad shows that the division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane finds no place in premodern writing, but comes out of Modernity, more specifically in Durkheim's writings (Asad, 2003:31-2).

³² ICOSA was established to be an institute of higher learning located between the *Dār al-ʿUlūm* and the university.

both first and second semester and then four electives: Qur'ānic Studies, Religion & Society, Islam in Africa, and Religion and Culture in Africa. The second half was a minor dissertation. My MA dissertation (Mathee, 2004) offered a critical reading of the Pakistani scholar Fazlur Rahman's "*The Islamic methodology in history*". I looked only at the first chapter of the work, titled, 'Concepts, *sunnah*, *ijtihād* and *ijmā'* in the early period' (Rahman, 1995). Rahman differentiates between *Sunnah* as concept and *Sunnah* as content. *Sunnah*, he argues, was not something absolutely specific laying down once and for all the details of rules about all spheres of human life. Rather, *Sunnah* as a concept, covered validly not only the *Sunnah* of the Prophet himself but also the interpretations of the Prophetic *Sunnah*. In this sense, *Sunnah* was co-extensive with the *ijmā'* of the Community, an ever-expanding process; hence, a laudable living tradition (Rahman, 1995:5-9).³³

Because of my training in Islamic law at Al-Azhar, I was familiar with these concepts that are key in the study of *Fiqh*, *Uṣūl al-fiqh* and *Fiqh al-Muqāran* curriculum. Citing from the *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, the *Kitāb al-ḥarāj*, the *Kitāb al-siyar al-kabīr*, and a letter of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Rahman delineates the concepts in a novel way that problematised how they are taught at Al-Azhar — and in all traditional *madrasas* in the Muslim World, the West, South Africa, etc.³⁴ (Rahman, 1995:7-8; 12-17). This forced me to go back to the prescribed texts of Al-Azhar's curriculum, texts to follow the concepts' evolution. It is fair to say that only being in the Western academy, I would / could encounter of Rahman's works and like texts that helped me to reflect on my traditional training in more appreciative and critical ways.

³³ Rahman borrowed the designation living tradition from Western Islamicists such as Josef Schacht. However, it was not uncritical borrowing; he criticised the Western Islamicists' view of *Sunnah*. However, Rahman was critical of Muḥammad bin Idrīs al-Šāfi'ī's (d. 820) whose interventions, he argued, contributed to the demise of *Sunnah* as a living tradition. Al-Šāfi'ī, he claims, reversed the natural *ijtihād-ijmā'* order into *ijmā'-ijtihād* thereby severing their organic relationship. Prior to al-Šāfi'ī, Rahman asserts, *ijmā'* was a process and forward-looking coming at the end of free thinking; hence, resulting in change and dynamism. Al-Šāfi'ī's efforts offered stability and uniformity at the expense of creativity and originality; hence, *ijmā'* became backward-looking, a static product. (Rahman, 1995: 5-24).

³⁴ These works were written during the era of the early Muslim generations – roughly the first one-hundred-and-fifty years of Islam.

My MA dissertation (Mathee, 2004) was a critique of Rahman, more specifically his account of the living tradition of the first three generations of Muslims. It argued that the living tradition, Rahman so lauded, was, largely, an undefined arbitrary exercise permeated with conflict not informed by a coherent ethical, intellectual, and scientific framework. Much of the living *Sunnah* were primarily, though not exclusively, the activities and decisions of rulers that went on to produce a cultural paradigm that excluded the Muslim individual. In fact, I draw on Rahman's description elsewhere of the Qur'ān — and therefore the *Sunnah* — as presenting the Prophet's exemplary conduct that aimed at constituting an ethical-based socio-political order under *tawhīd* (Rahman, 1982:15). Many activities of the living *Sunnah*, often the product of the whims and desires of power, contradicted the morally invigorating concerns of the *Sunnah*.³⁵

Rahman, in my reading, highlighted the poetics of the early generations but ignored the excesses of their politics. Notwithstanding my critique of the "Islamic methodology in history", I use the text in the two modules that I teach as part of the Honours curriculum in the Department of Religion Studies at the University of Johannesburg. Be that as it may, and whether my critique of his work has merit or not, the work enriched me intellectually, to understand the making and complexities of the Muslim religious-intellectual tradition and appreciate it as the product of methodologies in history.

I can safely say that I would not have been exposed to the genesis and evolution of Islamic law had I sufficed with what I learned at Al-Azhar. I would not have known the early texts that Rahman cites, because the core prescribed texts of traditional madrasas' (Sunni and Shī'ī) curriculum are texts written onwards from the 6th century *hijri* / 12th century CE. The *madrasa* student

³⁵ Rahman's discourse, though, has to be read as the concerns of a modern(ist) visibly pained by the present *ulamā's* apparent inability and/or refusal to engage critically with the tradition. His commitment to what he considered an imperative of a Muslim Modernity to confront the stagnancy that plagued modern Islamic thought and Muslim society. This imperative is aptly expressed in his *Islam and modernity: the transformation of an intellectual tradition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982) and aptly translated in an Arabic "*Islam wa ḍarūrah al-ḥadātha*," indicating necessity. To be sure, Rahman's modernising call was not a parodying of Western Modernity.

limited to the curriculum cannot follow the evolution / changes in these later texts and, therefore, form a critical appreciation of Muslim law-making. My critique, then, of the current traditional *madrasa* is not merely what they teach but also, and perhaps more importantly, what they do not teach of the rich Muslim religious-intellectual corpus of works. We were not trained how to read the earliest texts. Hence, I had to read al-Shāfiʿī's *Risālah* about four times before I could understand it. This, I think, is true for all graduates of traditional *madrasas*; including Arabic mother-tongue-speakers, it is not simply a question of language.

In my MA study, I focused on the Muslim intellectual tradition as the product of scholars, a critique of the ideas of that scholastic tradition. For a PhD, I moved from religion as a discipline to history as an academic discipline. I enrolled in the Department of Historical Studies at UCT. I now came face to face with Islam as lived reality, Muslim society in history. Doing history at UCT enabled me to place methodology above ideology in a way Religious Studies at UCT did not enable me. I found that history was better geared to avoid the abnormalizing of Muslims, a form of discursive violence, both intended (by Islamophobes) and unintended (Muslims and friends of Muslims). And history is the great humanizer (Barzun & Graff 2003:9).

However, I did not abandon Islamic law; on the contrary, my relationship with Islamic law, my specialisation at Al-Azhar was strengthened and more intense than hitherto. I had a newfound appreciation for Islam law, just this time, from what some will call orthodox jurisprudence to orthopraxis, i.e., Muslim law lived in history. My PhD study enabled me to look differently at Islamic law, or as I prefer to call it, Muslim law-making, is. What ordinary Muslims think of it and make with it in the everyday lives. Thus, I went beyond the erudite jurists and illustrious pious scholars whom Ebrahim Moosa discusses in his “*What is a madrasa?*” For my thesis, I looked at marriage, divorce, and paternity dispute *fatwās* as a historical source for Muslim social behaviour in Timbuktu during the colonial era (1894 – 1960).³⁶ Using the *fatwās*,

³⁶ For *fatwās* as a source of social and economic history, see (see Powers, 1990; 2002; Hallaq, 1994; Tucker, 1998; Wuld al-Saʿd, 2000; Aḥmad, 2008). Other sources to gauge the practice of everyday life and social behaviours include police dockets (Amin, 2002), chain letters (Soares, 2003), prison records (Viljoen, 2003), dairies

I offer a window into the lives of Muslim wives from Timbuktu, their practice of everyday life; their stories that place them comfortably in history.³⁷

Conclusion

How has my journey from the *madrasa* to the academy shaped me? Would many of my fellow *shuyūkh* from my alma matter still regard me as one of them? It is quite clear to me that I am not the same traditional *Ṣayḥ* who arrived at the academy fresh out of the *madrasa*. The academy transformed me to be sure but did not divest me of the *madrasa* ethos and legacy. May I equally be viewed with scepticism by some in the academy? I do not know the answer to these questions; what I do know and care about is the opportunities that my journey from the *madrasa* to the academy as hybridity offers me to contribute to both spheres.³⁸ What is certain

and premodern chronicles (Rapoport, 2005), biographical works (Abū al-‘Arāf, 2019), etc. As Shahid Amin (2002:27–28) puts it, the speech and deeds of humble folk have to be wrenched from “non-conventional” historical sources as laity are more adept at producing goods and services, rarely documents (2002:27–28). *Fatwās* as a source of actual practice open a path for a conversation with Islamic substantive law (*Fiqh*) manuals. This methodological approach “tames” the often-ideological approach to Islamic law of many moderns (conservatives and progressives). By way of example, Kecia Ali, drawing on *Fiqh* texts argues that early Muslim jurists explained the relationship between a wife and husband based on the relationship of the slave–master relationship. Ali acknowledges that *fatwās* and notarial manuals as case particulars have a close connection to practice and are more useful to close the gap between normative prescription and actual practice. However, her aim is not to re-construct social history but to understand marriage as presented in prescriptive *Fiqh* texts (Ali, 2003 & 2010). The critique here is not that Ali is wrong, rather it problematises her methodology as insufficient to understand Muslim marriage as a lived reality and not as a modality offered by *Fiqh* texts.

³⁷ The ordinary, in the description of de Certeau: “[wo]man ... a ubiquitous character, walking in countless thousands on the streets ... murmuring voice of societies. In all ages, [s]he comes before texts (read the law). Rather than being merely represented in it, the ordinary [wo]man acts out the text (read the law) itself. [S]he is ... an apparent referentiality (a common history) that make credible a writing that turns “everyone” into the teller of his[her] ridiculous misfortune; Michel De Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, trans. Steven Rendall, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), v & pg. 2.

³⁸ Bhabha (1994) contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the ‘Third Space of enunciation’, an ‘in-between’ space that carries the burden and meaning of culture. Important to note that hybridity as a term has roots in a previous set of racist assumptions hence the imperative to be aware of the indiscriminate history of the term (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:118–121).

is that Al-Azhar did not become the secular Western university, not in letter nor in spirit; and it should never.

More than my *alma mater*, Al-Azhar shaped my character and set me on a continuous journey, the imperative to know and the imperative to transform.³⁹ My experience in the Western academy opened up for me a path to walk the Muslim religious-intellectual tradition critically. More importantly, my time here convinced me of possibilities of convergences between the *madrasa* and the modern academy, possibilities for collaboration notwithstanding some serious divergences. To be sure it was not an easy, or even straight, walk; it was not a linear progression from this point to the following point. Rather it is a constant walking to and from, a dialectic of and for growth. This chapter speaks to this walk that spans Al-Azhar the *madrasa* and UCT the academy.

Wa Allahu a'lam.

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³⁹ My profound gratitude to Egypt and to the Egyptian people for receiving me and countless students from around the world training us in knowledge traditions.

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Chapter 3

Network and Curriculum Developments in Barelwi *madāris* of Pakistan: A Historical Review

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Introduction

The Barelwi madrasa tradition in South Asia represents one of the most influential strands of Sunni Islamic education, shaped by a synthesis of devotional practice, Sufi-oriented religiosity, and classical Islamic scholarship. Across South Asia, the Barelwi tradition emerged in the late 19th century in reaction to British colonial rule and missionary activity, as well as competing reformist movements in India. It was in this context that Barelwi scholars increasingly turned to the madrasa as a key institutional space for preserving and cultivating Sunni devotional practice and safeguarding Islamic learning.

The educational vision of the Barelwis was not only reactive, but also constructive. It sought to develop a religiously grounded Muslim subject, centring on Sufi-inflected vision that emphasised reverence for the Prophet Muhammad, continuity with classical scholarship, and ethical-spiritual formation. Consequently, madrasas became central instruments through which the Barelwi movement articulated both religious authority and communal identity.

After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, this institutional trajectory expanded significantly. Barelwi ‘ulamā’ established a wide network of madrasas across the country, particularly in



Punjab, Sindh, and urban centres such as Karachi and Lahore. These institutions not only preserved traditional curricula but also contributed to the formation of an extensive educational, social, and religious network that linked scholars, spiritual leaders, and local communities. Over time, these madrasas evolved into key sites for producing religious scholarship and shaping broader socio-religious engagement within Pakistani society.

Against this background, this chapter examines the historical development of Barelwi madrasas in Pakistan, with particular attention to their institutional formation, curricular evolution, and network expansion. It analyses how these institutions have responded to shifting political conditions, state educational policies, and broader debates over reform and modernisation.

Model Barelwi Madāris and Educational Philosophy

In March 1904, Jāmi‘ah Raḍwīyyah Manẓar-i-Islām was founded at Bareilly under the supervision and patronage of Mawlānā Shāh Muḥammad Aḥmad Raḍā Khāṇ Qādirī Barelwī (1856–1921), the venerated figure of the Barelwis. Mawlānā Aḥmad Raḍā Khāṇ was of the view that the education and training must be given in the light of Islam and it must be purposeful. Therefore, he not only himself compiled the curricula for the Jāmi‘ah Raḍwīyyah Manẓar-i-Islām and taught for few years but also met its all expenses. In 1894, Mawlānā Aḥmad Raḍā Khāṇ gave guiding principles for Muslim education and character-building of the students. According to these principles, *inter alia*, the centre of all educational activities must be *madāris* and the aim of education must be to produce devout and traditional Muslims; the students must be taught knowledge that would be useful for *dīn* and the world, and the teachers should not be only interested in teaching just to make a living, but should be dedicated, and devout and committed to the education (Qādirī, 1984:54–70; Haroon & Hussain, 2005:13–16). In 1912, Mawlānā Aḥmad Raḍā Khāṇ presented four points for the welfare of the South Asian Muslims. These points, *inter alia*, suggested that there should be emphasis on the spread of Islamic teachings (A‘lā Ḥaḍrat n.d.:10–14). The essence of this point was that if Muslims

followed the teachings of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, they would become free from the anxiety of earning their livelihood, as the Islamic teachings have the best guidelines of trade and business for the Muslim community.

To provide all kinds of education, another important *madrisah* was started in 1934 at Mubarakpur, with the name of Madrisah Ashrafiyah Mişbāḥul 'Ulūm. In 1974, it was renamed as al-Jāmi'ah Ashrafiyah, which has become one of the most important Barelwi *madāris* in India as it developed a network of mainstream schools and *madāris* almost all over India (Alam, 2011:75-76, 93, 102-105; Sanyal, 2008:23). These and some other Barelwi influential and important *madāris*, established mostly in the Punjab, Sindh, Bengal and Uttar Pradesh during 19th and 20th centuries were not only producing Barelwi intelligentsia but they were also instrumental in establishing a network of educational, social and religious as well as economic and later political relationships amongst the Barelwi '*ulamā*', *pīrs*, and masses.

The Barelwi '*ulamā*' also formed several *anjumans* and organisations for the educational uplift of their followers. In March 1925, Barelwis organised their own religio-political party, *al-Jam'iyyat al- 'Aliyyat al-Islāmiyyat al-Markaziyah* commonly known as All-India Sunni Conference (AISC). Amongst its other aims and objectives, the educational and *tablighī* work amongst the Muslims and non-Muslims, respectively, was the most important to mention.

Mawlānā Shāh Muḥammad Ḥāmid Raḍā Khān Barelwī (1875-1943), president of the Reception Committee, in his welcome address to the inaugural session of the AISC, held at Moradabad, identified four major fields of work for the social and religious uplift of the Muslims. According to him, *tabligh*, religious education, sense of security and social reforms were the only remedies. In order to launch a massive educational movement, he proposed to establish a central *madrisat tabligh* (school for missionary training), to train religious teachers, *manāẓir* (religious debaters) and preachers. This *madrisat tabligh* was also supposed to be responsible for regularising and monitoring the whole *tablighī* work and educating the adults, youngsters,

professionals, students of Western educational institutions¹ and children by establishing small night *madāris* at every village, town, and city. Mawlānā Ḥāmid Raḍā Khān also suggested starting *madāris* in almost every province, which would teach all forms of knowledge. He also highlighted the need of research and its proper publication and communication (Qādirī, 1978:140–144).

Foundational Barelwi Madāris in Pakistan

After the creation of Pakistan (August 1947), the Barelwi '*ulamā*' established many new *madāris* and produced faith-oriented literature for the religious indoctrination. They used education as a crucial element for creating their distinct religious identity.

As the majority of the Barelwi '*ulamā*' migrating from India settled in Karachi, so, the first important Barelwi *madrasah* was formed in 1948 at Karachi with the name of Dārul 'Ulūm Amjadiyah. Whereas Dārul 'Ulūm Jāmi'ah Ḥanfiyah was the other important religious seminary which was formed in January 1949 at Kasur, in January 1950, Jāmi'ah Raḍwīyyah Maẓhar-i-Islām, Lyallpur (now Faisalabad) was established. Dārul 'Ulūm Makhzan 'Arabiyah Baḥrul 'Ulūm, was formed in October 1951 at Aram Bagh, Karachi. Markazī Dārul 'Ulūm Nūrul Madāris was established in 1950/51 at Chishtian. Jāmi'ah Rāshidiyah, Pir-Jo Goth in May, Dārul 'Ulūm Aḥsanul Barakāt, Hyderabad in July and Jāmi'ah Naqshbandiyyah Raḍwīyyah, Sangla Hill in 1952 were started. Then in 1953, Jāmi'ah Ghūthiyah Na'imiyah and Jāmi'ah Na'imiyah were started at Gujrat and Lahore respectively. Dārul 'Ulūm Aḥsanul Madāris, Rawalpindi (March), Jāmi'ah Ḥanfiyah Dārul 'Ulūm Ashraful Madāris, Okara and Dārul 'Ulūm Jāmi'ah Ḥanfiyah Raḍwīyyah Sirājul 'Ulūm, Gujranwala (June)

¹ According to the Barelwi ideologues, the young Muslim generation has imbibed the anti-Islam thoughts and practices mainly because of Western education. Monthly *Swād-i-A'ẓam* (Moradabad), June 1928, 10. *Markazī Anjuman-i-Nu'māniyah-i-Hind, Lāhor* was established in 1887 with the aims, inter alia, to condemn secular education and to check the spread of English education (Rakkar, 1985:43). However, most of Barelwi '*ulamā*', including Mawlānā Aḥmad Raḍā Khān were in favour of learning English as a language (Qādirī, 1984:65–66). Mawlānā Sayyid Muḥammad Sulāman Ashraf Bihārī (1878–1939), head of Islamic Studies department, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh (1920) while drafting the syllabus for the department in May 1924, strongly advocated for the inclusion of English language in the syllabus (Ashraf, 1924:23, 56–59; Ashraf, 1915:22–23).

were established in 1954. Jāmi'ah Nizāmiyyah Raḍwīyyah was started at Lahore in May 1956. Ruknul Islām Jāmi'ah Mujaddiyah, Hyderabad, Dārul 'Ulūm Mazhariyah at Aram Bagh, Karachi and Jāmi'ah 'Abdul Ḥakīm, Sialkot were formed in 1956. Madrisah Jāmi'ah Ghūthiyah Raḍwīyyah, Sukkur was started in 1958. In 1959, Madrisah Islāmiyyah Khaīrul Ma'ād was restarted at Multan. In December 1960, al-Jāmi'ah al-Ḥanfiah Dū Darwāzah was formed at Sialkot, whereas Dārul 'Ulūm Mujaddiyah Na'imiyah, Malir Colony, Karachi was founded in 1961. The foundation stone of the Jāmi'ah Ta'limāt-i-Islāmiyyah, Karachi was laid in September 1962. In 1963, Dārul 'Ulūm Jāmi'ah Owaisiyah Raḍwīyyah, Bahawalpur, Jāmi'ah Qādiriyah Raḍwīyyah, Lyallpur (August), and Jāmi'ah Farīdīyah, Sahiwal (September) were established. In 1964, Jāmi'ah Raḍwīyyah Ḍīyā'ul 'Ulūm, Rawalpindi (January) and Dārul 'Ulūm Qamarul Islām Suliamāniyah, Karachi were established. In 1967, Dārul 'Ulūm Islāmiyyah Barakātul Qur'ān, Sangla Hill was inaugurated. Dārul 'Ulūm Qādiriyah Baghdādiyah, Mardan was founded in January 1969. In 1970, Jāmi'ah Islāmiyyah Ghūthiyah, Chakwal, Markazī Dārul 'Ulūm Jāmi'ah Ghūthiyah Raḍwīyyah Anwār-i-Bāhu, Quetta (June) and Jāmi'ah Ḥaīderiyah Faḍlul 'Ulūm, Jalalpur Sharif were established, whereas Jāmi'ah Ghūthiyah Mu'iniyah Raḍwīyyah Rīāḍul Islām, Attock was started in 1971 (Aḥmad, 1972:21 and passim). In the later years, the graduates of these institutions established a network of *madāris* almost all over Pakistan. Moreover, the *madāris* established before partition of the British India (1858-1947), in the areas now constituted as Pakistan, were also producing a large number of '*ulamā*'.

Governmental Educational Policies and Barelwis' Response

The First Pakistan Educational Conference, held at Karachi in November-December 1947 resolved that the educational system in Pakistan should be inspired by Islamic Ideology and it should be based on the Islamic conception of universal brotherhood, social democracy and social justice. Instead of evolving a comprehensive and viable Islamic educational system, the basic aim remained to teach Islam as a faith, as the Islamic values were not defined specially. The Conference also suggested bringing

madāris into line with the exiting educational system (Baloch, 2000:3-6).² During the Ayub regime (October 1958-March 1969) a Commission on National Education was appointed in December 1958 by the Government of Pakistan. The Commission, in its report, while advocating the need for modernising and streamlining of the *dīnī* education, suggested imparting religious education at primary, secondary and higher levels. The Commission also suggested changing the age-old syllabi of the *madāris* and to include Mathematics, Science, Social Studies and Humanities along with the traditional *niṣāb* (Ahmad *et al.*, 2016:122-125). In 1962, the then Governor of the erstwhile West Pakistan, on the recommendations of the chief administrator of *Awqāf*, appointed an 11-member Committee³ to, inter alia, reform the *madāris* curricula. The Committee in its report, while suggesting removal of some “outdated” subjects, recommended the inclusion of Mathematics, General Science, Social Studies and English as a language in order to bridge the gulf between the two educational systems.⁴ In May 1963, a Commission was constituted for the establishment of Dacca (now Dhaka)-based Islamic Arabic University, inter alia, to bring all affairs of the *madāris* under its surveillance (Ahmad, u.d:129-133, 182 and *passim*).⁵

The Yahya regime (March 1969-December 1971) gave proposals for a new educational policy in July 1969 and circulated for public comments, which in March 1970 were approved by the federal cabinet (Ibid:295-299, 303-307). The proposals for the new policy were reviewed by Barelwi ‘*ulamā*’ in their meetings held in July 1969 at Lyallpur and Lahore. After thorough

² For details see, Government of Pakistan, *Proceedings of the Pakistan Educational Conference* (Karachi: Ministry of the Interior / Education Division, n. d.).

³ Mawlānā Sayyid Aḥmad Sa‘īd Shāh Kāẓimī (1913-86) of *Madrisah Islāmiyyah ‘Arabiyah Anwārul ‘Ulūm*, Multan was representing Barelwi ‘*ulamā*’.

⁴ *Report Of The Committee Set Up By The Governor Of West Pakistan For Recommending Improved Syllabus For The Various Darul Uloom And Arabic Madrasas In West Pakistan* (Lahore: The Superintendent, Government Printing West Pakistan, 1962, 8-10. The Committee, without skipping the essential religious subjects, reduced the volume of prevailing *Dars-i-Niẓāmī* to make it simpler and easier and suggested a scheme of studies for the *madāris*. 14, 19-23, i-xxix.

⁵ Ahmad, A. *A Documentary History of Islamic Education in Pakistan*, Vol. I, 129-133, 182, 191-196, 216-217. Pīr Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad Ṣāleḥ of Sarsina Sharif (1914-90) was a member of this Commission.

consideration they, inter alia, suggested to make Islamic belief and values as the guiding principles for the education system; right from primary to Master's level, *dīnī* education should be made compulsory and to support *madāris* in their endeavour to educate the children in an independent academic atmosphere. However, they welcomed the introduction of those new disciplines in the *madāris*' curriculum which could help them to achieve their goals (Qaṣūrī, 1994:196-198).⁶

Under the Education Policy 1972-1980, status-quo for the *madāris* was promised,⁷ however, in 1975, when it was rumoured that the Bhutto government (December 1971-July 1977) wanted to nationalise the *dīnī madāris* under its nationalisation policy, the Barelwi 'ulamā' strongly opposed the move and announced to resist any such action.⁸

To examine and re-define the aims of education, a National Education Policy was launched in October 1978. It stands for bridging the gulf between *madāris* and secular educational institutions. The Policy aims to reorganise the structure and curricula of *madāris* in consultation with 'ulamā' and Council of Islamic Ideology (February 1974).⁹ In January 1979, National Committee for *Dīnī Madāris*¹⁰ was formed, inter alia, to review the existing curricula of both forms of education. The Committee recommended that the curricula of these institutions must be

⁶ Monthly *Raḍā-i-Muṣṭafah* (Gujranwala), September 1969, 12; monthly *Sālik* (Rawalpindi), February-March 1959, 18; monthly 'Arafāt (Lahore), October 1969, 5 and February-March 2001, 139.

⁷ *The Education Policy, 1972-1980* (Islamabad: Ministry of Education, 1972), 37.

⁸ Fortnightly *Swād-i-A'zam* (Lahore), 1 February 1975, 1.

⁹ *National Education Policy And Implementation Programme* (Islamabad: Ministry of Education, 1979), 43-47 and *National Education Policy (Salient Features)* (Islamabad: Ministry of Education, 1978), viii. For the help and facilitation to draft the Policy, the Council of Islamic Ideology constituted a sub-committee in June 1978. Mufti Muḥammad Ḥusain Na'imī (1923-98) of *Jāmi'ah Na'imiyah*, Lahore was representing the Barelwi 'ulamā'. *Sālānah riport 1990-91* (Islamabad: Islāmī Nazriāti Kūnsal Pākistān, 1993), 244-245.

¹⁰ 'Allāmah Sayyid Maḥmūd Aḥmad Raḍwī (1925-99) of *Dārul 'Ulūm Hizbul Aḥnāf*, Lahore, Mawlānā Ghulām Rasūl Raḍwī (1920-2001) of *Jāmi'ah Raḍwīyyah Maẓhar-i-Islām*, Faisalabad, Ṣāhibzādah Sayyid Maḥmūd Shāh Gujrātī (1920-87) of *Madrisah Khuddāmūl Ṣūfiyyah* (1920/21), Gujrat and Mawlānā Muḥammad Raḥmatullāh Nizāmī (1935-2019) of *Jāmi'ah Muḥammadi Sharīf*, Jhang were representing Barelwi 'ulamā'.

revised so that their graduates become good Muslims as well as patriotic citizens of Pakistan. While resolving to end the dualism in the exiting education systems and to bring graduates of *madāris* in line with the mainstream of society, the Committee, inter alia, recommended inclusion of some modern subjects, like Mathematics, Social Studies, General Science, Economics, Political Science, Islamic (Muslim) History and English and Urdu language and literature in different levels of *dars-i-Nizāmī*.¹¹ It was also recommended that the syllabi for the degrees of Masters of Arabic and Islamic Studies given by *madāris* and public sector universities should be identical. Moreover, it was also suggested to establish a National Institute for *dīnī madāris*, inter alia, to form and review the curriculum.¹² However, the recommendations of the committee remained unimplemented for certain reasons.

A 16-member Commission on Islamisation of Education, under the Shariah Act X of 1991 was appointed in July 1991 to bring the education system in consonance with the spirit of Islam. The Commission¹³ in its report, inter alia, recommended integrating both systems of education in order to engulf temporal and religious education in the *madāris*; having a national committee for liaison between government and *madāris* and helping them to revise their curriculum. However, its deliberations remained inconclusive for different reasons.¹⁴ In light of recommendations

¹¹ The *Dars-i-Nizāmī*, whose principal compiler was Mullā Nizāmuddīn Muḥammad Sahālwī (Farangī Maḥallī) (1677/68–1748) is such a scheme of Islamic Studies, which, even after some amendments and additions made drastically with the advent of 20th century, is still regarded as the foundation and compulsory for becoming a *‘ālim* in South Asia. This syllabus, compiled somewhere in the 18th century, comprised eleven major branches of *‘ulūm-o-fanūn*. These were grammar, syntax, logic, philosophy, Mathematics, rhetoric, *kalām*, *uṣūlul fiqh*, *fiqh*, *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*. For details see, Rāhī (1978).

¹² *Riporṭ qūmī kamaīṭī barāe dīnī madāris, Pākistān* (Islamabad: Wazārat-i-madhabī umūr, 1979), 65–81, 89–93, 147–155, 168. For female students, the committee, in addition, recommended Home Economics and an introduction to family affairs. 82–85.

¹³ Muftī Sayyīd Shujā‘at ‘Alī Qādirī (1941–93) of *Dārul ‘Ulūm Na‘īmiyah*, Karachi (November 1975) was representing Barelwi *‘ulamā’*. Pīr Muḥammad Karam Shāh of *Dārul ‘Ulūm Muḥammadiyah Ghūthiyah*, Bhera, who was working as a judge of Shariat Appellate Bench (February 1979), was consulted as an expert.

¹⁴ *‘Aburī riporṭ bārae ta‘līm kī Islāmī tashkīl* (Islamabad: Camishan bārae ta‘līm kī Islāmī tashkīl, 2000), 5–8, 64–65.

of the national conference held in April 1991 at Islamabad, National Education Policy, 1992 was framed. In March 1998 another Policy was announced for 1998–2010. Both documents vowed to upgrade the quality of education of *madāris* and to bridge the existing gulf between the formal education system and *dīnī madāris*.¹⁵

In August 2001, the Musharraf regime (October 1999–August 2008) promulgated an Ordinance, the “Pakistan Madrasah Education (Establishment and Affiliation of Model Dini Madaris) Board” to enable the establishment of model *dīnī madāris*¹⁶ and a 20-member ‘Pakistan Madrasah Education Board’ (Ahmad n.d., volume 1:267).¹⁷ to improve and secure uniformity of standards of education and for the integration of the system of Islamic education imparted at *madāris* within the general education system.¹⁸ Under the Education Sector Reform Action Plan, 2002–2003–2007, the *dars-i-Nizāmī* was started at

¹⁵ For details see Ahmad (2016:97–106, 109–119).

¹⁶ The government established model *dīnī madāris* at Karachi (boys), Sukkur (boys) and Islamabad (girls).

¹⁷ The suggestion for the establishment of a directorate and board of religious education for monitoring the working and standard of *madāris* was put forward by the Committee constituted in 1962 by the then Governor of West Pakistan. *Report Of The Committee Set Up By The Governor Of West Pakistan*, 14, 34. Thus, ‘The East Pakistan Madrasah Education Board, Dacca’ was established in 1966. The proposal for the establishment of such a Board was also put forward during the Zia regime. *Daily Nawa-i-Waqt* (Lahore), 19 March 1985. The National Education Policy, 1998–2010 also proposed the establishment of a *dīnī madāris* Board and Model *Dārul ‘Ulūm* at divisional level throughout the country (Ibid., 118–119).

¹⁸ *The Gazette of Pakistan Extraordinary*, Islamabad, 18 August 2001 (Karachi: The Manger of Publications, 2001), 903–905. Some *madāris* agreed in principle to reform their curricula in accordance with these guidelines. However, the *Markazī Majlis-i-Shūrā* of the *Tanzīmūl Madāris* in a meeting held on 23 September 2001 at Lahore unanimously decided not to affiliate any *madrasah* with the Pakistan *Madrasah Education Board*. *Kārwaī ijlās Majlis-i-Shūrā Tanzīmūl Madāris (Ahl-i-Sunnat) Pākistān* (Lahore: *Markazī daftar Tanzīmūl Madāris (Ahl-i-Sunnat) Pākistān*, n.d.), 12. In December 2005, the government promulgated another Ordinance, Dini–Madaris Voluntary Registration and Regulation Ordinance, 2005. It also amended, through an Ordinance, the Societies Registration Act, 1860 for registration of *madāris*. *The Gazette of Pakistan Extraordinary*, Islamabad, 1 December 2005 (Karachi: The Deputy Controller, Stationary & Forms, 2005), 789–791. This Ordinance received mixed reaction from the Barelwi ‘*ulamā*’. ‘*Arafāt* (Lahore), September 2005, 17, 22. It is pertinent to mention here that in 1994, the then government banned the registration of new *madāris* in order to curtail their mushrooming and unauthorised growth. ‘*Arafāt* (Lahore), January–February 1995, 20–21.

secondary and higher secondary levels to bridge the gap between the *madāris* and formal educational systems (Ahmad volume II:139). The Musharraf regime also launched a five-year highly funded *madrasah*-reform project worth PKR 5,759.395 million (US\$113 million) in October 2004 and the establishment of Madrasah Welfare Authority in March 2008, in order to register the *madāris* and review their curriculum. In this endeavour, *madāris* were supposed to teach English, General Science, Social Studies, Computer Science and Economics. Under the Pakistan National Education Policy, 2009, the *madāris* were supposed to be mainstreamed along with the establishment of Madrasah Education Authority (Ibid:187, 194-197). For the crackdown on (religious) terrorism, the National Action Plan was announced in December 2014, which was also not well received by the Barelwi ‘*ulamā*’.¹⁹ The Barelwi ‘*ulamā*’ in their endeavour to put forward suggestions for the improvement of the educational system in the country, demanded, inter alia, official support for the *madāris* and a thorough revision of the curriculum of the government-run educational institutions under their supervision.²⁰ The Barelwis were also sceptical about several governmental policies including the introduction of the Single National Curriculum in 2020.²¹

Barelwi Educational Organizations / Institutions

An international missionary organisation, World Federation of Islamic Missions was established in August 1958 by Dr Muḥammad Faḍlur Raḥmān al-Anṣārī al-Qādirī (1914-74). The objectives of the Federation were, inter alia, to establish and maintain institutions for the training of Islamic theologians, teachers and to establish and maintain modern education institutions with

¹⁹ *Daily Dawn* (Islamabad), 11 January 2015; 15 February 2015 and 2 March 2015; *Nawa-i-Waqt* (Rawalpindi / Islamabad), 14 January 2015 and monthly *Nūrul Ḥabīb* (Basirpur), February 2015, 13-16.

²⁰ *Sālik* (Rawalpindi), February-March 1959, 18; ‘*Arafāt* (Lahore), January-February 1995, 20-22; monthly *Nidā-i-Jam‘iyyat* (Lahore), June 1996, 3; monthly *Su‘i-Ḥijāz* (Lahore), October 2005, 19-20; Khawājah Qamaruddīn, *Khuṭbah-i-Ṣadārat* (Karachi: Shabbir Aḥmad Dehlawī, n. d.), 8-9 and Malik Muḥammad Akbar Khān Sāqī, ed., 5 *Tārīkhī Taqrīrīn* (Gujrat: Maktabah-i-Raḍwīyyah, 1977), 109-115.

²¹ *Nawa-i-Waqt* (Lahore), 7 October 2019 and *Su‘i-Ḥijāz* (Lahore), November 2020, 48-52.

Islamic background. Dr al-Qādirī believed that there is no division of sacred and profane knowledge in Islam. According to him, after the fall of Cordova (1031) and Baghdad (1258), the Muslims lost their political as well as intellectual leadership and until today, they have not been able to recapture their eminent position, at least in the intellectual field, mainly because of their negligence of the cultivation of physical sciences. Dr al-Qādirī vowed that the Muslims found themselves free from political slavery and to some extent from economic slavery, but they are still struggling to find emancipation from social and mental slavery of the West (Mohamed, ed., 1999:23-33; Mahmood, 2015:416-418).

While critically analysing the religious educational system of the *madāris*, Dr al-Qādirī observed that they emphasised mostly on the teaching of *fiqh* rather than inculcating the comprehensive and deep knowledge not only of Islam but also of other religions and ideologies. Furthermore, he wanted to see the graduates of these *madāris* as the religious as well as socio-political leaders of the *ummah* (Ansari, 1966:16-17). Dr al-Qādirī, back in 1938, drafted a comprehensive plan for the educational uplift of Muslims. For the remedy of the Muslim intellectual collapse, he, inter alia, called for educational autonomy and an Islamic intellectual renaissance (Ansari, 1944). As a first practical step in this endeavour, he established the Aleemiyah Institute of Islamic Studies at Karachi in July 1964.

The leading Pakistani and Indian Barelwi ‘ulamā’, in a meeting held in January 1973 at Makkah on the eve of Ḥajj, decided to establish, *al-da‘wat Islāmiyyah al-‘ālamīyyah*, better known as World Islamic Mission (WIM).²² In April 1974, Mawlānā Shāh Aḥmad Nūrānī Ṣiddiqī (1926-2003), then president of the *Jam‘iyyat-i-‘Ulamā’-i-Pākistān* (JUP)-(March 1948) was nominated as the head of the Mission. For the accomplishment of its mission, an Islamic Missionary College was established at Bradford, UK on 30 July 1974, which was followed by the establishment of some schools / colleges and *masājīd* mostly almost all over the Europe and few in Mauritius and Pakistan. The WIM, inter alia, stands for the teaching and promotion of Islamic

²² *Raḍā-i-Muṣṭafāh* (Gujranwala), February 1974, 12-13.

knowledge to the general public and carrying on educational work amongst Muslims.²³ The headquarters of the Mission is in Manchester, UK. Presently, Shāh Muḥammad Anas Nūrānī Ṣiddīqī Madanī (b.1966) is the head of the Mission. Dr Farīdah Aḥmad Ṣiddīqī (1935–2013) founded the Karachi-based Khawātīn Islāmī Mission in 1959, for the religious education and training of women. The Mission, besides some schools, also run an Islamic University for Women, established in 1990 at Karachi.²⁴

Mawlānā Muḥammad Dhākīr, right from 1940, was trying to transform the Jāmi‘ah Muḥammadi Sharīf into an educational movement and an Islamic university. He also established *Motamar-i-Ta‘līmāt-i-Islāmiyyah ‘Arabiyah* (Islamic Arabic Educational Conference) in 1953. On 7 December 1972, a bill was presented in the National Assembly of Pakistan for the establishment of an Islamic university, but because of the opposition of the treasury benches, it was not passed (Jaiyyah, 1997:112–115).²⁵

Besides, some school and college systems and self-proclaimed universities, the Mohi-ud-Din Islamic University (2000), Nerian Sharif, Azad Jammu & Kashmir and The University of Faisalabad, commonly known as Medina University, was established in 2002 under the patronage of Madīnah Foundation are also worth mentioning. All these educational institutions and their sister institutions are aimed at providing Islamic education and worldly knowledge (government curricula), from pre-school to post-graduation to the new generation of middle and upper middle class under one roof. On the management side,

²³ Monthly *Tarjumān-i-Ahl-i-Sunnat* (Karachi), May 1974, 69–80; fortnightly *Nidā-i-Ahl-i-Sunnat* (Lahore), 16–31 January 1992, 5–8 and monthly *Aḥwāl-o-Athār* (Lahore), December 1997, 9–11.

²⁴ Muḥammad Yūnas Qādirī, “Dāktar Farīdah Aḥmad Ṣiddīqī ki khidmāt kā aik ajmālī Jā‘izah”, in *‘Azīm Mubaligh-i-Islām* (Karachi: Khawātīn Islāmī Mission, 2003), 124–132; monthly *Faīḍān* (Faisalabad), February 1978, 18–19 and weekly *Aḥwāl* (Karachi), 4–16 June 1989, 26, 34.

²⁵ Ṣāhibzādah Anwār Aḥmad Bugwī, *Tadhkār-i-Bugwīyyah*, jild awwal (Bhera: Markaziyyah Majlis Ḥizbul Anṣār Pākistān, 2007), 517–520 and monthly *al-Jāmi‘ah* (Jhang), September–October 1983, 45–50. In 1964, 1967 and February 1973, bills for the Islamic University were presented in the erstwhile West Pakistan and Punjab Assemblies, respectively, but both were not adopted by the House. Monthly *Ḍiā-i-Ḥaram* (Lahore), January 1977, 20.

mostly belonging to the private sector, these institutions are a source of handsome income and inculcating cultural identity in the Barelwis. The graduates of these institutions are being inducted in mosques, *madāris* and *qāḍī* courts. Some of them prefer to join military and governmental educational institutions. Currently, the electronic media is a very attractive job market for them. Finally, yet importantly, the graduates of these *madāris* are a nursery for the socio-political strength of different Barelwi religio-political parties and pressure groups.

Until February 2021, *Tanzīm al Madāris (Ahl-i-Sunnat) Pākistān* (January 1974) was the sole regularity body for the majority of Barelwi *madāris*.²⁶ After that, the Pakistan Government granted permission to five educational boards to function, including three new boards of the Barelwis.²⁷ This act of the government fanned the already controversial status and authority of the *Tanzīm al Madāris*. The *Tanzīm al Madāris* and its leadership during September 2019–December 2020 were severely criticised by some heads of Barelwi *madāris* for their alleged corruption and mismanagement.²⁸ However, it was countered by the other side that this conflict has been initiated by the government to weaken the leading position of Muftī Munībur Raḥmān (b. 1945) president of the *Tanzīm al Madāris*, who held a strong position on some governmental policies, especially on reforming the *madāris*.²⁹

Al-Karam International Institute

Pīr Muḥammad Karam Shāh al-Azhārī (1918–98), after graduating from *Jāmi'ah al-Azhar* (1970) came back to Pakistan in July 1954, and restructured his ancestral *Dār al 'Ulūm Muḥammadiyah Ghūthiyah* (1925). Along with constructions of new buildings and infrastructural expansions, he also designed and introduced a new curriculum to meet the changing requirements of the time, which was implemented from May 1957, by the new academic year.

²⁶ For details see Ahmad (2017).

²⁷ Monthly *Kanzul Imān* (Lahore), March 2021, 7. The Lahore-based *Wifāq al-Madāris al-Islāmiyyah al-Raḍwīyyah*, *Pākistān* is also worth-mentioning.

²⁸ For details see, *Nawa-i-Waqt* (Rawalpindi / Islamabad), 3 & 5 September 2019; daily *Jang* (Lahore), 15 September 2019 and *Nawa-i-Waqt* (Lahore), 19 September 2019.

²⁹ Daily *Ausaf* (Lahore), 13 September 2019.

While emphasising on the more central place for syntax and morphology, *Qur'ānic* and *aḥādīth* studies and Arabic language and literature, he also included subjects like English, Geography, Philosophy, Political Science, and Economics. The syllabus was again revised in 1969, 1987 and 2001.³⁰ Currently, the *Jāmi'ah* is being administered by the *Anjuman-i-Ta'limul Muslimin Ghūthiyah, Pākistān*. The *Jāmi'ah* has more than eight hundred sister *madāris*, not only in Pakistan but also in some European countries, where more than 200,000 students are enrolled.³¹ In 1990, a separate college for women, *al-kuliyāt al-Ghūthiyah lilbanāt* was established at Bhera, which also has a few branches in the Punjab. The duration of their studies is four years.³²

In November 1982, the *asnād* of *durah-i-ḥadīth* issued by *madāris* was declared equivalent to a Master of Arts in Arabic and *Islāmīāt* by the Zia Regime (July 1977–August 1988). Besides, five *madāris* boards, the *asnād* of some *madāris* were also recognised by the erstwhile University Grants Commission (now Higher Education Commission of Pakistan–HEC) and HEC in 2021, equivalent to a Master of Arts in Arabic and *Islāmīāt* (*al-shahādātul ālamīyyah fī al-‘ulūm al-‘arabīyah wa al-Islāmīyyah*) for teaching of Arabic and Islamic Studies and pursuing higher studies only. *Dārul ‘Ulūm Muḥammadiyah Ghūthiyah* (from 8 January 1987) and *Jāmi'ah Islāmīyyah Minhājīl Qur'ān* (from 27 April 1992) were also amongst them.³³ Later, in 2017, the HEC also announced the recognition of *al-shahādātul āliyyah fī al-‘ulūm al-‘arabīyah wa al-Islāmīyyah* as equivalent to a Bachelor's degree upon qualifying compulsory subjects like

³⁰ For details see Bakhsh (2011:343–366) and *Ḍiā-i-Ḥaram* (Islamabad), August 2020, 61–62.

³¹ *Jāmi'ah al-Karam* was established in January 1995 at Retford, Nottinghamshire, UK.

³² *Al-kuliyāt al-Ghūthiyah lilbanāt* (Bhera: n. pub., n. d.); *Ḍiā-i-Ḥaram* (Lahore), October 2014, 6 and *Ḍiā-i-Ḥaram* (Islamabad), August 2020, 61–62.

³³ University Grants Commission Notification, No. 8-413/Acad/82/128 dated November 17, 1982; University Grants Commission Notification, No. 8-418/Acad/87/94, dated January 8, 1987; University Grants Commission Notification, No. 10-2/Acad/92/ dated April 23, 1992; Higher Education Commission Letters No. 8-61/HEC/A&A/2006/ dated October 15, 2006, No. 8-61/HEC/A&A/2014/ dated October 9, 2014, and No. 8-16/HEC/A&A/2023/493 dated July 4, 2023. However, for employment in other departments, the incumbent was required to have a Bachelor of Arts degree from a recognised university.

English and Pakistan Studies.³⁴ The *Tanzīm al Madāris*, along with other *wifāq*-s of *dīnī madāris*, agreed to adopt the syllabus of the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Islamabad in compulsory subjects of modern education for matriculation and intermediates certificates.³⁵

On 1 December 2021, the President of Pakistan gave his assent to the Act of the Parliament for the establishment of the Al-Karam International Institute at Bhera. The Institute was supposed to, inter alia, provide education and scholarship in such branches of knowledge as it may deem fit with special focus on research in Sharī'ah and to make provisions for research, and for the application, advancement and dissemination of knowledge. About the enrolment policy, it was mentioned that the Institute shall be open to all persons of either gender and of whatever religion, race, creed, class, colour or domicile.³⁶ The Institute vowed to promote, in purely Islamic and Eastern atmosphere, the true understanding of Islamic teachings in the modern age and to raise awareness of the universality of Islam. The first academic session started in October 2022, offered a Bachelor of Science (BS) in English, Arabic, Islamic Studies and Master of Laws. The syllabi of BS in Arabic and Islamic Studies were those which were developed by Pir Karam Shāh.³⁷

Minhajj al Quran University, Lahore

Dr Muḥammad Ṭāhirul Qādirī (b. 1951) for the worldwide propagation of Islam founded the *Idārah-i-Minhāj al Qur'ān* in October 1980 at Lahore.³⁸ In the education sector, the *Idārah* strived to have an international Islamic university at Lahore. The idea behind the project was to educate and train the new generation in the light of scientific, spiritual, and practical facets of Islam. The university claimed that it is a meeting ground for

³⁴ Higher Education Commission Letter No. 8(61)/A&A/2017/HEC/1260 dated October 13, 2017.

³⁵ *Dawn* (Islamabad), 14 July 2016.

³⁶ *The Gazette of Pakistan Extraordinary*, Islamabad, December 9, 2021 (Karachi: The Deputy Controller, Stationery & Forms, 2021), 1138–1142.

³⁷ *Ḍiā-i-Ḥaram* (Islamabad), June 2022, 6.

³⁸ For the introduction of *Idārah-i-Minhāj al Qur'ān* see Ṭāhirul Qādirī (1996).

the religious and temporal education and its graduates would mend the current dichotomy between the religious and temporal education, which will pave the path for the Islamic revolution (Rafiq, 1998:379, 386-391). The Minhaj University initially started in September 1986 as *Jāmi'ah Islāmiyyah Minhājūl Qur'ān* at Lahore; later on, it was granted degree-awarding charter in 2005 by the Punjab Government.

On 4 February 2021, *Jāmi'ah Islāmiyyah Minhājūl Qur'ān* was also allowed to run its own educational board, *Nizāmūl Madāris Pākistān, Lāhor*.³⁹ The Board is supposed to be a regularity body to regularise, monitor and examine all activities related to education. The main purpose of this board is to produce such graduates who are capable of guiding and leading the *ummah* in various walks of life.

Nizāmūl Madāris vowed, inter alia, to introduce comprehensive reforms in the system of religious education and to organise it on modern lines; to expose male and female students to the contemporary sciences along with classical Islamic knowledge so that they can play a dignified, effective, useful and facilitative role in society and provide religious guidance to the coming generations. Furthermore, it strives to impart basic education in Computer Science and Social Science subjects such as General Science, and Mathematics to the students so that they are fully capable of using modern information and technological tools for the propagation of Islamic teachings to the modern minds. Acknowledging the universal and academic importance of English and Arabic languages, it also planned to take steps for the proficiency and expertise in both these languages, so that the students can express themselves eloquently at the international level.⁴⁰

The educational system of the *Nizāmūl Madāris* has been divided into few categories; mainly *al-shahādātul ālamīyyah fī al-'ulūm al-'arabīyah wa al-Islāmiyyah* of two years along

³⁹ Federal Ministry of Education and Technical Training, Notification No. NCC/RE-46/2014-1 dated 04-02-2021.

⁴⁰ <https://nizam-ul-madaris.edu.pk/english/tid/53150/Nizam-ul-Madaris-Pakistan-introduction.html>

with specialisations in *tafsīr*, *aḥādīth*, *fiqh* and *taṣawwūf*.⁴¹ For all its programmes, *Nizāmul Madāris* developed its own *niṣāb*, by amalgamating traditional subjects with modern ones. A Committee drafted the scheme of studies for all levels, which, after the revision and approval of Dr Ṭāhirul Qādirī, adopted by the *Nizāmul Madāris*.⁴² The *niṣāb* gives central position to the study of the complete *Qurʾān* and *aḥādīth* besides emphasising on other classical disciplines along with modern subjects, like Computer Science, Comparative of Religions, History, Education, Economics and Civics.⁴³

To meet the growing needs and expansion in its educational projects, the *Idārah-i-Minhāj* *Qurʾān* visualised constructing a grand and multi-purpose Minhaj Education City in Lahore. This city will be a reflection of Islamic cultural, spiritual and intellectual legacy.⁴⁴

Dar-ul-Madina International University

Daʿwat-i-Islāmī (DI) was launched in September 1981 at Karachi and Mawlānā Abū Bilāl Muḥammad Iliās Qādirī (b. 1950) was appointed as its *amīr*. The DI was founded on the principles of invitation to follow the *Sunnah* and to be virtuous and it stands for the revival and resurgence of Islam through peaceful preaching and educating the people.⁴⁵ The DI expanded rapidly and presently, it is functioning in more than one hundred and fifty countries covering six continents, thus constituting a veritably transnational *tablighī* and educational movement.⁴⁶

⁴¹ <https://nizam-ul-madaris.edu.pk/english/tid/53153/Educational-system-of-Nizam-ul-Madaris-Pakistan.html>

⁴² *Nizāmul Madāris Pākistān* (Tʾarūf, maqāṣid, niṣāb) (Lahore: Shuʿbah niṣābāt Nizāmul Madāris Pākistān, 2021), 10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 11–116.

⁴⁴ Monthly *Minhāj* *Qurʾān* (Lahore), February 2014, 95–100.

⁴⁵ Shuʿbah-i-Isḫāh-i Kutub, Tʾarūf-i-Amīr-i-Ahl-i-Sunnat (Karachi: Maktabatul al-Madinah, 2007), 4. For details see, Sayyid Faiḍ ʿAbbas Qamar, *Ittibāʾ Sunnat-i-Nabawwī aūr Daʿwat-i-Islāmī* (Lahore: Muslim Kitābwī, 2000) and Malik ʿādil Raḍā, *Ihyaʾ-i-Sunnat maīn Amīr-i-Ahl-i-Sunnat aūr Daʿwat-i-Islāmī kā kirdār* (Lahore: Haqq Publications, n.d.).

⁴⁶ Markazī Majlis-i-Shūrā, *Daʿwat-i-Islāmī kā Tʾarūf* (Karachi: Maktabatul al-Madinah, n.d.), 38–39.

On 11 March 2013, the President of Pakistan gave his assent to the Act of Parliament (No. V of 2013) for the establishment of Dar-ul-Madina International University (DMIU), under the DI Trust. The vice-chancellor is the chief executive officer of the university, whereas apex authority of the University rests with the Board of Trustees. The Act also empowered the University to appoint a three-member Shariah Advisory Committee headed by a competent *mufti* or *‘ālim* of Islamic *Fiqh*. This Committee is supposed to give its recommendations in the light of the *Sharī‘ah* on any matter referred to it by any of the university committees for consideration and taking decision on a compliant regarding Islamic *Fiqh*.⁴⁷

The principal seat of the DMIU is in Islamabad and it can establish its campuses, colleges, institutes, offices, research or study centres and other facilities in Pakistan and abroad. The DMIU was also given permission to affiliate or associate itself with any other national or international institutions and universities along with the authority to affiliate national colleges. The DMIU is supposed to be open for all persons of either gender and of any religion, race, creed or class and for all recognised teaching in various courses and can use virtual, distance learning or online teaching methods along with conventional ones.⁴⁸

The DMIU started its academic sessions in January 2024 by offering BS in Arabic, Education, Islamic Studies and Islamic Banking and Finance. The establishment of the university can be taken as a bold step for transforming DI into a transnational educational movement as well.

Besides DMIU, the most important educational network for males and females is the *Jāmi‘ah al-Madīnah*. The central *Jāmi‘ah al-Madīnah* for males was established in 1995 at New Karachi in the central secretariat. All matters related to the *Jāmi‘ah*-s including development and revision of curricula, are supervised by a 22-member *Majlis*. Until July 2023, there were 1,374 *Jāmi‘ah al-Madīnah* and *Jāmi‘ah al-Madīnah lilbanāt* working not only

⁴⁷ *The Gazette of Pakistan (Extraordinary)*, Islamabad, 14 March 2013 (Karachi: The Deputy Controller, Stationery & Forms, 2013), 109, 114, 123.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 105–106.

in Pakistan but also in India, UK, South Africa, Nepal, Kenya, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.⁴⁹ The male students have to complete *Dars-i-Nizāmī* in eight-year whereas for female, the completion period is five years. The total number of male graduates until 2015 was 2348 whereas, more than 13000 females graduated till July 2023. Besides, *Dars-i-Nizāmī*, these *Jāmi‘ah al-Madīnah* also offer some specialisation and short courses in Islamic Jurisprudence, computer, Arabic and English languages in some selected *Jāmi‘ah al-Madīnah*.⁵⁰ These *Jāmi‘ah*-s have developed their own syllabi, mostly in the light of *Dars-i-Nizāmī*.

In January 2011, the network of a school system, *Dārul Madīnah* (now *madāris al-Madīnah*) was established for the two-year education of the male and female children at grass-root level. Until July 2023, more than 4,980 *Dār al-Madīnah* were working all over Pakistan where more than 0.5 million children were educated to recite *Nāẓirah* and do rote memorisation of the *Qur’ān*.⁵¹ A similar school system is also working for the adults. There are almost one hundred thousand *madārisul Madīnah* for both genders; however, for males its daily coaching time is after the night prayer and for females its timings are somewhere between morning and afternoon. DI, for the people living abroad, launched online *Madrisah al-Madīnah* in September 2011.⁵² The *Dārul Madīnah* schools were started with the purpose of educating children in both religious and worldly education under one roof. The students are also offered vocational education, some language courses along with the first two-year syllabus of the *Dars-i-Nizāmī*.⁵³ The *Dārul Madīnah* Islamic School System was started with the aim to educate a child right from pre-nursery to higher secondary level.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Monthly *Faiḍān-i-Madīnah* (Karachi), September 2023, 11. (*Faiḍān-i-Da‘wat-i-Islāmī nambar*).

⁵⁰ Markazī Majlis-i-Shūrā, *Da‘wat-i-Islāmī kā T‘arūf*, 32 and *Faiḍān-i-Madīnah* (Karachi), September 2023, 17, 32.

⁵¹ *Faiḍān-i-Madīnah* (Karachi), September 2023, 10, 27-28.

⁵² Majlis al-Madīnah al-‘ālamīyyah, *Amīr-i-Ahl-i-Sunnat kī dīnī khidmāt* (Karachi: Maktabatul al-Madīnah, 2012), 129, 131.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 135-136.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

For the Islamic education of the students of temporal educational institutions, DI arranges a short course on basic Islamic teachings during the summer vacations.⁵⁵ The DI has extended its educational activities to some Pakistani jails as well, where the prisoners are educated and trained in the light of Islamic teachings, besides vocational education and social services are also provided. The *Majlis Faiḍān-i-Qur'ān* formed in October 2002, is not only responsible for the education of the prisoners but also for establishing libraries, constructing mosques and supervising other socio-religious activities.⁵⁶ The *Majlis* for special persons was also formed in November 2003, under which special schools are functioning. From July 2004, it has also started a thirty days special course on sign language and communication for these people.⁵⁷

The DI also utilises non-conventional teaching methodology as it arranges, inter alia, a 63-day *Madanī* training course for men, a five months *Faiḍān-i-Shari'at* course and a seventeen days *Faiḍān-i-Ramaḍān* course for women. Besides, DI also arranges short courses for women related to their *dīnī* education and training.⁵⁸

The *iftā' maktab*, based at Karachi with branches in three other cities, an auxiliary branch of the *Dārul iftā' Ahl-i-Sunnat* (Ahl-i-Sunnat's board of issuing fatwa) established in November 2000, vets the books in the light of *Shari'at* to be taught in the *Kanzul Madāris* Board and *Dārul Madīnah* Islamic School System.⁵⁹

The DI, in 1986, started its first-ever publishing unit under the name of *Maktabatul Madīnah*. Later, in 2001, it established a research-oriented publishing house with the name of *al-Madīnah al-'ālamīyyah*. Besides Karachi, it also has a branch in Faisalabad, where almost 133 '*ulamā*' are working in 27 different departments associated with this body, which after research, editing and

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁶ *Majlis al-Madīnah al-'ālamīyyah, Da'wat-i-Islāmī kī jāil khānājāt maīn khidmāt* (Karachi: Maktabatul al-Madīnah, n. d.), 2-3, 17-22.

⁵⁷ *Majlis al-Madīnah al-'ālamīyyah, Amīr-i-Ahl-i-Sunnat kī dīnī Khidmāt*, 258-259, 264-265.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 172-174, 177-180. During August 2022 to July 2023, more than 70,000 women completed different such courses. *Faiḍān-i-Madīnah* (Karachi), September 2023, 31.

⁵⁹ *Faiḍān-i-Madīnah* (Karachi), September 2023, 15-16.

peer review, publishes inter alia, text books related to *dars-i-Niẓāmī*, for its *madāris*. Until February 2021, it has finalised more than 53 books, mostly available in print form.⁶⁰

In September 2008, DI established its own *Madanī* channel, which was a big breakthrough in the *da'wah* approach and methodology of the DI. This channel telecasts occasionally *Madanī mudhākīrah* with Mawlānā Iliās Qādirī, besides telecasting other religious programmes. Through this question-answer session, Mawlānā Qādirī educates his audience and viewers on, inter alia, the issues relating to daily affairs of life.⁶¹ In 2023, it started telecasting programmes in Arabic, Bangla and English languages. In January 2017, monthly *Faiḍān-i-Madīnah* was started in *Urdū*; currently it is being published in seven different languages including English, *Guajarātī* and *Hindī*. Arabic quarterly, *Nafaḥatul Madīnah* was started in October 2021.

On 27 April 2021, DI was allowed to run its own educational board, *Kanzul Madāris* Board, Pakistan. The Board is supposed to be a regularity body to regularise, monitor and examine all activities related to the *dīnī* education.⁶² The Board stands for, inter alia, promotion of academic and research-oriented culture in the *madāris*.⁶³ The Board also developed detailed *niṣāb* of *dars-i-Niẓāmī* for both genders. It also recommended a specific scheme of studies for specialisations in *ḥadīth* studies, *fiqh-i-Ḥanafī*, Islamic Economics and Science of Timing along with a few other fields.⁶⁴

The DI has so much interest and concern about the proper and faith-oriented education to be given in its institutions that it has also developed detailed terms, conditions, and duties for the teachers, administrative staff and even for supporting staff.⁶⁵

DI has a very strong and effective network for educating and training of its followers. It has more than ninety departments for

⁶⁰ *al-Madīnah al-‘ālamīyyah, al-Madīnah al-‘ālamīyyah: T‘āruf, maqāṣid, khidmāt: 2001 tā 2021* (Karachi: *al-Madīnah al-‘ālamīyyah*, 2021), 5.

⁶¹ *Majlis al-Madīnah al-‘ālamīyyah, Amīr-i-Ahl-i-Sunnat kī dīnī khidmāt*, 104-106. The proceedings of these *Madanī mudhākīrah*-s are available in the form of audio cassettes, CDs, and books.

⁶² HEC Letter No. 8-16/HEC/A&A/2023/493 dated July 4, 2023.

⁶³ <https://kanz-ul-madaris.org/page/Aims>

⁶⁴ <https://kanz-ul-madaris.org/>

⁶⁵ For details see dawateislami.net/html/jamiatulmadina/

the educational, social, and religious services of the community.⁶⁶ For all its *tablighī*, educational and socio-religious activities, DI has been regarded as an important revivalist movement of the Barelwī, amongst other important international Islamic networks, since 2010 (Lumbard & Nayed, 2010:170).

Conclusion

At the time of creation of Pakistan, besides *dīnī madāris* and non-Muslim missionaries' educational institutions, there were very few educational institutions in Pakistan which were imparting Islamic values to their graduates. With the passage of time, there emerged several educational institutions based on religious and Western secular systems. Amongst these institutions, *dīnī madāris* and higher education institutions affiliated with them are the most important to mention.

The *madāris*, besides providing free education, books, messing, lodging, clothes and medical facilities, also pays a handful of stipends to some students and salaries to the teachers and supporting staff. To meet all these expenses, most of them depend on charity and donations. The minimum admission criteria for *dars-i-Niẓāmī* in most of the *madāris* is matriculation and the admission is test and interview-based. They have a well-defined daily time table, scheme of studies and examination system for elevation to next grades.

Although the stalwarts of most of the *madāris* are of the view that the curricula of these educational institutions is comprehensive as the *Dars-i-Niẓāmī* is a way and methodology to reach and achieve the ultimate goal, *i.e.* students' intellectual advancement and understanding of *dīn* (Sajjād & Khālīd, 1993:39–57; Moosa, 2015:141).⁶⁷ However, they do advocate the need of the addition of some modern / secular subjects as prescribed by the government for matric, intermediate and graduate levels to meet the challenges of the modern times

⁶⁶ For details see (Gardaizi n. d:51–55).

⁶⁷ Personal interview with Mufti Munibur Rahman, 27 October 2013, Karachi; Mufti 'Abdul Qayyum Hazārwi. Monthly *al-Sa'id* (Multan), January 2000, 52 and October 2011, 45–46 and 'Arafāt (Lahore), September 2005, 20, 25 (*Tanzīm al-Madāris Nambar*).

(Ahmad, 2012:66-70, 179-181),⁶⁸ even though the discourse of Islamic education is still dominated by the traditional religious disciplines. With the addition of modern disciplines and new fields of discourse, modes of communication as well as institutions, these *madāris* could not deviate from their traditional socio-religious and educational background (Hartung, 2001:201). Although these institutions are nurturing Barelwi-oriented ‘*ulamā*’, they are not involved in any kind of militancy, except a few occasional protests against the blasphemy and anti-American protests.⁶⁹

The curricula of studies pursued in most of the *madāris* have no strong or solid relation with the actual intellectual and spiritual needs and problems of the practical life. Although they are using modern technologies and methods of learning, as the curricula are not meeting the requirements of the modern times and have colossal apathy towards some disciplines, the results are not up to the mark. They almost modified the *dars-i-Nizāmī* drastically; most of them are not clear-headed about the prime needs and challenges of modern times. The need of the hour is to produce such graduates from these *madāris* who are acquainted with present-day problems of life with an ability to give their practicable solutions.

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⁶⁸ The *Rābiṭah al-mu’līmīn Madāris-i-‘Arabiyah (Ahl-i-Sunnat) Pākistān* and *Anjuman-i-Ṭalabā’-i-Madāris-i-‘Arabiyah (Pākistān)*, established in February 1978, also advocated revision of syllabus according to the growing needs of the time. *Monthly Anwārul Farīd* (Sahiwal), October 1985, 32. *Tanzīm al-Madāris*, on number of occasions, revised the *Dars-i-Nizāmī*. For details see, Ahmad (24-27).

⁶⁹ For details see Ahmad (2021, 45-56).

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Chapter 4

Validating Learning Acquired at Islamic Education Seminaries Through Qualification Frameworks

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Introduction

Education systems globally have been subsumed within a secular Eurocentric monoculture of modern science (Santos cited in Mirza, 2024). Pihama and Lee-Morgan (2019:19) argue that “education was both a target and tool of colonialism, destroying and diminishing the validity and legitimacy of Indigenous education, while simultaneously replacing and reshaping it with an ‘education’ complicit with the colonial endeavour”. This negation of alternative knowledge systems has resulted in generational psychological scars on Indigenous communities. (Re)centring alternative knowledge systems is, thus, considered paramount to the pursuit of decolonising education and society. What does recentring mean, what do different communities consider the centre to be, and are they always interested or willing to move closer to the “centre” or the other? If the centre is a perception, no doubt with material and perhaps spiritual consequences, are the perceptions of the “centre” and the “margins” always the same? Put differently, is mainstream everyone’s mainstream?

Mainstream education systems are designed to validate learning through individual qualifications, certificates or diplomas, often within the context of qualification frameworks (COED, 2006). By 2021, about 150 countries, including South Africa,

had adopted a National Qualification Framework (NQF), which is considered critical to positively transforming education systems (Bateman, 2022). The promulgation of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act in 1995 was aimed at addressing discrimination in education, brought about by the apartheid regime and arguably before, by providing a national qualification framework which would allow all learning to be validated and recognised. In so doing, all learners would be able to articulate equally along an education pathway that is not arbitrarily restrictive.

Christian theological seminaries are recognised in the context of the NQF (see SATS, 2024; Cape Town Baptist Seminary, 2024; Christ Baptist Church Seminary, 2023). Similarly, institutions focused on Islamic education have been recognised as private higher education institutions by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) with qualifications accredited by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) (see IPSA, 2022; Madina Institute, 2024). Programmes on the study of Islam have also been offered in public higher education institutions in South Africa since at least the 1970s (Haron, 2014a). Islamic education seminaries or Muslim theological seminaries, commonly referred to as *Darul Ulooms* (houses of knowledge) in South Africa (see Haron, 2014b), have, however, not embarked on formal accreditation routes in the context of the South African NQF (Ahmed, 2019:155). Ahmed (2019:155) claims that this is because administrators of *Darul Ulooms* regard themselves as fulfilling a religious role only. Yet, if one reviews the prospectus of Christian theological seminaries that are recognised in the context of the NQF, they are explicit about their religious role as well (SATS, 2024; Cape Town Baptist Seminary, 2024; Christ Baptist Church Seminary, 2023). Moreover, institutions such as IPSA (2022) and the Madina Institute (2024) are also overtly religious.

This chapter aims to determine what the processes of validating learning through mechanisms supporting the implementation of the NQF in South Africa imply for Muslim theological seminaries. This chapter examines how validation processes in the context of the South African NQF allow for validating learning at Muslim theological seminaries. Drawing on literature and policy documents, the chapter shows that while it is

technically possible for Muslim theological seminaries to comply with the validation processes supporting the implementation of the South African NQF, Muslim theological seminaries have opted out of the processes because of practices that could be viewed as discriminatory. The chapter argues that Muslim theological seminaries eschew direct integration with secular and other religious ways of knowing, which could restrict the freedom that they have to continue offering learning organised around a particular way of knowing. Moreover, though, the perceived effort is not needed for their survival or growth and, thus, an unnecessary complication that could end up “cramping their style”. The chapter ends with implications in the context of ongoing efforts to promote decoloniality and integrate knowledge systems within mainstream education systems.

This chapter starts by explaining how learning is validated in the context of the South African NQF. This is followed by an overview of the institutions where Islamic education is offered in South Africa, with an emphasis on Muslim theological seminaries, and the learning that occurs there. The chapter then analyses how the validation processes that support the implementation of the NQF could be construed to restrict how learning is organised at the Muslim theological seminaries. The chapter concludes by reflecting on what this means for including alternative knowledge systems in the mainstream education system and the consequent implications for research.

Qualification Frameworks and Validating Learning in South Africa

In many countries, including South Africa, processes that link the formal validation of learning to qualification frameworks emerged and have been established over the last four decades. Tuck (2007:v, own emphasis) defines a qualification framework as an “instrument for the development, classification, and recognition of *skills, knowledge and competencies* along a continuum of agreed levels. It is a way of structuring existing and new qualifications, defined by learning outcomes.” In addition, a qualification framework creates a shared understanding of the information that they convey to an employer about

prospective workers' competencies. It also sheds light on the relationship between qualifications and allows for the articulation of pathways at various levels (Evans-Klock, 2010).

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act of 1995 (RSA, 1995) was one of the first pieces of legislation passed into law by the inaugural post-apartheid government. The South African NQF was developed during the transition to democracy and was expected to transform the provision and regulation of education in the country (Keevy, 2013). The NQF in South Africa was established to promote redress and equity through the education system (DoE, 1995). Redress and equity are expected to emerge from a uniform system of standards and quality assurance to recognise learned skills throughout the country for everyone (Sayed & Kanjee, 2013:16-17). According to the post-apartheid state, learning and knowledge are recognised to the extent that they are included in programmes aligned with the NQF (Sayed *et al.*, 2017). The NQF integrated education and training at all levels within one framework. The policy provided the overall framework for education programmes and pathways of articulation for all qualifications to Doctoral or NQF 10 level (Sayed *et al.*, 2017).

Since 1995, a qualification or learning programme must be developed against the NQF levels to be accredited first and then registered by the SAQA. Two separate processes are involved. First, the institution must be accredited. Depending on the NQF level at which the institution will offer a qualification, institutional accreditation occurs with either the Umalusi¹ or the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). Once an institution is registered, it can apply to offer learning programmes linked to qualifications. Depending on the NQF level and field of the qualification, the institution would apply to one of three quality councils. In higher education, the quality council is the Council on Higher Education (CHE).

In sum, departments of education and quality councils tasked to oversee NQF implementation are enabled to formally validate knowledge and learning in South Africa. They do this

¹ Umalusi is the National Accreditation Body for Independent Schools in South Africa (see Waghid, 2018: 678) and quality assures the National Senior Certificate (NSC) and Independent Exam Board (IEB) that learners receive at the end of basic education or matric.

by recognising and accrediting institutions and qualifications. In each instance, particular processes and procedures must be followed.

This section now turns to outlining the procedure for registering a private higher education institution (HEI) with the DHET and accrediting a qualification with the CHE. This is undertaken to compare it with the literature on Muslim theological seminaries to determine the potential to register as private HEIs and accredit their qualifications formally. Procedures for private HEIs are outlined because Christian theological seminaries are registered as such. The assumption is thus that the knowledge organised at Muslim theological seminaries would be commensurate with what is expected at such institutions. The limits of this assumption are acknowledged. At the same time, the alternative institutions, such as an independent school or vocational college, were not regarded as feasible because the nature of the knowledge transmitted is not basic or entirely technical and vocational. This will become evident in the next section, which refers to the curriculum in Muslim theological seminaries. Further interrogation into the nature of independent and private religious education institutions recognised within the context of implementing the NQF could provide fruitful avenues for further consideration in determining avenues for formal registration of education providers.

Before a learning programme can be taught at a South African higher education institution that will result in a recognised qualification, the institution must be registered with the DHET and the programme must be accredited by the CHE (Zawada, 2020:144). The DHET is responsible for registering private HEIs according to the Higher Education Act of 1997 (RSA, 1997). The DHET (2016) has gazetted the *Regulations for the Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions*. The regulations outline the application process, requirements for registration, the actual registration, certification, the responsibility of the institution, an appeals process, and general and transitional arrangements (DHET, 2016). Requirements for registration are: compliance with the Higher Education Act of 1997; a name must be registered in line with the Companies Act of 2008 (RSA, 2008); a declaration must be made to no discrimination based on race

or any other constitutional provision; only programmes and qualifications aligned with the NQF must be offered; compliance with the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations and evidence of financial viability (DHET, 2016). Once an institution has been registered, they are further obligated to maintain their registration, display their registration status, only offer registered programmes, inform students and the public of their programmes, keep academic records, address student complaints and grievances and provide accurate information to the public and registrar (DHET, 2016).

The CHE is responsible for the accreditation of qualifications offered by public and private HEIs according to the Higher Education Act of 1997 (RSA, 1997). The CHE (2012) set out *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* in 2004 and revised them in 2012. When applying to accredit a new programme, an HEI must provide details of programme design, student recruitment, admission and selection, staffing, teaching and learning strategy, student assessment policies and procedures, infrastructure and library resources, programme administration services as well as postgraduate policies, procedures and regulations (CHE, 2012). When (re)registering existing programmes, the HEI should provide details about the programme coordination, academic development for student success, teaching and learning interactions, student assessment practices, coordination and work-based learning (where applicable), and delivery of postgraduate programmes (CHE, 2012).

The procedures for registering HEIs and accrediting programmes are considered fundamental to the quality assurance of education in South Africa (DHET, 2016; CHE, 2012). Notwithstanding the imperative for quality assurance, it is not far-fetched to imagine that these procedures and criteria are onerous and might take an institution a long time to achieve. Ellis and Steyn (2014:268) contend that private HEIs are operating in “an overregulated” environment. Importantly, however, both the registration of private HEIs and the accreditation of programmes are opt-in processes as opposed to necessary features for operation. The carrot after registration and accreditation is that graduates’ certification would be formally recognised to ensure

articulation in their education pathway, thus, enabling career progression. In other words, formally recognised qualifications offer graduates mobility within the education system.

Informal and non-formal learning are acknowledged in the South African NQF, though, and can be formally recognised if a process of recognition of prior learning (RPL) is available to embark upon. Non-formal learning is “planned learning activities not explicitly designated as learning towards the achievement of a qualification or part-qualification” (SAQA, 2019:6) in the context of the NQF. Non-formal learning can be and is validated in several ways, depending on where it is offered, how it is delivered and who chooses to recognise it. In the context of RPL, the onus is on the individual learner to demonstrate that informal or non-formal learning aligns with NQF learning outcomes where a registered institution makes an RPL process available (see Haron, 2014a:62).

Islamic Education and Muslim Theological Seminaries in South Africa

Islamic education can be transferred through various institutions, including through family and family traditions (Fauzi & Nursikin, 2023), at the mosque (Mudzakkir, 2008), at madrasah, (Nata, 2010), through Taklim Assembly, a gathering where people listen to lectures (Rifa’I, 2019), and through Islamic boarding schools, and elsewhere, where individuals acquire knowledge that is informed by Islamic texts (Lucia, 2022). Islamic education is described not only as transmitting knowledge and skill but also as generating a specific way of being in the world, which is different to but separate from the wider community.

Davids and Waghid (2021) make a case for referring to such education as Muslim rather than Islamic Education. They contend that referring to any human construct as ‘Islamic’ is to denounce the finality of Islam as completed or finalised by the Almighty (Davids & Waghid 2021:1). While the rationale for this argument is accepted for “Islam”, it is not necessary to apply it to Islamic. Here, Islamic and, by extension, Islamic education, can be applied to human endeavours because humans draw on what they regard as emanating from what the Almighty revealed in the context of Islam, irrespective of the extent to which it might

or might not be aligned. That alignment with Islam can never be known is, however, accepted. In other words, that Islam can never be fully known or encompassed is an underlying assumption of this chapter.

In South Africa, Islamic education is typically located in afternoon madrasahs, also called maktab madrasahs or madrasahs, Muslim independent schools and Muslim theological seminaries. Haron (2014b) argues that, unlike minority-Muslim communities in Western countries, in southern Africa, including South Africa, Muslims enjoy religious freedom and autonomy to engage in and establish organisations, including educational institutions that suit their needs. This freedom has been used to establish the range of Islamic education institutions (see Waghid, 2018). Although secular subjects are offered in Muslim independent schools, Islamic education is also taught. Most children attend the afternoon maktab madrasah as a supplement to mainstream education (Haron & Mohamed, 1990:13). Afternoon madrasahs are held in the afternoon at mosques, independent institutions and private homes to teach basic Islamic education to children and adolescents. Post-apartheid, Independent Muslim Schools were established and proliferated (Waghid, 2018). Learners who attend these no longer need to attend afternoon madrasahs (Waghid, 2018). Basic Islamic Education and learning is not the focus of this chapter. Rather, higher Islamic learning and education transmitted in Muslim theological seminaries.

Within the broad milieu of Islamic education in South Africa, Muslim theological seminaries of higher learning in Islamic science are commonly referred to as *Darul Uloom*s. Such institutions are, moreover, typically aligned with the Deobandi education system and are amongst the most prolific in number and graduate output in South Africa (Ingram, 2011; Sayed, 2011; Reetz, 2011). In other words, while there are Muslim theological seminaries that are not Deobandi-aligned, their presence is not as keenly felt amongst South African Muslims (Sayed, 2011). The relationship between constructing a new Muslim identity and the Deobandi *Darul Uloom* is demonstrated by McDonald (2005:84-86). Literature that claims similar levels of impact related to Islamic seminaries aligned with other

Islamic discourses or traditions could, to date, not be located in the South African context.

*Darul Uloom*s have been established in South Africa since the 1970s. The first *Darul Uloom* in South Africa was established in Newcastle in the KwaZulu-Natal province in 1973 (Haron, 2014b:259). Education programmes taught at *Darul Uloom*s in South Africa range from three to seven years in duration, comprising courses in “Arabic, Urdu, Quranic exegesis, Quranic recitation & memorization, Islamic jurisprudence, Muslim history and Educational Psychology” (Haron, 2014b:260). Typically, different *Darul Uloom*s in South Africa adopt similar programmes, curricula and texts aligned with the Nizami curriculum from India (Haron, 2014b). The Nizami curriculum is considered ultra-conservative and outdated (Ahmed, 2019:148).

There is disagreement over who first established the Nizami curriculum (Ahmed, 2019:136). Arjmand (2018:25) states that the Nizamiyya curriculum was originally formulated in the 11th century as the first attempt at a uniform curriculum in madrasah by Nizam al-Mulk. Nizam al-Mulk was a high-ranking government official of the Seljuk dynasty² (Zaman, 2018:66). This would explain structured academic programmes offered in the Deobandi *Darul Uloom*s (Ahmed, 2019:149). Ahmed (2019:135) states that Mulla Nizam al-Din established the curriculum in the 18th century in India. It is unclear from Ahmed’s (2019) claim what would have contributed to the structured nature of the Deobandi *Darul Uloom* programmes.

Interestingly, though, both those who argue for Nizam al-Mulk (Zaman, 2018) and Mulla Nizam al-Din (Ahmed, 2019) claim that the Nizami curriculum originally contained both secular science and religious science subjects. By and large, the Deobandi *Darul Uloom*s do not include secular subjects at the level of higher learning. The core feature that remains, then, of the Nizami curriculum is the structure of the curriculum as opposed to the specific content. The Deobandi *Darul Uloom* continue to transmit Islamic religious knowledge in a structured manner

² The Seljuk dynasty reigned around what is now Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan from 1037 to 1194 (see Baiza, 2018:118–9).

although the precise content might not be exactly the same and secular sciences are not included.

In South Africa, the *Darul Uloom* offer either a six- or seven-year programme comprising about 28 subjects and an average of six hours of classes per day (Ahmed, 2019:157-8). Subjects include language (Arabic and Urdu grammar, etymology, syntax and literature) and Islamic (theological, historical and legal) are introduced to students systematically over the six-year period (Ahmed, 2019:158-60).

“The clash between conservatism/traditionalism and modernism/liberalism was and is still quite evident when assessing the attitudes of Southern Africa’s Muslim communities” (Moosa, 1989) (in Haron, 2014b:256). Deobandi graduates tend to maintain traditional, archaic teaching methods instead of adopting novel teaching methods, according to Haron (2014b:255). A separation between Islamic and secular knowledge is furthermore eschewed by certain Deobandi clerics (Haron, 2014b:256). Islam should be studied in a “pure” and “unadulterated” Muslim environment, not “tainted by secular thinking [or] ... affected by modern influences” (Haron, 2014b:256). The *Jamiatul Ulama* (Council of Theologians) did not engage with the process of establishing a study of Islam programme at a university in the 1970s in Durban, South Africa (Haron, 2014b:256).

Haron (2014b:257-8) claims that the *Darul Uloom* curriculum is predicated on a common good philosophy derived from Islam’s primary sources with “a set of goals directed to the service of God”. Yet *Darul Ulooms* in South Africa limit themselves to Ahl al-Sunnah wal Jama’ah (or Sunni) doctrine (Haron, 2014b:262). In other words, they do not engage in teaching Shia doctrines (Ibid.:262). Sunni and Shia are the two most prominent sects amongst Muslims, globally. For this reason, Haron (Ibid.:263) questions whether the common good philosophy holds in a context where there is exclusion on the basis of doctrine. Not only do South African *Darul Ulooms* limit themselves to the Sunni doctrine, but the Hanafi school of thought, in particular (Ahmed, 2019:160).

Ahmed (Ibid.:151-157), a graduate and teacher at a *Darul Uloom* in South Africa, has suggested a number of reforms to the curriculum. These include focusing on Arabic and English and excluding Urdu, different pedagogical strategies, analytical engagement with content such as Islamic Jurisprudence, revision of texts used, including debate, discussion and research and including non-religious sciences (Ibid.:154). He claims that the Deobandi *Darul Uloom* curriculum highlights information-gathering rather than reasoning (Ahmed, Ibid.:148). Ahmed's (Ibid.:153) claims that "students lack the ability to engage the classical works of the scholars in order to meet the needs of the modern, changing world" and, therefore, the reforms he is proposing are needed.

Ahmed (Ibid.:161) recommends instances where the content of texts should be extended to address contemporary matters. Ahmed (Ibid.:151) points out that the content of the Deobandi *Darul Uloom* curriculum in South Africa is focused on the prescribed text as opposed to "real-life issues". It is not clear what the text contains that is not "real-life", though. Ahmed (Ibid.:153) suggests though that classic and contemporary text be included which address contemporary matters such as crypto-currency and cloning. By implication, it would appear that most texts used are classic and, thus, while they contain matters that affected human beings' "real life", they do not refer to phenomena that emerged subsequent to the text been written. Ahmed (Ibid.:159) notes that laws of inheritance are taught in fourth-year. Presumably, this would remain part of people's "real-life" as long as there is ownership at the time of death.

Ahmed's (2019) explication of the Deobandi *Darul Uloom* curriculum highlights the consistently structured nature thereof. None of his reforms refer to the need for further structure or systemisation of the learning. In other words, while Ahmed and others are critical of the nature of the subject matter covered and the pedagogical strategies, no one has suggested that the learning programme lacks clarity, coherence or structure.

Graduates from *Darul Uloom*s secure jobs, often within the South African Muslim community but also abroad in places like

Australia and Canada (Haron, 2016:53), where South African Muslims have settled. At the same time, Ahmed (2019:148) contends that jobs outside of the ambit of Muslim communities are hard to obtain without formal certification. “A recognised certificate will also allow graduates to complete a teaching qualification and thereby serve as registered and approved educators” (Ibid.:156). While the process is more complicated than Ahmed suggests because any qualification will not enable one to register with the South African Council for Educators (SACE), to register with SACE, a formally recognised teaching qualification is required. Furthermore, Ahmed (2019) does not explain how *Darul Uloom*s might proceed to obtain such formally recognised certification or how graduates might do so. That process was described in the previous section of this chapter. In the next section, the chapter turns to an analysis of how *Darul Uloom*s or Muslim theological seminaries might engage with validation processes in the South African context to award formally recognised qualifications.

Analysis of *Darul Uloom*s engagement with regulation in the context of the South African NQF

This section of the chapter analyses how *Darul Uloom*s might engage with validation processes or regulation in the context of the South African NQF. The section does this by considering how learning is organised in Deobandi *Darul Uloom*s, outlined above, related to the procedures outlined above about the Regulations for the Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions (DHET, 2016) and Criteria for Programme Accreditation (CHE, 2012).

In line with the South African policy framework, to offer formally recognised qualifications, a *Darul Uloom* would have to apply to be registered as a private HEI and then apply for their learning programmes to be accredited. When considering the regulations and criteria outlined above, there do not seem to be major stumbling blocks from the perspective of regulation. In other words, nothing appears to be missing or lacking from the side of the *Darul Uloom*s that might lead the regulators to either deny registering them as private HEIs or not accredited their programmes.

Of course, the administration of *Darul Uloom*s would need to put much effort into compiling the forms and evidence needed to show that they comply with the Higher Education Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations as well as are financially viable. In addition, there could be questions asked about their declaration of non-discrimination in the sense of either sectarian doctrines or gendered education. In practice, *Darul Uloom*s are likely to be able to argue in favour of maintaining both because there are other sectarian gendered education institutions in the country. These are, thus, not likely to be absolute barriers to registration. Furthermore, *Darul Uloom*s are likely to be able to maintain their registration as well as inform students and public of their programmes, keep academic records, address student complaints and grievances and provide accurate information.

The programmes offered by *Darul Uloom*s, moreover, stand every chance to be accredited by the CHE should they be pitched at the correct level of learning and comply with all the information required by the application. From the literature reviewed on *Darul Uloom*s, they would be able to, should they wish, provide details of programme design, student recruitment, administration and selection, staffing, teaching and learning strategy and programme administration services. The literature does not reveal information on student assessment policies and procedures, infrastructure and library resources or postgraduate policies. However, given that the *Darul Uloom*s have graduates, one would assume that assessment is happening, and hence, even if explicit policies do not exist, they might be developed based on practice; the same would be true of postgraduate policies. Moreover, the presence of graduates is suggestive that there is infrastructure even if it might not include library resources.

An analysis of the procedures and guidelines of the DHET and CHE regarding recognition and accreditation of institutions and learning programmes, compared to what the literature reveals, shows that Muslim theological seminaries have the capability to validate learning within the context of the South African NQF. The analysis is limited because literature related to Islamic education seminaries was not intended to engage with the extent to which it could be recognised or accredited within

the context of the NQF. It was not possible to find literature that referred to the level and depth of learning or assessment practices, for example. It would be crucial to document when applying for accreditation. Moreover, no seminary within the Deoband education system has sought accreditation, as far as could be determined. It is, therefore, not clear what barriers might practically be experienced during the process. No research could be found that explored why Deobandi *Darul Uloom*s have not sought accreditation. Further empirical research is, thus, needed to explore these in more detail. Consequently, it could be argued that although qualification frameworks have not been developed for Islamic education systems, the intention to recognise all learning opens up space for validating such learning, at least in the context of the South African NQF and Deobandi *Darul Uloom*s.

Critical questions would need to be asked in further research, interrogating whether the NQF is able to completely accommodate alternative knowledge systems. One such question relates to a component of Islamic education. While learning is validated according to levels expressed by knowledge, skills and autonomy in qualification frameworks, Islamic education is also focused on spirituality. To understand religious education, Baiasu (2018:1) states that “religious texts and experiences, or spiritual practices, such as prayer are often reported to involve special ineffable insights, that is, a spiritual understanding that cannot be put into words by using language in customary ways”. Consequently, religious knowledge is often based on a transcendent reality. Faith in God is a fundamental premise of religious education. It would be important for research to interrogate what this means for recognising a knowledge system when core elements of the system are not generally recognised.

Whether and how spirituality is assessed in the context of Islamic education, specifically Deobandi *Darul Uloom*s could not be determined from the literature. None of the subjects that Ahmed (2019:158–60) refers to are of a spiritual nature, and all are associated with learning material, implying standardised learning if not assessment. Alternatively, it is probably not necessary for every element of the learning programme to be aligned with the NQF levels. Presumably, if adequate bases are covered, learning beyond that need not be a barrier.

Another question that would require attention is the multitude of approaches to Islamic education. In other words, there is not one Islamic education system (Mirza, 2024). Presumably, this would not be true of a particular institution. Therefore, the process in the South African context, where registration is required of the institution before the programme can be accredited, should favour the situation of multiple education systems. This could mean, though, that all institutions would not experience the registration and accreditation process in a similar manner. The possibilities are all conjecture without empirical research and experiences of practical applications.

The fact that Deobandi institutions have opted out of formal regulation, at least according to Ahmed (2019), requires further interrogation. As noted above, the reason provided for not doing so, that it seeks to maintain its religious ethos, is contradicted by both Christian and Islamic private HEIs that have conformed to regulation and maintained their religious ethos. Are administrators and leadership at *Darul Uloom*s not aware of this, or do they not trust that the religious ethos is, in fact, maintained? Or might there be further reasons that have not been examined to date in existing literature?

The subjugation of Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) was a key mechanism of colonialism that sought to reject and delegitimise knowledge that did not centre the Western episteme in and through the production of knowledge. Therefore, (re)centring alternative knowledge systems, including Islamic education systems, is paramount in pursuing decolonising education systems. At the same time, either not recognising or distrusting “entrance” to the centre would be a justifiable reaction. Questions about whether so-called marginalised knowledge systems or knowledge systems on the fringes want to be centred has not received much attention in decolonial scholarship. An assumption, based on its absence in the Western-centred university, is that it should, by default, be recentred. Attention must be given to whether, how and why ways of knowing that exist beyond mainstream education aspire to be “centred”.

In his book, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*, de Sousa Santos (2014:8) argues that “there is no global justice without cognitive justice” ... and that “diversity should be valorized”. If the recognition of all knowledge is a matter of cognitive justice, we might still ask recognition by whom. If individuals or communities consider their way of knowing is recognised irrespective of whether or not it conforms with or complies with formal state regulation, has justice been achieved, and has diversity been valorised?

Therefore, what learning must be validated cannot be the purview of policymakers alone. Community engagement would be required to ascertain how Islamic education might be included, what could be excluded, and on what basis. It also means that those who manage the Deobandi *Darul Uloom*s cannot be solely responsible for deciding where they wish to be in relation to the “centre” because the position has implications for the learning pathways of graduates, not only them and their institutions. This means involving communities in messy engagements of curricula and pedagogy. It does sound unwieldy and time-consuming, and it is, but it would be naïve to think that cognitive and social justice could be achieved via uncomplicated processes.

McDonald (2018:5) claims that Deobandi-aligned institutions also limit “integration into broader society” because of the consequences associated with “acquiring specific literacies” or ways of reading the world. *Darul Uloom*s, furthermore, do not allow co-education between men and women (Ahmed, 2019:190). These are matters that need to be interrogated in relation to broader South African policy imperatives regarding transformation and equality. The reality is that these institutions exist in South Africa, albeit not formally recognised. Would formal recognition complicate the state’s democratic ideals? The research agenda towards formal recognition of alternative knowledge systems obviously requires more sustained attention.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to interrogate the capacity for learning from Muslim theological seminaries to be validated in the context of the qualification framework in South Africa. How learning

acquired in *Darul Uloom*s might be validated in this context was established. Although no *Darul Uloom* is purported to have validated their learning in the context of the South African NQF, the chapter argues that, technically, this is possible in the context of existing policy regulations and how learning is organised at *Darul Uloom*s according to literature. Furthermore, the reason that is reported for not becoming formally regulated does not hold, in that other institutions with a religious ethos have maintained both regulation and their ethos.

The chapter, thus, recommends further empirical research to examine the congruence of validating learning from Muslim theological seminaries in the context of qualification frameworks. This is important because understanding how knowledge from different systems might be recognised on formal instruments will contribute to deepening decolonial debates. The subjugation of IKS was a key mechanism of colonialism that sought to reject and delegitimise knowledge that did not centre the Western episteme in and through the production of knowledge. Consequently, considering the ways in which alternative knowledge systems seek to and might (re)centre, including Islamic knowledge systems, is paramount to pursuing decoloniality.

The study of Islam in universities has an important agitating role to play in the decolonial project (Bulbulia, 2021). The study of Islam can be consequential for “decolonial futures in which different knowledge systems, worldviews and lived experiences may be integrated to enrich, challenge and complement efforts to redress the harm caused by coloniality” (Bulbulia, 2021:6). If the study of Islam at universities is to be successful in agitating for decolonisation, attention has to be paid to how knowledge of Islam is produced and reproduced outside of the academy and how it might or might not be recognised. This endeavour would be complicated because of knowledge production having taken on many forms throughout the history of Islam. Moreover, Islam and Islamic knowledge production have been implicated in colonial projects as well.

An important Islamic knowledge tradition that emerged in the modern, colonial world was the Deobandi education system. Some have argued in direct response and resistance to British

colonialism in the Indian sub-continent. This chapter aimed to broaden the understanding of the connection between the Deobandi education system and the national education system in South Africa. The chapter did this by conducting a desktop review, drawing on literature and policy analysis related to the South African National Qualifications Framework and literature on the Deobandi education system. In so doing, the chapter demonstrates the need for empirical research interrogating the extent to which Islamic education systems can be formally recognised in the context of national qualification frameworks as a contribution to decolonial debates.

Acknowledgements

Grammarly software is installed on the computer that I used to write this chapter. Suggestions for language editing were accepted throughout the writing process. No further suggestions were requested or used.

I received no funding support during the preparation of the manuscript.

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Chapter 5

Madrasa Education and the Social Sciences: Considering Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy

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Abstract

This chapter seeks to explore the present-day role of madrasa education, otherwise known as traditional Islamic education. I come to this as a psychologist focusing primarily on issues concerning minority communities and thereby posit my reflections within a social sciences context. My work predominantly navigates towards building bridges across communities and fostering greater understanding of the unknown within society. Similarly, in this chapter I seek to explore in a reflective manner, the role of madrasa education in light of many of the social issues facing minorities and, by extension, all communities. Herein, I will specifically focus on Muslim communities, the madrasa, modern academy, education and present-day social contexts. I argue that there is both demand and a need for developing new pathways within madrasa education systems, one that is accessible for all and which allows for pressing social circumstances to be addressed in a manner which sits within the identity of the communities in question, whilst also addressing their holistic needs. I draw upon experiences within my previous role teaching undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Islam and Pastoral Care, to demonstrate the need felt by prospective practitioners and younger students in training. I conclude with a series of recommendations to facilitate this bridge-building including; diversification of curriculum through



embedding real-world context and application, development of professional ethical practice and core skills competency, active consideration of representation across all specialisms, research-informed practice and knowledge-generation, and opportunities for personal development and growth.

The Madrasa, Muslim Identity and Modern-Day Contexts

My practitioner work takes me deep into communities, exposing me to the harsh realities of everyday life and associated trauma for the average person. I recall being contacted in panic by a mother of a young boy, born with physical and cognitive disabilities. She was concerned that her son could not be circumcised because of the risk that surgery would pose to his life. Her panic, however, was not caused by this, it was because of her having consulted a local *alima*, a graduate of a Muslim seminary, who had told her that should her son not be circumcised then he would go to hell. Whilst this example may seem extreme, it is, nevertheless, exemplary of the anguish often faced by everyday individuals as they attempt to reconcile their faith identity with the reality of everyday life. Faith being so integral to their identity, they actively seek out appropriate sources for guidance rooted in faith. Those who graduate from traditional seminaries are seen by the average community member as holding the correct training to be able to provide such guidance. This is particularly acute in comparison to their own lack of awareness and education in relation to religious practice.

The traditional madrasa¹ has been invaluable in developing scholars trained in theology. Where the Muslim identity is

¹ The modern-day madrasa is akin to a supplementary school, often holding classes at evenings and weekend pertaining to social, moral and personal development within a faith framework (Valli, 2012). Going back to the time of the Ottoman empire, the traditional *mudarris* were centres of learning for all, with a focus on jurisprudence. Alongside this, evidence for the study of Philosophy, Astronomy, Medicine, Natural Sciences and Mathematics have been found (Ihsanoglu, 2004). Within the Indian sub-continent the madrasa turned *darul uloom* offers intensive theology training for full-time students focusing on the transmitted sciences and the rational sciences. Subjects include Arabic grammar and syntax, morphology, jurisprudence, polemics, philosophy, and Qur'an exegesis and hadeeth studies, amongst others. This is normally through the *dars-e-nizami* programme developed as a direct result of colonialism (Zaman 1999). In this chapter, the madrasa refers to the modern Islamic institutes of learning in the West, which cross over with the *darul-uloom* from the sub-continent.

considered to be an ultimate way of being, endowed with dignity for every human (Kamali, 2002), the madrasa has facilitated the need within communities to retain faith identity within all aspects of life. As shared by one of my former students, the madrasa allowed him to access a “systemised form of learning (*which*) allowed me to gain a strong grounding in the Arabic language, thereby enabling me to access primary sources within Islamic theology” (male student). In a post-colonial world that continues to witness the after-effects of its legacy, the Muslim lived identity is one that continues to evolve. Access to primary and source text, therefore, becomes imperative within this. Sirin and Fine (2007) propose the hyphenation of the self within Muslim youth identity in a post-9/11 world. Within this, they conclude that Muslims are required to navigate their identities within different spaces and around experiences such as discrimination. Further discussions around the securitisation of Muslim communities and Muslim identities can be seen within the work of Abbas (2007) and Younis (2022). Peek (2005) proposes three stages to identity development within a US sample. These are put forward as: religion as an ascribed identity; religion as identity claimed by the individual themselves; and religion as an openly declared identity. Such nuances are indicative of the dynamic and evolving nature of identities within Muslim communities, particularly in the West. Within Rothman and Coyle’s (2018) model of the soul, it can be understood that the Muslim identity is guided by its attachment to God. It is, therefore, no surprise to find that those who undertake training in theology within the traditional madrasa are the default go-to individuals for many of the social difficulties encountered within everyday life, with faith forming a central component of their needs (Ali *et al.*, 2005). This is further exemplified within Muslims seeking therapeutic support; actively seeking out individuals who have insider understanding of their faith identity and have the prerequisite training and skills to be able to encompass this within therapeutic support (The Lantern Initiative *et al.*, 2021). This is a far cry from the ideas of Dupré (1993), whereby knowledge gained was considered separate to the person gaining it. It is evident that the Muslim identity is intertwined with the lived reality and experiences of each individual, whether holder of that knowledge or seeker of that knowledge.

The changing demographics within Muslim communities has, inevitably, led to considering the existing training of scholars in theology and the current gaps within such provision. Theology, whilst often taught as fiqh within the madrasa context, herein refers to the *Ilm-ul-kalam*, or knowledge of the sacred text. Developments in the field of practical theology take this understanding to a more applied context, demanding more in terms of how theology might manifest within everyday life for the average person. This becomes significant for considerations within the social sciences context. The foremost madrasa institutions within the UK adopted Urdu as their main medium. Pedagogical approaches, as outlined by Zaman (1999) included sitting on the floor, learning the art of debate and devising arguments, memorisation of knowledge, and finally discipleship whereby the teacher themselves became someone to study and emulate. Accommodation of such concepts within Western contexts is deliberated by Zaman as not being so straightforward, perhaps requiring contextualising within Western pedagogies in order to be able to ascertain an equivalent. There are deeper considerations within this relating to post-colonial legacies which would benefit from further extrapolation. What is certain however is that with the ever increasing social challenges experienced within Muslim communities, there has been an increasing need for scholars trained in theology to be able to cater to the psycho-social-spiritual needs of their communities within professional contexts and to furthermore, consider the use of the English language within this. The introduction of English-medium institutes catering to the young English-speaking Muslim, has taken gradual steps to meet these needs. A variety of models can be seen within this. Some institutions have retained the core text and subject matter of the traditional madrasa but simply offered it in the English medium. Others have expanded further to include additional contemporary subjects such as leadership skills and additional activities engaging youth, females and the broader communities, moving their institutions from purely centres of learning to community centres. Others have altogether shifted into new subject areas, adopting a more university-style curriculum consisting of mainstream recognised qualifications and subjects leading to employment thereafter. Whether or not

they self-identify as alternatives to the madrasa is dependent upon the founding vision of such institutions.

In various pockets, there are still some visible signs of accessibility concerns to the traditional madrasa model. Within community conversations surrounding my practitioner work, anecdotal evidence posits madrasa education and training in theology as either reserved for the “chosen” ones or the ones who hold no alternative prospects, and, therefore, take this up as a last resort. Others have disclosed that cultural dress codes stipulate that women who are not wearing black, and men without traditional clothes and a hat (topi) automatically face exclusion from the madrasa. What is evident within such examples is the reductionist approaches to religion; from a holistic faith that allows opportunity for growth, to a set of rules and regulations, often steeped in ethnic cultural norms as opposed to established faith tenets (Chowdhury, 2023). This becomes significant when considering social needs within communities, the training of individuals who will go on to hold positions of religious authority, and their ability to meet those needs. Former pastoral care students at the Markfield Institute of Higher Education revealed what they sought out from further studies: elements which they found to be missing from traditional Islamic education, yet such support provided them with gaining the delicate balance required between academic and professional practice, all the while being firmly built upon faith-based principles.

“I joined MA Islam and Pastoral care to understand multi-dimensional approaches to responding to societal issues and support others.” (Female student)

“The MA has helped me in my role as it has honed my speaking and writing capabilities which allows me to participate in senior level discussions within the organisation. The MA degree aided me in securing a management position.” (Male student)

In further conversations, students presented the increasingly diverse range of pressing social concerns which they were facing, yet felt unable to adequately address. They also recognised the need to address these issues within professional contexts,

whilst being grounded in faith-identity and trusted sources of theology. In order to make an impact, they required the prerequisite academic and professional skills, allowing them to fully implement their training in theology, whilst holding the relevant knowledge alongside the appropriate professional standing. They thereby sought out educational pathways which would support them in attaining this delicate balance.

Presenting issues for Chaplains and those trained in theology include dealing with domestic violence, sexual abuse, abuse by those holding positions of religious authority, trauma, issues concerning gender identity and sexuality, breakdown of family units, divorce, and child contact arrangements post-divorce or leaving of abusive relationships, to name a few. These topics are not topics frequented within traditional Islamic education except through a *fiqhi*² lens. The social-psycho-spiritual dimensions of the lived reality of such social concerns often remain unacknowledged, yet present profound detrimental consequences for individuals, families and communities alike. Former students professed the idea of thinking that they had been doing chaplaincy for the years prior to their studies, only to realise that to be very far from the truth, because of a lack of adequate madrasa training and practical application of content taught within the madrasa.

Present-Day Social Contexts

The need for academic development which facilitates the practical application of theology within professional contexts, therefore, becomes clear when considering current social contexts. Present-day social contexts across local, national and international spheres, have resulted in the dire necessity of having trained scholars of theology who are also familiar with areas more akin to social work and psychology. Ali *et al.*, (2005) found that US Imams were not only acting as therapists but they were also providing conflict resolution services, mediation and trauma support in cases of discrimination. Muslims in prisons in the UK currently stand at 17% of the prison population (Sturge, 2022), yet are only 6.5% of the population within England and Wales (ONS, 2022). Whilst this raises broader questions,

² Pertaining to rules and regulations

the needs of this group must be accounted for. At present, there is some provision of chaplaincy services when serving their sentence; however, post-release there remains much work to be performed to continue this support, with communities being at the forefront of this (Irfan, 2022). Within a US context; Salkic (2016) and a UK context; Chowdhury (2023), both argue the essential need for Imams to distinguish between misunderstanding and incorrect application of sacred scripture to uphold or justify abusive practices within marital and/or family relationships. In England and Wales, it is estimated that there are approximately 4,500 children of Muslim heritage in care, with a dire shortage of Muslim families who they can be placed with (Cheruvallil-Contractor *et al.*, 2022). The role of those with religious authority in creating change within communities in relation to this is paramount. Within my own previous involvement in the training of chaplains at the UK Markfield Institute of Higher Education, this diversity of social concerns has required the embedding of psychological concepts within core training in order to equip chaplains with the prerequisite skills to understand the human at their best and worst. Pertinent topics have included understanding and developing professional counselling skills, being well-versed in relation to various forms of abuse and the contexts that they may occur within, understanding the processes of trauma and what the nuanced role of religion is within this, understanding crime, reintegration trajectories and desistance from crime, and the development of professional practice skills.

Without adequate understanding of contemporary social issues, psychological guidance of such issues, complimented with theology, the everyday member of the public can end up receiving harmful and ill-informed advice that potentially puts themselves and others at risk of harm. This approach would be in line with the concept of curriculum renewal and tradition outlined by Alhashmi (2021), whereby curriculum is informed by the needs of the times, yet still remains in line with the Islamic tradition at its baseline. One example of potential harm includes not being able to ascertain the difference between life-threatening domestic violence and abuse cases, in comparison to two individuals who are experiencing a turbulent relationship and wish to find a way through. A further

example is a lack of awareness of what constitutes dispensatory circumstances, particularly from a psychological perspective rather than a purely physiological or theological perspective, and, therefore, why there would be valid grounds for the normal rules pertaining to various religious regulations not being applicable under such circumstances. The pertinence of this is exemplified within the example provided at the start of this chapter. Within social dilemmas, there is also evidence of misuse of scripture to justify and facilitate the continuation of abusive practices. Faith principles being used for protective purposes in comparison to the misuse of religious scripture being used to maintain forms of control over an individual, including in their access to and worship of God, has been equally known to occur within abusive contexts (Chowdhury, 2023). Furthermore, sexual abuse of minors by those holding positions of religious authority and the role of religious institutions in shielding such actions are receiving increasing attention. Whilst most of this work remains at the grassroots within communities, there is some emerging research (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2021) with further research also being undertaken across the UK. Disclosures of domestic abuse remain shrouded in stigma and shame (Hammer, 2019). Disclosures pertaining to sexual abuse are further surrounded by fears of statutory responses being misaligned to cultural sensitivities, loss of family respect and community standing, and concerns around shame and discussing issues culturally perceived to be immodest to speak about in public spaces (Gilligan & Akhtar, 2006).

When faith becomes intertwined with various forms of abuse, the consequences upon one's faith identity has been found to be devastating (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2021). Whilst these are clearly delicate topics, their sensitive nature and the barriers to speaking out are not to be mistaken as the non-existence of these issues. Rather, it can be deduced that suffering is being experienced in silence and in isolation. Behind such research, there are real victims enduring tragic consequences which urgently require addressing; firstly, to provide support for those victims and secondly, in order to prevent the existence of future victims. Imperative to this is the creation of safe spaces within which support can be sought and wherein these issues can be addressed. Equally, it is important to recognise that religion can and does play a significant role in supporting Muslim victims

of abuse to find a way out of the abuse, and to live a fulfilling life which facilitates the centralising of their Muslim identity (Chowdhury, 2023; Chowdhury & Winder, 2022). Such options, however, are not possible without the comprehensive training of Imams and students of theology. Muslims in particular, will seek out those who have an understanding of their cultural and religious needs within the provision of therapeutic and mental health support (The Lantern Initiative *et al.*, 2021). This provides direction for the change that is required in the training and development of individuals who go on to hold positions of religious authority.

Based on both practitioner work and research in the field, I present the following as holistic psycho-social-spiritual well-being needs within Muslim communities:

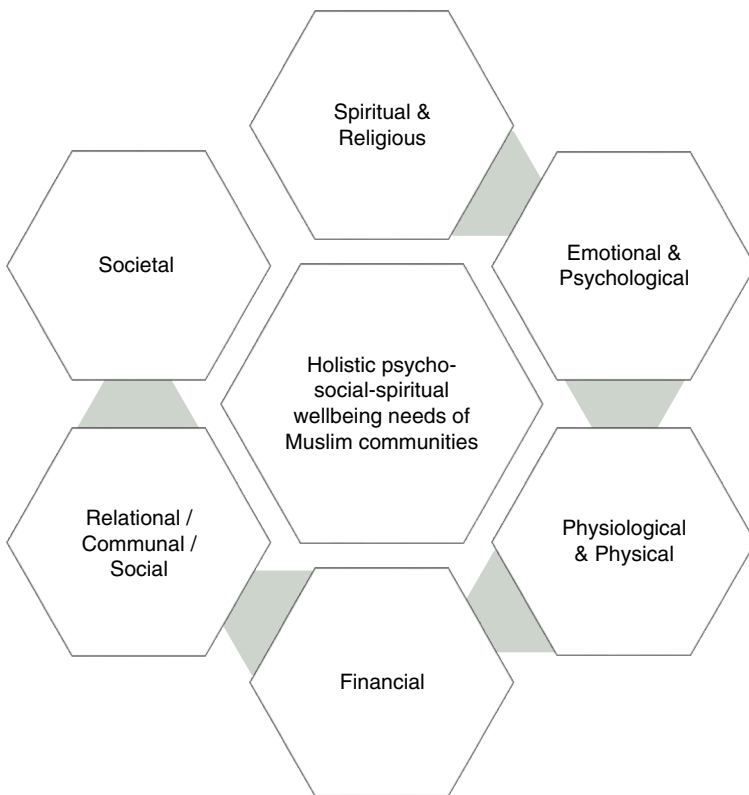


Figure 1: Holistic psycho-social-spiritual wellbeing needs of Muslim communities

Figure 1 demonstrates the necessity for re-examining the role of madrasas in the training and development of future religiously informed leaders. Given the prevalence of stigmatisation experienced within Muslim communities (Balazard & Peace, 2023; Ryan, 2011), it is argued that addressing these needs must occur on both an individual and collective level, with all feeding into identity development. Stigmatisation and the othering of identities is known to hold negative affirmations (Carter, 2017), therefore, what would be significant here is how these elements can be harnessed to provide positive identity affirmations within broader macro-level structures in society. This would facilitate the recognition of well-being needs more widely, allow protective factors to be actively utilised, whilst also affirming to Muslim communities that seeking help when required does not need to be shrouded in stigma.

Given this social context and backdrop to the Muslim identity, it is, therefore, unsurprising to witness students enrolling on courses which allow them to bring their faith identity into the classroom. Rather, the necessity of having their faith identity accommodated within epistemological approaches to teaching has been evident within my own teaching experiences and that of colleagues. This requires educational routes and pedagogical approaches to embed the identity and lived experiences of its student population into the curriculum as the baseline, from which further learning is then facilitated, thereby allowing students to bring their whole selves to their education, learning, and future development. What makes this unique within Muslim communities is the embedding of the spiritual and higher purpose behind the undertaking of education and what the end goal may be. Visible examples of this include students adopting the optional nightly prayers (tahajjud) as part and parcel of their study routine. Further to this is the normalisation of supplications (du'as) as part of their ongoing development and within the decision-making processes involved in pursuing specific educational and career paths. This is often adopted from the outset, prior to entering education and the chosen course of study. Within an Islamic framework, these are not uncommon practices; however, for students to find spaces in which such faith-based practices can be normalised as part of mainstream educational training routes

is uncommon. It could be argued that institutions such as the Markfield Institute of Higher Education is specialised in what it offers and, thereby, the facilitation of student identities within their programmes are to be expected. Whilst this may be partially true, the structures within the institution are such that they are there to provide undergraduate and postgraduate education. Despite the generic presence of faith, there is no compulsion or external drive for students to adopt more esoteric pathways within their education journey. Furthermore, the programmes can be undertaken by anyone of any background, faith or no faith. This indicates that the embedding of faith identity and spiritual practices are student-led, student-initiated and maintained by students, whilst the institution creates the prerequisite safety required by students for such purposes. As a Muslim psychologist, I conclude that this links back to the ultimate attachment which Muslims hold – that being ones' connection to God. This need and drive has been evident within my various areas of research, as it has also been visible amongst the students who I have supported.

Future Directions in Madrasa Education

In this regard, the revival of Islamic psychology is demonstrating its potential within the decolonisation of curriculum, with positive contributions in Muslim communities and beyond (Badri, 2020; Rothman *et al.*, 2022). A reductionist approach to faith, stripping the faith down to a rigid set of rules and regulations, has been argued as upholding silencing around various forms of injustice (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2021; Chowdhury & Winder, 2022). Yet the same research also demonstrates a dual strand at work, whereby holistic approaches to faith allow opportunities for the reclaiming of faith (Chowdhury, 2023). In the same manner, Abdalla (2021) argues that the subject of *fiqh*³ was never intended for rigidity; rather, it was always intended for supporting the dynamic nature of everyday life and the variety of cultures across humankind. The inclusion of Islamic Practical Theology within social work is one such example of how this holds current critical relevance (Isgandarova, 2022). Sahin (2022) proposes the reframing

³ Abdalla moves away from the traditional translation of the word as Islamic law, to defining it as everyday living.

of sharia, often boxed in as objectives of Islamic law, as “relational ethics and practical wisdom” (Sahin, 2022:188). This is not the reconfiguration of the sciences behind sharia, but the reframing of its application for the purposes of social justice. In line with this, “holistic” here refers to returning to the essence of Islam as a way of being, as opposed to a set of rigid religious practices, resulting in the dissolving of identities (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2021) and the breakdown of families (Hammer, 2019; Isgandarova 2018). Holistic approaches to faith facilitate the preservation of identity according to individual needs. It is this flexibility that is offered within the fields of Islamic Psychology and Islamic Practical Theology. The Islamic model of the soul (Rothman & Coyle, 2018) offers a visual representation of the fluctuating nature of the human. Whilst demonstrating how harm can be committed, it simultaneously offers how the development of that harm can be managed and treated, in accordance with the nature of the human as understood within an Islamic epistemological framework. This provides the foundational guidance to practical theology, relational ethics, and holistic approaches within identity development, critical to addressing pressing social concerns within Muslim communities. Expanding upon this and embedding such developments within academic, professional and traditional training routes offers a non-reactionary, decolonial approach which builds upon the capital already present within Muslim minority communities.

Accessibility within the field of Islamic education has expanded beyond the traditional madrasa system. This is not to discount the value of the traditional model. However, recent developments and expansion of English medium institutions are now visibly catering to a new generation of Muslims. The direction and content of programmes within such institutions have been directly informed by demands within communities. Muslims are increasingly seeking to engage with the growth and development of their communities as part of their faith practice, referred to as the “common good” by Schmid and Sheikhzadegan (2022:1). This requires a new direction in traditional studies within Islamic Practical Theology. Many often come to their studies with the aim of strengthening their faith through the education paths that they undertake and the subsequent career

paths that they embark upon. The common denominator is the lining of faith to both study and work.

Being able to contribute to society as a minoritised member of the broader society allows for individuals to see themselves as part of that society. Furthermore, it offers the realisation that the personal identities brought to such roles are essential to effectively providing pertinent services required within society today (Crabtree, 2022). This offers a unique opportunity for the modern madrasa to consider their curricular, pedagogical approaches and epistemology. Critical to this is the embedding of current-day contexts relevant to the student population present within such institutions. Institutions must, therefore, offer opportunities for critical thinking, inclusive of theology-based subjects, whilst centralising present-day contexts and social concerns. There must be room for students to consider and recognise embedded theology; that is, theology that is assumed to be true but may not actually stem from accurate religious sources. Furthermore, students must be encouraged to recognise reductionism in all its forms and how to supersede this in order to alleviate human suffering and constructively engage with social work across all communities. That is not to say that traditional pedagogical approaches need to be completely disregarded, but rather, the same respectful etiquettes should continue to apply whilst allowing room for introspection, critical thinking and practical application suitable to current contexts. This is what the revival of Islamic Psychology offers. By equipping students with contextualised knowledge, grounded in their faith tradition, yet cognisant of the pressing social concerns with people at the heart of this, students will be better able to provide essential support provision which currently remains lacking. Furthermore, being driven internally within communities, allows those very communities to hold authority and control over their own epistemological approaches to supporting their communities.

Grounded in the burgeoning field of Islamic Psychology and related discourses in theology, Arif (2023) proposes new perspectives in relation to the conceptual analysis of the fitra. Extending beyond what is accepted as the natural inclination to think or act in a particular manner, Arif adds the notions of presence of the religious instinct, the power of the mind in

logical thought processes, and finally, the internal voice or voice of conscience which steers towards right and wrong actions. Recognising these foundational elements of the ontological understanding of the human within Islamic epistemologies, facilitates room for developments in social work and psychological understanding as outlined in this chapter. Such foundations form the epitome of Islamic Psychology. Within this is the shift away from reductionist approaches to faith understanding and implementation. Coupling these with the holistic well-being needs presented in Figure 1, offers a potential route for working with individuals within present-day contexts, regardless of their background. Furthermore, the overall principles across these areas hold potential to benefit other communities, where adaptations according to their own customs may facilitate meeting the needs of their own communities. Islamic Psychology, the application of social work and practical theology offer broad enough scope whereby Muslim practitioners should be developed to such a degree that they can apply overall principles to persons of any background, without necessarily imposing religious tenets on them. The challenge for future directions in modern madrasa education, then, is to not stop at taking ownership of returning to their own epistemologies within a holistic framework, as offered by Islamic Psychology. They must further consider how they might benefit beyond the borders of their own communities.

Recommendations

In conclusion, the following are recommended in relation to new directions for madrasa education within the context of Islamic Psychology, related to social work and practical theology.

- 1. Diversification of curriculum through embedding real-world context and application**

Where within mainstream education and employment, the demonstration of transferable skills is a prerequisite, the same too must apply within madrasa education. This needs to be inclusive of real-world practice where the practice of faith is not prescribed upon others, but rather enables individuals to be personally empowered to seek their own identities. Within this, there is no necessity to shy away

from classical theological texts; however, critical thought must be facilitated in relation to current-day social contexts. Addressing real-world issues must be feasible without limiting understanding to theory only.

2. **Development of professional ethical practice and core skills competency**

One of the key concerns raised at the community level relates to the professional training and practice of those who hold positions of religious authority and who are often sought out during personal and familial dilemmas. Ethical practice is not a stranger to Islamic theology; rather, it is a central pillar to all conduct. The application within social reality, however, may be more unfamiliar because of some of the reasons outlined herein. Both the development of and the return to professional ethical practice and core skills competency, thereby, is imperative, to not only build up trust internally, but to further raise standards in order that social concerns can actually be resolved rather than perpetuated.

3. **Active consideration of representation across all specialisms**

Where imams are normally male, many social troubles often have females at the core of the experience. Yet historically, female scholarship was vital to the development of male scholarship. Facilitating adequate representation across specialist fields is vital for ensuring that all community members have a safe space in which their voice can be heard. Similar can also be said of male victims who need to come forward, make disclosures and obtain support, but may at present feel unable to do so because of gender dynamics. This means curriculum design and developmental opportunities must also be extended to all with embedding of interdisciplinary practices.

4. **Research-informed practice and knowledge-generation**

Traditionally, many Muslim communities have been the subject of research. This continues to exist into the present day. There is a need for the development and training of the next generation of researchers, who already possess appropriate cultural understanding. Such training must be

inclusive of understanding how to ensure fair representation, and robust and ethical research processes. This will serve to ensure that those concerned can lead on the topics of concern in a manner that truly reflects the lived experience.

5. Opportunities for personal development and growth

Personal growth and development extend beyond the educational environment. Consideration needs to be given to how students will go on to live in the real world and the development of adequate skills to be in service to others, as will be expected of them, given their training. This responsibility can often be underestimated. Therefore, there is a need for the embedding of personal incremental development as core aspects of training, within all stages of curriculum design. Within this, consideration will inevitably need to be extended to those who have not had opportunities to push themselves previously, and, therefore, may never consider broadening their options. It further extends to positive social interactions, inclusive of developing skills required for healthy gender relations as well as opportunities to consider personal identity development. As many of the issues placed before those with training in theology often focus on social and interpersonal relationships, it requires for those individuals to be well-equipped with such skills themselves.

New directions in madrasa education can, therefore, look to examples within modern academies in how to provide safe spaces wherein individuals are empowered to discover and take ownership of their current and future identity, without losing crucial aspects of that identity. It, further, should enable them to make decisions which do not harm themselves or inadvertently bring harm upon others, through lack of training. This would align with Foucault's' latter notions of education as creative, enabling and positive (Leask, 2012); elements clearly embedded within the field of Islamic Psychology. The centrality of Islamic Psychology, within the fields of contemporary social work and practical theology, is vital to addressing pressing social concerns whilst re-shaping society through the individual. The traditional

madrassa must evolve to enable students to be able to traverse the path of understanding who they are and what they stand for, as precursors to setting a vision beyond short-term goals for their own futures. In the words of a former student, current madrassa education “does not offer an opportunity to explore debates about Islam from (the) perspective of an outsider or how to respond to contemporary challenges” (female student). In essence, the madrassa must develop the creation of spaces in which individuals can truly thrive, with a resulting positive impact extending into their communities and beyond. Islamic Psychology alongside Islamic ethics, demands this level of introspection of its students, as a precursor to working with communities. The madrassa is held up as providing critical resources by these very communities and, thereby, must also rise to this challenge.

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Chapter 6

Contemporary Reception of 4:34 and “Wife-Beating”: Navigating Gender in the Madrasa

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Introduction

4:34 and specifically the notion of *ḍaraba*, represents one of, if not the most, contentious verse in the Qur’ān.¹ Broadly speaking, *ḍaraba* has been understood in pre-modernity as sanctioning some kind of physical disciplining of wives in a marriage dispute. What makes the notion of *ḍaraba* particularly controversial is that it is rooted in the lived reality of Muslim lives. It is not an abstract theological point that has no bearing on everyday lived reality. Hence, numerous works have closely examined the verse, looking at its context and postulating alternative reformist approaches.²

¹ The verse in its entirety reads: “Men are the maintainers over women (*al-rijālu qawwamūna ‘alā al-nisā’*), with what God has favoured some over others (*bimā faḍḍallāhū ba‘ḍahum ‘alā ba‘ḍ*) and with what they spend out of their wealth (*wa bimā anfaqu min amwālihim*). Righteous women are obedient (*qānitāt*) and guard what God would have them guard. If you fear high-handedness (*nushūzahunna*) from your wives, remind them [of the teachings of God], then ignore them when you go to bed (*wahjurūhunna fī al-maḍājīf*), then hit them (*waḍribūhunna*). If they obey you, you have no right to act against them: God is most high and great.” Translations of the Qur’ān are taken from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an* (Oxford: OUP, 2008) Unless otherwise stated.

² The most comprehensive treatment and overview of such approaches can be found in, Ayesha S Chaudhry, *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

However, in being rooted in a lived reality, such reformist articulations must crucially gain acceptance amongst adherents to achieve their aims.

This chapter has a twofold aim. Firstly, it examines the receptiveness of three approaches to *ḍaraba* amongst a group of Muslim participants. The three broad approaches adopted are what I term as traditional, reformist and traditional reformist. Traditional refers to classical positions articulated in Sunnī exegetical works that are generally seen as authoritative. Reformist refers to re-interpretations of *ḍaraba*, disregarding the physicality of the word and adopting alternative definitions. Key to this approach are methodological articulations around the nature of classical exegesis and historical contextualisation. Finally, traditional reformist revolves around the position of Muhammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr (d. 1973), who, although he would be considered as a modern representative of traditionalism, articulated a reformist position on *ḍaraba* in his famed commentary of the Qurʾān, *Tafsīr al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*.

The second aim of the chapter revolves around the participants of this study. Our participants consist of a group of final year undergraduate students at the Markfield Institute of Higher Education (MIHE) undertaking a module on “Islam Gender and Sexuality”.³ However, our participants can also be considered traditional scholars in their own right, having graduated from a traditional Islamic seminary. These students prior to higher education undertook a traditional curriculum at various Darul ʿUlūm’s in the UK (Sidat, 2019:653). These Darul ʿUlūms trace their origins to the seminary in Deoband in North India, which was founded in 1867 as a response to the “structural secularisation” of society in the context of the waning of Mughal power and the ascendancy of British colonialism. Their aim was to revive Islam through education and training. Consequently, the Darul ʿUlūms in the U.K were established in the 1960s and 1970s following large numbers of South Asian Muslim migration. In many ways, we can see these Darul ʿUlūm’s as the primary representation of the Madrasa system (Moosa, 2015).

³ MIHE was established in 2000 as a Higher Education Institution working with partner universities to grant students recognised Higher Education qualifications, for a history of MIHE see, Ataullah Suddiqui, ‘Markfield Institute of Higher Education’. *Islamic Studies*, 42(3):509-16.

After devoting a session on *ḍaraba* and the various approaches to this concept, a questionnaire was circulated amongst the cohort to gauge their stance on the various approaches. The questions explored the differences between the way in which *ḍaraba* was taught at Darul ‘Ulūms and at MIHE and the students’ reception of the approaches. Hence, our second aim is to understand the different pedagogical approaches of two modes of learning – traditional Islamic seminary studies and higher education.

Our chapter, broadly speaking, consists of two parts. Firstly, there is a theoretical component which discusses the various approaches to *ḍaraba*, summarising the content which was covered in the session. The second part consists of the fieldwork component, which breaks down the perspectives of our participants on the three approaches to *ḍaraba* as well as their general thoughts on their experience at an Islamic seminary and then in the academy.

Theoretical Foundations: Approaches to *Ḍaraba* in 4:34

Traditional Approaches

The traditional approach considers the way in which 4:34 is presented in the works of classical exegesis, which are seen as authoritative in Sunnī Islam. Our examination of these traditional exegetical works follows a historical chronology, looking at the very earliest works of this genre up to the pre-modern period. We define “traditional” exegesis as works which draw upon and work within the tradition, or the past. As Karen Bauer demonstrates, this was precisely the way that medieval exegetes provided legitimacy and authority to their own works. They drew upon their exegetical predecessors (Bauer, 2013:39).⁴ Traditional exegesis, therefore, tends to be insular. The various positions that are explored draw

⁴ Similarly, Bruce Fudge is discussing the approach of exegetes writes, “the exegete will draw from existing opinions in those fields. Much of exegesis therefore takes the form of excerpts of discussions found elsewhere, with the content largely taken from other genres.” Bruce Fudge, 2006, ‘Qur’ānic Exegesis in Medieval Islam and Modern Orientalism’, *Die Welt Des Islams*, 46(2):117

upon the authority of previous exegetes or at least work with the same methodological assumptions. Hence, it is uncommon to have dramatic shifts in interpretation. We can observe this with dominant interpretations of *ḍaraba* in 4:34. Although there is nuance amongst the various traditional exegetes, the physicality of *ḍaraba* is retained. This is unlike reformist approaches, which adopt unprecedented positions of completely discarding the physicality of the word, as we will come to see.

This examination of traditional approaches to *ḍaraba* begins with the figure of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767), where he begins his commentary by recording the occasion of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) of the verse. Here we find that a woman by the name of Habiba bint Zayd came to complain to the Prophet with her father, about her husband, Sa'd ibn al-Rabi' "who had struck her. Initially the Prophet judged that she was entitled to retaliation (*qisās*), and hence she was permitted to strike him back. However, 4:34 was revealed and the Prophet retracted his initial position." Muqatil holds, therefore, that if a wife is disobedient (*nushuz*), then a three-stage process should be adopted. Firstly, she should be warned, then refrained from engaging in intercourse and finally, if the previous two steps do not work, a husband may strike his wife in a way that does not cause agony or disfigurement (*ghayr mubarrih*). Muqātil holds that men have the general right to discipline and have authority over their wives, and a wife is not permitted to seek retaliation if a husband does so, unless there is serious injury (Muqātil, 1969:370–371).

Muhammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) also cites the same historical context by providing the same occasion of revelation but with multiple chains of transmissions. Al-Ṭabarī understands "disobedience" as wives 'rising up from their husbands beds in disobedience' and contradicting husbands in matters they should not be contradicting. He also adopts the three-fold process, by citing the views of previous authorities, a husband should first counsel his wife. If this fails, he should not engage in any sexual relations, and if this fails, then he should strike his wife. Like Muqātil, al-Ṭabarī states that beating should be in a way that is light (*daraba ghayr mubarrih*) and does not leave any marks on the body (*ghayr mu'ththir*). Because al-Ṭabarī recounts the views of previous authorities, he also recounts the

view of Ibn ‘Abbas that this light beating should be performed with a twig (*miswāk*). Al-Ṭabarī is careful to state that should the wife return into obedience then the husband should not cause her any more harm (Al-Ṭabarī, 1997:60–64).

Al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273) draws upon the notion that both men and women have rights over the other, referencing the Prophet’s farewell sermon, which also includes the notion of *ḍaraba*. He uses the Prophet’s final speech as providing contextualisation for 4:34. Here, the Prophet is reported to have said that:

“I enjoin good treatment of women, for they are prisoners with you, and you have no right to treat them otherwise, unless they commit clear indecency (fāḥisha mubayyina). If they do that, then forsake them in their beds and hit them, but without causing injury or leaving a mark.”⁵

Al-Qurṭubī highlights that this cannot refer to adultery because this would entail the *ḥadd* punishment. Rather the Prophet’s farewell speech emphasises the relationship between a husband and wife. The wife should not anger her husband and defer judgement to him in matters such as who can visit the house, while the husband has the duty of feeding and clothing her (Al-Qurṭubī, 2001: 161).

Finally, Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373) also adopts these approaches towards *ḍaraba*. He sees the marriage bond as completely hierarchical, where the man is a woman’s head and judge. Correspondingly, then, he can discipline her if she strays. This hierarchical nature is bolstered through the use of Prophetic narrations. One narration he cites is where the Prophet warns against a nation that is led by women. In another, the Prophet states that if he were to command anyone to prostrate to another human being it would be the wife to the husband. Ibn Kathir also adopts the three-fold step in which a *nushūz* wife can be brought back into obedience. However, he is also careful to state that the last step of *ḍaraba* is a gentle strike and when a wife returns to obedience, no further action may be committed against her (Ibn Kathir, 1990: 465).

⁵ Sunan Ibn Majah no. 1851.

Putting traditional exegetical trends together, it is apparent that traditional exegetes placed limitations on beating by diminishing it either through procedure or by stating that the beating should be not leave marks or cause agony. When looking at the spectrum of whether to read *ḍaraba* as being more severe (in the sense of battery) or lenient (in the sense of disciplining, which can be paralleled with disciplining children), exegetes gravitated towards the latter. This, in itself, is a conscious choice and emphasises the traditional trajectory on this issue. Exegetes could have easily read the notion of *ḍaraba* in a harsher manner, without these conditions or mitigations, but they unanimously did not. Considering this, it is perhaps justified, as Asma Asfaruddin also argues, that pre-modern exegetes did not actively advocate domestic violence:

It is clear that the verb elicited similar concerns on the part of the classical male jurist who under no circumstance condoned violent retribution against a wilful and recalcitrant wife – a light tapping that caused no physical injury was the maximum discipline that was considered permissible by them as a last resort after other non-corporal means of chastisement had been exhausted. This practice of this husband's 'duty' did not then amount to wife battery as the concept is understood today in reference to physical and injurious brutality perpetrated against the wife by an abusive husband (Asfaruddin, 2015:104).

However, despite this, it is clear that traditional exegetes unanimously adhered to the physicality of *ḍaraba*. At most, the closest we can find to negating its physicality, is to pronounce the act of striking as something that is detested (*makrūh*) as opposed to it being permitted (*mubāh*). We can see this from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī for example, who, in turn, bases this on the position of al-Shāfiʿī (Marin, 2003; Ali, 2008). Another example, comes from Abū Bakr ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1148) who, in turn, bases his position on ʿAṭāʾ (d. 115/733), who held that “the command [for a husband] to hit his wife is merely a command of permission (*ibāḥa*)” and although it is permissible it is preferable to be angry with her, which ibn al-ʿArabī understands as the first two steps of admonishing and “separating beds.” (Ibn al-ʿArabī, 2002:499).

Reformist Approaches

The next trend critically re-examines the notion of *ḍaraba* in 4:34 and can be understood as falling under the reformist camp. What unites such an approach, is their departure from the physicality of *ḍaraba*. As we saw, traditional scholars, despite their differences and strategies in mitigating the physicality of *ḍaraba*, still adhered to the physicality of the word. The reformist camp, on the other hand, completely discards this. Many of the thinkers falling under this category are often ascribed under the label of “Islamic feminism”. However, it would be inaccurate to solely ascribe this label to those who adopt this trajectory. There are some who would, for example, shun the word “feminist”. Despite this, the primary objective of this approach is overwhelmingly guided by the concerns and principles of feminism, where the primary aim is to read the Qur’ān as one of greater equality. Amina Wadud’s introduction to her work sums up much of this discourse:

The objectives sought and the methods used, often come from feminist ideals and rationales. Although they are often concerned with valid issues, the absence of a comprehensive analysis of the Qur’an sometimes causes them to vindicate the position of women on grounds entirely incongruous with the Qur’anic position on women (Wadud, 1999:2–3).

One of the central theses of the feminist discourse is to bring attention to the way in which the Qur’ān has been read in the past, and in particular, the role that exegetes have played. For them, exegesis has often been the prerogative of men, with women being excluded and merely “subjects” of interpretation. Hence, the question is raised that if women were to engage in exegesis, would this then lead to a reading of greater egalitarianism? In conjunction with this, the feminist discourse also emphasises and brings to light important arguments relating to the time the ancillary sources relating to women in the Qur’ān were produced. They highlight how exegetical and legal works were produced in a historical androcentric milieu with an Arab-Islamic cultural predilection. Hence, there should be an acknowledgement of this “time-boundedness” and “limitedness” in the establishment of principles: “misogyny of this period is, of course, well known.

It was assimilated into Islam by way of commentaries and super-commentaries on the Qur'ān.” (Barlas, 2002:9). Hence, it is essential not to conflate the Qur'ān, with its interpretation. The former being the verbatim divine discourse, while the latter a human endeavour, with all its contingencies. Patriarchy, which they argue was widespread in that milieu, was read into the Qur'ān. This, then, seeks to achieve two aims. It opens the possibility for new participants in the interpretive project and at the same time lessens the power of the previous interpretations.

This trajectory is important in that it lays the methodological foundation and groundwork to adopt alternative definitions of *ḍaraba*. This foundation needs to first be accepted in order to forgo the physical definition of *ḍaraba*. As we saw, despite certain nuances, pre-modern exegetes unanimously ascribed and understood *ḍaraba* as something physical. The primary methodological guidance of the reformist camp is to go beyond the dictates of traditional scholarship and religious authority. The reformist approach is not confined to what is adopted in traditional works and there is no issue with breaking from tradition and positing new interpretations. In fact, the traditional corpus is completely bypassed, which opens the possibility of adopting unprecedented definitions of *ḍaraba*.⁶

Two examples of this approach can be seen in two modern translations of the Qur'ān: 'The Sublime Quran' by Bakhtiar (2007) and the "Quran: A Reformist Translation" by Edip Yüksel, Layth Saleh al-Shaiban and Martha Schulte-Nafeh (2007).⁷ With Bakhtiar (2007), this issue is given such utmost importance that she discusses this issue in the introduction of her Qur'ān translation. She emphasises from the very beginning that there is no scope for husbands to hit their wives, rather husbands

⁶ It should be noted that re-readings are not merely subjective reinterpretations. This approach has their own methodologies, such as separating the particulars from the universal in the Qur'ān, reading verses in their historical context, giving primacy to intratextuality, and placing primacy on the notion of God's unity (*tawhīd*). See, Aysha A. Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). However, what underlies all this is that traditional scholarly discourse is completely bypassed.

⁷ For an examination of other potential definitions of *ḍaraba*, that eschews physicality see Hadia Mubarak, *Breaking the Interpretive Monopoly: A Re-Examination of Verse 4:34*, *Hawwa*, 2(3)(2004):261-89.

are “supporters” of their wives. On the contrary, any notion of “wife-beating” would constitute criminal behaviour. She argues that *ḍaraba*, should be read as instructing husbands to “leave” or “go away” from their wives. This, she argues, is directly linked to Prophetic practice, because the Prophet is held to be the “embodied Qur’ān”. Hence, a valid and accurate translation would need to be extracted from the Prophet’s own actions. When we examine the Prophet’s practice regarding disagreements with his wives, we see him removing himself from their company. At no point does the Prophet strike his wives because he understood 4:34 as a commandment for husbands to leave their wives if they could not reconcile marital issues after the first two steps of consultation and separation. Bakhtiar links this reading with 2:231, which forbids men from “injuring” their wives if they petition for divorce: “When you divorce women and they have reached their set time, then either keep or release them in a fair manner. Do not hold on to them with intent to harm them (*wa lā tamsikūhunna ḍirāran li ta’tadū*) and commit aggression...”⁸ If *ḍaraba* is read as “hit” in 4:34, she argues that this leads to a contradiction when compared with 2:231, because husbands would be prohibited from injuring their wives if they wished to divorce them, but would be allowed to hit them if they wanted to retain them in marriage.

The second re-reading of *ḍaraba*, which discards the physicality of the word comes from Yüksel, al-Shaiban and Schulte-Nafeh. In a similar fashion of placing emphasis on intratextuality, they argue that 2:228 establishes the ethic that husbands and wives both have similar rights over each other: “Women have rights similar to those of men equitably (*wa lahunna mithlu alladhī ‘alyhinna bi’l ma’rūf*).”⁹ If husbands had the right to beat their wives, this would compromise this similarity in rights. Hence, the Qur’ān cannot advocate husbands and wives having similar rights while simultaneously solely allowing husbands to strike their wives (Yüksel *et al.*, 2007:20).

⁸ Translations of the Qur’ān are taken from Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an*. Unless otherwise stated.

⁹ These verse uses Mustafa Khattab, *The Clear Quran* (Cairo: Dar al-Salām, 2018) to better reflect the literalism of this context.

Yüksel *et al.*, (2007) argue that *ḍaraba* should rather be read as instructing husbands to “strike out” their wives, meaning “to compel a separation.” This, in turn, is based on a reading that connects 4:34 with 38:44 and the story of Job. 38:44 also uses the root *ḍaraba* in the context of Job where he is commanded to: “take in thy hand a little grass, and strike therewith (*faḍrib bihi*): and break not (thy oath).”¹⁰ The Qur’anic context of 38:44 is extremely vague. However, traditional exegetes did provide additional details. The context which they adopted is as follows: Job’s wife upset him while she was caring for him, and so in anger, he made an oath that he would beat her a hundred times. However, when he was healed, he was faced with the dilemma of actually fulfilling his oath that he had uttered in anger. God had mercy on him, and instead of hitting his wife a hundred times, offered him the option of gathering a hundred twigs and hitting his wife once. This would fulfil his oath, yet at the same time, leave his wife unharmed. This entire context is absent from in the Qur’ān. What is merely mentioned is that Job is commanded to “strike” something or someone (Chaudhary, 2014:191).

Yüksel *et al.*, (2007) dismiss the exegetical details of traditional exegetes. Rather they argue that *faḍrib* in this context means “to travel”. In the context of the verse, they argue that it makes more sense for God to instruct Job “to travel” after he had been healed than “to hit” something or someone. Hence, extending this to 4:34, when *ḍaraba* is used, this actually commands husbands to “strike out” their wives, meaning that they should “compel a separation”. This is akin to Job “travelling” or “striking out” – “‘striking out’ the disloyal wives, – that is, separating from them – is consistent, and it is the best solution”. (Yüksel *et al.*, 2007:20).

However, both Bakhtiar and Yüksel *et al.*’s alternative adoptions of *ḍaraba* is not without certain problems. Notably, there are grammatical concerns. For example, with Bakhtiar, the adoption of “to leave” or “to go away” requires an additional qualifier, ‘an. However, the original verse does not contain such a qualifier. Similarly, Chaudhury notes Yüksel *et al.*’s adoption

¹⁰ This verse adopt the translation of Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’an: English Translation, Commentary and Notes with Full Arabic Text*, 10th ed. (India: Kitab Bhavan, 2001)

of “striking [someone] out” in English is still problematic and potentially violent. She argues that it may have been more useful for them simply to translate *ḍaraba* as “compelling a separation.” However, as she highlights, they are not able to do so “without intermediary hermeneutical steps” because of the constraints of the Arabic wording of verse (Chaudhary, 2014: 191).

Traditionalist Reform: The Case of Muhammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ‘Ashūr

Muhammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ‘Ashūr represents an interesting case study of a traditional reformist position in that he is firmly entrenched as traditionalist scholar, yet at the same time, adopts a reformist-based position when reading *ḍaraba* in 4:34.¹¹ Hadia Mubarak notes that Ibn ‘Ashūr’s approach does not represent a radical break from tradition, as we can see with the reformist position but rather firmly “represents the classical Sunnī practice of renewal based on pre-existing scholarly norms” (Mubarak, 2018). Ibn ‘Ashūr utilises traditional established methodologies to reach what can only be described as a new position to 4:34, something unarticulated by previous traditional scholars.

Ibn ‘Ashūr’s position is grounded in Arabic philology, and he re-examines the *address* of *ḍaraba*. For Ibn ‘Ashūr the commandment of *ḍaraba* is addressed not to husbands but to legal authorities. Guiding this position is the notion that within a single verse, different parties can be addressed. Hence, regarding 4:34, the various commandments are addressed both to the husband and to the legal authorities (Ibn ‘Ashūr, 1984:43). Looking at 4:34 in its totality, therefore, when the verse states, “those who you fear highhandedness (*nushūz*)” this is, in fact, an address to the legal authorities who would determine whether *nushūz* has taken place or not. This is because, should there be any instance of *nushūz* between couples, this would be taken in front of a judge to adjudicate and determine. This, he argues, is not the prerogative

¹¹ Ibn ‘Ashūr was born in Tunis in 1879, his training occurred at the prestigious Zaytūna, where he would go on to eventually teach. Ibn ‘Ashūr would rise through scholarly ranks to eventually become chief judge in 1927. In 1932 he was conferred the title of Shaykh al-Islam, solidifying him as the highest scholarly authority in the country.

of the husband. Concomitantly, the steps that are placed after determining *nushūz* is also addressed to the court, with the exception of the second prescription of “separating beds” (*wahjurūhunna fī al-maḍājīʿ*).

To prove his position, where the addresses of a command can shift within the same verse, Ibn ʿĀshūr cites precedent from previous exegetes. The first example comes from al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of 2:229 which reads:

Divorce can happen twice, and [each time] wives either be kept on in an acceptable manner or released in a good way. It is not lawful for you (husband) to take back anything that you have given [your wives], except where both fear that they cannot maintain [the marriage] within the bounds set by God: if you [arbiters] suspect that the couple may not be able to do this, then there will be no blame on either of them if the woman opts to give something for her release.

This verse refers to the *khulʿ*, where a wife is able to seek divorce from her husband provided that she returns the bridal gift given to her. Here in the same verse, both the husband and the legal authorities are addressed with a subtle shift of address. The first address is to the husband which tells the husband not to take back any of the gifts given to the wife. However, the second address is aimed at the legal authorities who are told that if they fear that the couple are not able to maintain the marriage, they may facilitate a wife to seek divorce provided that she gives back the bridal gift (Ibn ʿĀshūr, 1984:43).

The second precedent that Ibn ʿĀshūr cites, comes from 61:11-13, where three prescriptions are given. However, the addressee also shifts:

Have faith (tuʾminū) in God and His Messenger and struggle (tujāhidū) for His cause with your possessions and your persons—that is better for you, if only you knew— and He will forgive your sins, admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams, into pleasant dwellings in the Gardens of Eternity. That is the supreme triumph. And He will give you something else that will really please you: His help and an imminent

breakthrough. [Prophet], give the faithful the good news (bashir al-mu'minīn).

Of the three prescriptions in the verses, the first two are addressed to a group of people and, hence, phrased with the second-person plural – “Have faith (*tu'minū*)... and struggle (*tujāhidū*).” However, within this same context, the last prescription is addressed in the second-person singular, and, hence, the address is shifted from a group of people to a single individual, in this case the Prophet. With these two examples of addressees shifting within the same context, Ibn ʿĀshūr posits that the address of finding *nushūz* are the legal authorities and not the husband. Concomitantly, advising also comes under the authority of the law. The Qurʾān then shifts to address the husband to “separate beds” as a second step, before once again addressing the legal authorities with the last commandment of *ḍaraba*.

Alongside this, Ibn ʿĀshūr places the notion of beating, firmly from the realm of permissibility (*ibāha*), to reprehensive (*karāha*). He does this by drawing upon past authorities, namely the position of ʿAṭāʾ who stated: “a husband does not strike his wife but rather gets angry with her.” This is also coupled with narrations of the Prophet, which also give the same impression, such as a narration which states, “the best of you are those that do not strike your wives”.¹² Hence, by putting these rationales together, Ibn ʿĀshūr writes:

Hitting is a dangerous matter ... a limit must be applied in this [matter], which jurisprudence clarifies, because if the husbands are allowed to administer this, and while they are venting their anger, then it is expected that they will transgress the limits. For it is rare that one punishes commensurate to the sin. Further, the basis of jurisprudential principles does not permit for one to adjudicate for himself, unless there is a necessity (Ibn ʿĀshūr 1984: 43).¹³

¹² “This is from ʿAṭāʾ’s understanding of jurisprudence and law; through his reasoning, he recognised that hitting here is a matter of permissibility, yet he took the position that it is reprehensible through a different path, such as the Prophet’s statement, “The best of you shall not hit,” Ibn ʿĀshūr (1984) 5:43.

¹³ Translation taken from Mubarak (2018).

Hence, it can be seen how Ibn ‘Āshūr moves the issue of *ḍaraba* from the remit of the husband to the legal authorities. He does not deny the physicality of the word but rather mitigates it by taking it out of the hands of the husband. However, as Hadia Mubarak argues, this does not mean that Ibn ‘Āshūr merely substitutes spousal violence for state violence. Rather, Ibn ‘Āshūr’s entire position centres upon restricting the husband from enacting abuse in the first place as opposed to enacting any violence. Removing this from the husband and placing this on the legal authorities is the mechanism that he uses to do so. Furthermore, Ibn ‘Āshūr goes further to say that the husband could, in turn, be corporally punished by the authorities were he to exceed the disciplinary limits (Mubarak, 2018: 14).

Ibn ‘Āshūr also gives contextualisation as to why men may have been given the authority to discipline their wives physically, especially when taking into consideration certain traditions that may also give this impression in conjunction with 4:34. This, he argues, was an accommodation of the type of people who were around during the Qur’ān’s revelation. For such tribal and Bedouin people, the act of hitting one’s wife was not seen as a transgression, even amongst the women themselves. Hence, he makes the distinction between the Qur’ān acknowledgement of an existing patriarchal order, without establishing it as a normative principle. The legal norm for Ibn ‘Āshūr is, therefore, not to strike one’s wife (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984).

Reception to Approaches to *ḍaraba* in 4:34

From the outset of the questionnaire, our participants were asked how they perceived the notion of *ḍaraba* in 4:34 and, crucially, if they found it to be controversial in the first place (Figure 1):

Overall, this was an issue that was seen as controversial, because only one participant selected 1, meaning that they did not find this issue controversial at all. However, the vast majority did. The most popular option chosen was 4 out of a 5-point scale – out of the 16 responses, six participants chose this. Two students found this issue the most controversial by selecting 5. Five chose the middle option of 3, while two selected 2, still finding the issue somewhat controversial.

Chapter 6

On a scale of 1 to 5, how controversial do you find the notion of *daraba* in 4:34 (1 uncontroversial and 5 most controversial)?

16 responses

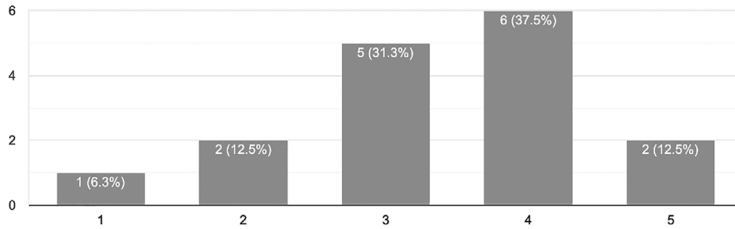


Figure 1: The Controversial Nature of *daraba* in 4:34

The first two open-ended questions gauged how the notion of *daraba* in 4:34 was covered in previous studies at the students' seminars.¹⁴ Of the 16 responses, only one respondent stated that this was not covered previously in their studies. Hence, we can extrapolate from this that in these seminars, this was an important enough issue that warranted discussion. Despite this, most of the responses stated that the issue was not discussed in as much detail as it was at MIHE. Five of the participants expressed that their previous studies dealt with the issue at a surface level, without too much analysis or elaboration:

"We previously did study the verse, but we just glanced over it and didn't pay much attention to understanding the verse at a deeper level".

"Yes, we did go over it but just briefly. We discussed the different opinions of scholars and their views on it. The topic wasn't open to much debate. It was rather the teacher just explaining the views."

"From what I can remember, the verse came up in a brief tafsir lesson and I understood it to be regarding the wife not permitting intimate relations with her husband and leaving him angry overnight which related back to the hadith of angels cursing her as well."

¹⁴ "Have you covered Q. 4:34 and the *daraba* issue previously in your studies? How was this issue explained?"

What was apparent from the participants' responses was that the most liberal traditional position on this issue was articulated and adopted in their respective seminaries. Overwhelmingly, the seminaries adopted the symbolic "tap" with a *miswāk* that is attributed to Ibn 'Abbās. This emphasises how Islamic seminaries are, in many ways, a continuation of the discourse which we saw in traditional exegesis of mitigating the potential severity of the verse. This, as is the case for traditional exegetes, is also a methodological choice, which does not read *ḍaraba* in 4:34 as a means of advocating for domestic violence, but rather reads it in a way that avoids or mitigates it.

Interestingly, two participants mentioned positions that their seminaries entertained which were not adopted by traditional exegetes. These participants noted that the verse could be seen as "metaphorical" and that "there was no wife-beating at all". One mentioned that the story of Job was used to understand *ḍaraba*. This is novel because the story of Job is a modern articulation that was not adopted previously by traditional exegetes. This shows Islamic seminaries as active participants in constructing and shaping discourse that is not dependent on traditional exegesis or previous authority. This also emphasises a grassroots development in the construction of Islamic thought and the construction of Qur'ānic meaning.

"Yes, I have, and there are multiple interpretations from scholars in regard to 'wife beating' one of them being, daraba means tapping. Or that it should be understood metaphorically."

"This issue was explained through differing interpretations of the Qur'an. Some interpretations show that there is no wife-beating at all, however some say the hitting can only be done with the tip of a miswak."

"Yes, it was explained from the point of view that if a woman was being disobedient (this was explained further in terms of what is disobedience to the husband) then a light hit described as the tap of a miswak is permissible leaving no marks."

"We didn't cover wife beating in detail, but we learnt that the husband is allowed to discipline the wife but not too an

extent where she is injured, and we learnt this through the story of Ayyub.”

The next question asked if the participants found it easy to ask questions and probe the topic further at their respective seminars.¹⁵ Regarding this, our participants had a mixed response. Approximately half expressed that they felt that they could not question further, while the other half felt that they could. However, the reason for being unable to do so was not because of any restriction from the seminars themselves but primarily because of the method of instruction. The participants who expressed that they were unable to ask further questions explained that this was because of time constraints, or because of the pedagogy of the way in which the class was conducted. One participant, for example, stated that the pedagogy merely consisted of the teacher simply explaining what the verse meant before moving on to the next verse. The pedagogy did not allow for questions. Hence, lack of further engagement was not because of censorship, but rather because of the style of pedagogy and instruction. A second way in which participants felt that they could not explore the issue further was because of an internal dilemma. Participants felt that by asking critical questions, they were questioning their own faith and, hence, self-restricted themselves from probing further.

“As it was taught very briefly, I did not have opportunities to ask questions at the time and did not understand to the full capacity as I could have if I was given more time in my previous studies”.

“If we are talking about in Darul Uloom then yes because again what we went over was very limited and the floor was not open to discussion or debate rather it was just an explanation and us having to take note off it”.

“We briefly went over it, we did not go into much detail, questions were allowed, but it was still restricted”.

¹⁵ “Did you find it difficult to explore or to ask questions on this issue? Please elaborate.”

“Yes, because while it’s a controversial topic I find interesting, it’s hard to dig deep into it without feeling like I’m questioning my own faith.”

Following on from questions on the way in which *daraba* was taught at Islamic seminaries, the next questions focused on the way in which the session was taught at MIHE, and from this, we extrapolated the differing approaches to this issue at the two educational institutions. From the responses, we see two primary trends. Firstly, what was most echoed amongst participants was that the MIHE session exposed students to a wider array of viewpoints and perspectives. This was seen positively by the cohort, because many stated that it allowed them to have a deeper understanding of the topic. It was not only specific positions that the participants were exposed to but also approaches and methodologies that they would not have otherwise considered, namely feminist and academic approaches. Some participants voiced and were appreciative of the fact that the issue was tackled in a more critical manner; an approach that was not adopted in their previous studies. The second trend that was garnered from the participants’ responses was that the session in MIHE was far more detailed and comprehensive than what was covered in the Islamic seminaries. An important corollary to this is that this, then, allowed students to ask questions and critically engage with the topic.

From this, we see that one of the greatest differences between the two modes of instruction is the adopted pedagogy. The academy favours and facilitates student-led discussions which allows them to express their opinions. The seminaries, on the other hand, cover a wide array of textual material, which does not leave time to discuss the issue in greater depth. The aim is not to cover a few verses, but the Qur’ān in its entirety. The pedagogy at seminaries is also teacher-focused, which leaves little room for students to contribute to knowledge construction. The academy, on the other hand, specifically allocates seminars or tutorials for this purpose; hence, bypassing some of the time constraints or issues of self-conflict found in seminaries.

“This session allowed me to have a deeper understanding on this verse and made me more open to analysing controversial

verses with greater rationality and being open to different kinds of discussions.”

“In my previous studies I only learnt what was previously said by fiqh scholars and mufti’s. However, at MIHE I learnt the academic approach and how modern researchers dealt with this verse now.”

“At MIHE we looked at feminist views on 4:34 and at my darul uloom, we didn’t do that.”

“MIHE explored all avenues allowing me to think of it in a more critical manner. We were exposed to more different views showcasing there is a scope for different interpretations.”

“It was taught in much more depth in MIHE and given more time for questions and answers and I learnt it as though it was something new to me. I appreciated the lecture at MIHE as I got to understand it properly since in my previous studies, I was taught it briefly.”

Reception to Traditional Approaches

Generally speaking, our participants found it difficult to dismiss the views of the traditional scholars. Despite this, 3 of the 15 participants, *did* outrightly reject the traditionally held physicality of the verse. However, the majority accepted the position of traditional scholars because of what they expressed was their authority and standing. Some did, however, display considerable hesitation in doing so and in the issue in general. The immense power that was accorded to the tradition was clear in some of the responses. One participant, for example, simply remarked: *“I think it’s fine if that’s what classical scholars and the earlier generations believed,”* acquiescing complete authority to previous traditional scholars. Another student acknowledged this fact but also stressed how exegetes themselves were restricted to the physicality of beating because of previous authorities before them:

“I understand that during the classical scholars’ times they tried hard not to stray away from the early scholars, as they are closer to the time of the Prophet and likely are more accurate in interpretation. I also acknowledge that the verse itself does refer to the term “beating”, therefore we cannot say this is not allowed or make it haram. However, the context in which they

were in is very different in its normalisation of certain practices, therefore in today's context it is unlikely to be accepted as a practice, especially in countries that criminalise hitting others."

However, even though there was a general acceptance, because of the power that was invested in traditional authorities, there was an overwhelming gravitation towards lessening the severity of *ḍaraba* and an attraction to more lenient traditional positions. This was performed in multiple ways. The three-fold process was emphasised, such that the striking should only take place after the other procedures have taken place. One student emphasised the context of the verse, stressing that even though the verse did allude to beating, it was unlikely to occur because of the strictures in place of its actual enactment: *"this is only allowed in a very specific circumstances, it is unlikely that this issue will become common"*.

A popular statement that was used in understanding traditional exegetes was that striking was only a "last resort", emphasising that there was a longer procedural list that needed to be followed first. This created a distance between the actual enactment of *ḍaraba*, because it could only occur after other options had been exhausted. Another common tendency was for our participants to gravitate towards the minor position attributed to Ibn 'Abbās of striking only being performed with a *miswāk*. Participants, for example, stated:

"The interpretation I would take is that it should be a last resort for a man to result in reprimanding his wife only due to neglecting religious obligations after he has verbally reprimanded her and only use something light as a miswaak."

"I acknowledge that the verse mentioned beating. However, the way it was worded showed that it was the last resort and when it came to beating, many scholars had different opinions on how daraba is, but they unanimously agree that you can't strike her face neither can it be harder than a miswak. So even though the word beating was used, the culture at the time didn't frown upon that and it was done in a way which wasn't frowned upon."

Restraint on the part of the husband was another way of mitigating the physicality of beating alongside stressing the importance of other avenues and approaches:

“I interpret “daraba” as a means of guiding or disciplining one’s wife. Recognizing the man’s role as the qawwam, or head, in a household underscores the significance of maintaining authority. However, it is crucial to exercise this authority with compassion and love, emphasizing emotional support rather than resorting to physical harm.”

Despite this, we do also see a tendency with our participants having a sense of hesitancy towards the positions of traditional scholars. One student acknowledged that they were aware of these positions but were unsure as to why traditional exegetes adopted it as such: *“this is understanding which I read when looking into classical explanations of the verse but was unsure as to why many scholars explained it in that way.”* One participant had issues with the word “beat” itself, stating that it could create unnecessary assumptions. However, they did not elaborate further: *“I feel the word ‘beat’ is a powerful word and could create unnecessary assumptions against the verse.”* Another explicitly stated that any kind of beating was “wrong”, but stressed the previous explanations given of the beating only being a “last resort”: *“Beating is wrong. The striking should be the last resort in the context of the verse.”* Another also saw striking as wrong within a marriage and dwelled upon the potential problems that such a dynamic would create in a marriage. Yet again, the notion of “last resort” was mentioned alongside the rationale that this was strictly not for any “small issues”. The participant also acknowledged some of the difficulties with the notion that men have a “right to beat” because this entails some form of entitlement, which they disagreed with:

“I don’t believe striking should ever be allowed within a marriage, especially only from one end, as it creates a huge power dynamic between a husband and wife. If it is allowed in Islam, according to classic interpretations, it should only be seen as a last resort and never used for small issues. Saying men

have a 'right to beat' doesn't feel right either, as it shouldn't be seen as some form of entitlement."

Overall, then, most participants accepted the articulations of traditional scholars, because of the authority that they ascribed to them. However, at the same time, they gravitated towards the most lenient positions of traditional exegetes and emphasised the procedural processes which further mitigated the enactment of *ḍaraba*. Despite this, a considerable number, three out of the fifteen, were not afraid to oppose the traditionally held physicality of *ḍaraba* and even those who did accept its physicality, expressed their hesitancy and reluctance.

Reception to Reformist Approaches

Our first question explored our participants' receptiveness to the fundamental rationale of the reformist approach, that of the historical contextualisation of the Qur'ān. The statement, "How much emphasis do you place on the historical context of verses?" was followed by a five-point scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree (Figure 2).

Interestingly, our participants were strongly neutral on this issue. Of the 16 participants, no one selected any of the options at either extreme – no one selected strongly agree or strongly disagree. Eight, or exactly half, were neutral, four opted for agree and four for disagree. Hence, in relation to this question, our participants seem to be the most ambivalent. I read this as a sense of hesitancy on behalf of our participants in committing to this approach, because it is not in accord with the way in which exegesis has traditionally been performed.

This ambivalence is also echoed in a follow-up question which asked: "How much do you agree with feminist approaches to the Qur'ān?" (Figure 3). The question included a paragraph clarifying what aspect of feminist approaches is being referred to.¹⁶

¹⁶ The clarifying paragraph on the form reads: "Interpretation has been conducted by men in a patriarchal environment. Hence, interpretation is skewed. Muslim women should be able to interpret the Qur'ān and if they do, this will open up the possibility of new interpretations, which are equally valid."

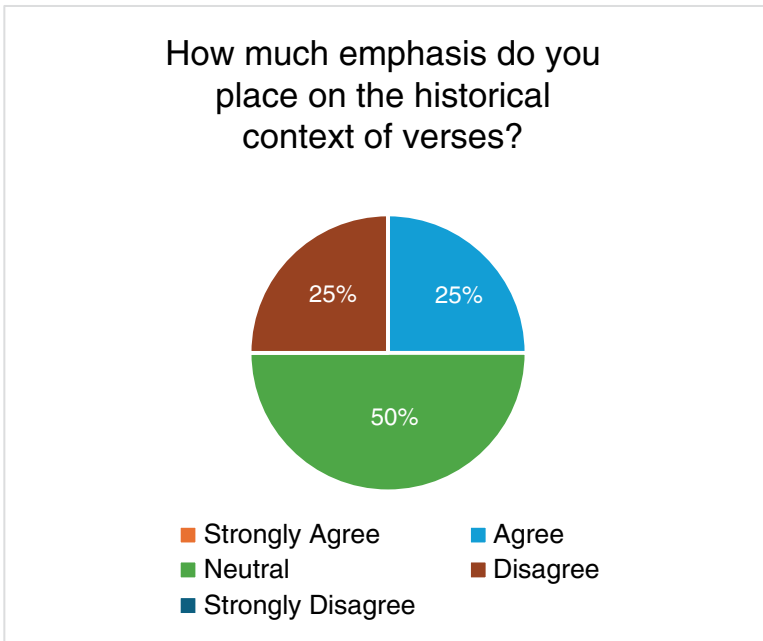


Figure 2: Emphasis on the Historical context of the Qur’ān

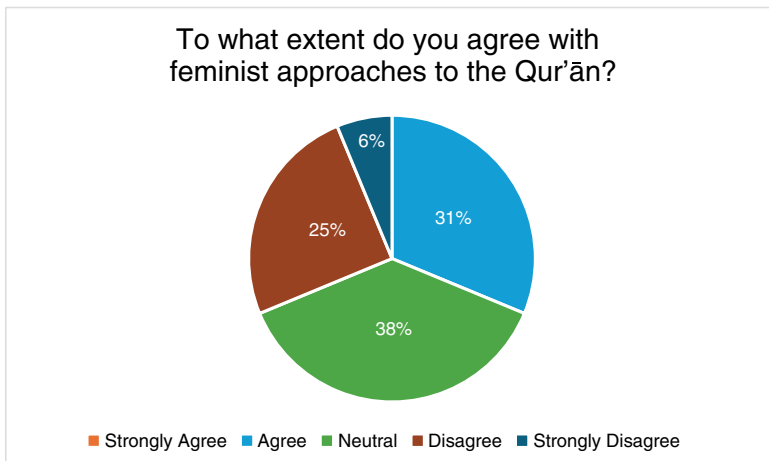


Figure 3: Extent of Agreement with Feminist Approach to the Qur’ān

There was also a sense of ambivalence and hesitancy from our participants to this question. Once again, of the sixteen responses, six were neutral. Four disagreed, one strongly disagreed and five agreed. When adding up the agrees and disagrees (including the strongly disagree), both equally fall under both camps. We read this as a hesitancy to commit to a reformist approach of interpreting the Qur'ān. On the basis of this, when examining exegesis as a lived reality, the reformist approach does not show to have general acceptance. When compared with traditional exegesis, our participants were far more open to adopting these stances, even when they personally disagreed or were uncomfortable with the conclusions. This emphasises that a link with the past and previous authorities remains important amongst the lived communities of Muslims.

These questions were then followed by open-ended questions to allow the participants to further express their thoughts. The first question gauged our participants' views on reformist interpretations of *daraba* which shun the physicality of the word and adopt alternative definitions (such as the approach of Bakhtiar and Yüksel, al-Shaiban and Schulte-Nafteh). Some participants were outright dismissive and rejected reformist approaches. One participant, for example, remarked: *"I don't think it's the correct interpretation."* Another stated: *"I don't agree with using different words, we should stick with what our scholars say."* The main rationale for rejecting reformist approaches was because they contradicted traditional approaches which were seen as more authentic. Traditional exegetes were seen as authoritative figures and, hence, repositories of authenticity and, hence, truth; that reformist approaches did not have prior precedent which was seen as particularly problematic. Some voiced concerns that reformist conclusions contradicted traditional conclusions, which would imply that the traditional authorities had somehow "got it wrong". This was also seen as problematic, because there was an internalisation that traditional scholars had more knowledge or better access to 'truth'.

"I believe that this stance requires further evidence to back it up."

"I think that the traditional understanding of 'daraba' in the context of this verse aligns with established linguistic

and juristic principles it maintains the integrity of Islamic teachings.”

“I can understand it, however I believe classical scholars had more knowledge from the teachers that taught them. In that case, I would not necessarily agree with the feminist perspective.”

“I believe that it is highly unlikely that the classical scholars would all mention it is allowed to hit your wife if it was not without high levels of research and pure intentions.”

Even though none of the participants wholeheartedly accepted reformist approaches, some were open to exploring them further. One participant remarked: *“It could be looked at in that light as well”*. Those who were more open to reformist approaches and could empathise the rationale behind it: *“I understand why they hold those views, but I don’t necessarily agree with everything that’s been mentioned.”* Some participants verbalised the importance of feminist approaches in interpreting *ḍaraba* because they were more in line with modern sensibilities. *“It’s an interesting approach to take, as it implies that beating isn’t a right but actually just what other men have interpreted it to be. Using different roots of the word also helps a person feel less guilty about trying to practice on the Quran in a modern society.”* Participants could understand some of the rationale that was adopted by reformist approaches such that the physicality of *ḍaraba*, contradicting the practice of the Prophet Muhammad, *“I think there is a possibility for the above to be a valid interpretation as I do think translating ‘da ra ba’ as a literal translation goes against the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in being good to your wife.”*

Even if reformist approaches were not entirely accepted, they were not seen in a negative light but as faithful attempts to understand the Qur’ān in the modern context: *“Feminist approaches that reconsider and expand traditional views on issues like wife beating are a good thing. By looking at different meanings of words and considering today’s values, these perspectives aim to make interpretations more inclusive and respectful. It’s a way of blending faith with the modern principles of fairness and equality. Getting both sides involved could potentially lead to more off a fair outcome.”*

Overall, our participants did not wholeheartedly accept reformist approaches primarily on the basis that they contradicted traditional approaches and did not have precedence in previous authority. The logic adopted was that if such interpretations were correct, they would have been cited by previous authorities who are seen as superior repositories of truth. Nonetheless, participants were empathetic to the reasons behind the reformist approach, seeing the value of harmonising 4:34 with modern sensibilities. Some understood and accepted the rationale given for these alternative definitions and, hence, reformist approaches were not seen in a negative light.

Reception to ‘Ibn ‘Āshūr

Because of the break from tradition, we saw how our participants generally disagreed with reformist approaches to *ḍaraba*, although they could empathise and understand why such an approach was needed. The views of Ibn ‘Āshūr, therefore, represent an interesting case study. Ibn ‘Āshūr is a scholar who is connected to the tradition yet at the same time adopts a position that can only be described as reformist. Our first question asked, “How much do you agree with Ibn ‘Āshūr’s position on 4:34?” (Figure 4)

Interestingly enough, most of our participants agreed with Ibn ‘Āshūr’s stance. Of the sixteen responses, seven agreed and one strongly agreed. Six remained neutral and only two disagreed. None of the participants strongly disagreed to Ibn ‘Āshūr’s position. Our participants were more strongly receptive to Ibn ‘Āshūr’s approach to the notion of *ḍaraba* over reformist approaches. There are similarities with Ibn ‘Āshūr and reformist approaches. Both look at the Qur’ān closely. However, while Ibn ‘Āshūr pays close attention to philology, reformist approaches emphasise historical contextualisation and intertextuality, and firmly establish the right of women and others to engage in interpretation. Crucially, however, they both adopt positions that go beyond the dictates of traditional exegesis. While there was a sense of ambivalence and lack of commitment to reformist approaches, we do not see this with Ibn ‘Āshūr. Far more of our participants voiced their disagreements with reformist approaches, with four disagreeing and one strongly disagreeing. However, in contrast,

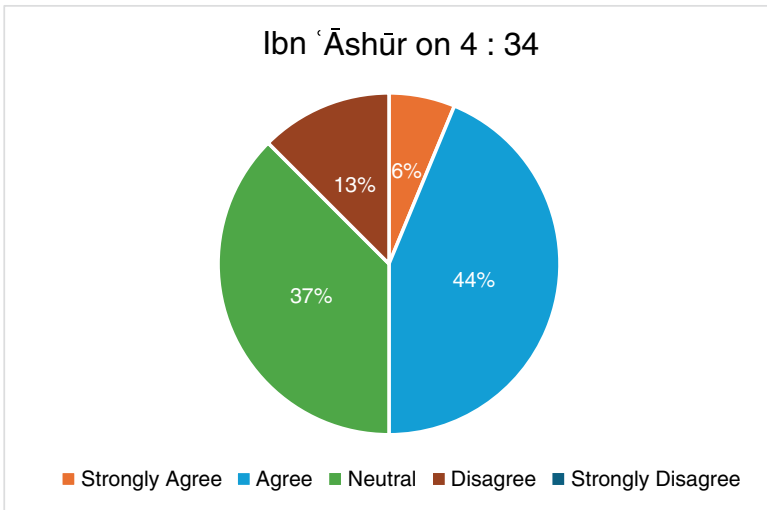


Figure 4: Agreement with Ibn ‘Āshūr’s position.

only two disagreed with Ibn ‘Āshūr’s position. The majority, seven, agreed with Ibn ‘Āshūr, with one strongly agreeing. In contrast, only five agreed with reformist approaches, with no one strongly agreeing with feminist approaches.

We then closely examined our participants’ views on Ibn ‘Āshūr by asking them to elaborate their thoughts on his position. Most of our participants voiced their agreement with his approach and were receptive to the state’s intervention on domestic matters, including the enactment of *ḍaraba*. The transfer of the *ḍaraba* from the hands of the husband to the legal authorities was seen as valid and appropriate.

“I believe the state should have a role in regulating and intervening in cases of domestic violence, and the extreme and bad use of the verse as an open permission to wife beating, ensuring that it aligns with Islamic ethics.”

“Wife beating is only allowed in a very specific context so if men abuse the verse, then they should be held legally accountable.”

Others voiced their agreement with the rationale which Ibn ‘Āshūr posits in historicising the verse such that *ḍaraba* was more accepted in Bedouin or tribal societies and not seen as an offence

even amongst women during the Qur'ān's revelation. However, in contemporary times, such attitudes are no longer prevalent and, hence, men are more likely to transgress: *"In today's time, men wouldn't take disobedience the way they did during the time this verse was revealed so it's important to have a better understanding with a court system."* In a somewhat feminist fashion, one student reversed the onus of the enactment of *ḍaraba* as highlighting an issue with the husband and not the wife: *"If the man is having to resort to violence, then it may be an issue with the man, which is understandable for Ibn Ashur's position."*

The fact that Ibn 'Āshūr's position was more progressive and in line with modern-day values, was seen as a positive. Three participants made this link. However, crucially for these participants, this did not infringe on the legitimacy and validity of Ibn 'Āshūr's approach:

"I believe it's more applicable to this day and age".

"This view reconciles traditional Islamic teachings and modern-day ideals".

"Ibn Ashur's approach recognizes the need for adapting religious teachings with modern values and human rights. The idea of the state intervening to basically prevent and punish domestic violence shows a progressive stance, promoting justice and compassion in society."

However, there was not a unanimous acceptance of Ibn 'Āshūr's approach. Some of our participants did vocalise some hesitancy. This hesitancy primarily revolved around the nature of the Qur'ān as a timeless moral text. Some were hesitant that Ibn 'Āshūr's approach limited the Qur'ān and interpreted his approach as suspending this ruling – even though they did not morally agree with it in the first place: *"morally I don't think its correct for men to beat their wife, but you cannot disregard the verse at the same time and say that it must be suspended."* Another student highlighted some of the shortcomings of Ibn 'Āshūr's position in that it does not really "solve" the issue: *"we don't live in a shariah based society therefore to adopt this view doesn't seem befitting."*

The views of our participants to Ibn 'Āshūr's approach to *ḍaraba* give a fascinating insight into the receptiveness

of reformist interpretation amongst lived communities. Ibn ‘Āshūr’s position is undoubtedly reformist. No exegete before him adopted such a position. Yet, this was not seen as an issue and most of our participants accepted Ibn ‘Āshūr’s approach over other approaches. We also do not see the same level of hesitancy in agreeing with Ibn ‘Āshūr’s position when compared with the reformist position. This emphasises an important point: reformist approaches are not necessarily problematic. What is more important is how such a position is articulated and the person articulating it. A position, no matter how reformist and without precedence, still has a chance of gaining approval, should the person articulating the reformist position be linked to the past and tradition.

Conclusion

This article has firstly sought to understand the reception of *ḍaraba* amongst Muslims as a lived reality. Secondly, this article has used the notion of *ḍaraba* as a case study to understand the reception of different pedagogical approaches in the Madrasa and the academy. Of the three approaches examined, traditional, reformist and traditional reformist, it is apparent that it is difficult to dismiss the authority of traditional approaches. This is because traditional exegetes are held to be repositories of authenticity and, hence, truth. This is in spite of any personal misgivings about such interpretations. Regarding reformist approaches which disregard the authority of traditional exegesis, we find a general hesitancy in accepting and adopting such conclusions. The reception of Ibn ‘Āshūr’s approach, therefore, represents a fascinating case study of a traditionally grounded scholar, who adopts a reformist position which no previous exegete had adopted. Interestingly, the majority of our participants had no qualms in accepting his approach. Ibn ‘Āshūr’s clearly reformist interpretation was not seen as an issue, emphasising the potentiality of reformist interpretations of the Qur’ān, as long as they are grounded and work with the tradition and past.

Our second objective finds that seminaries almost exclusively adopt traditional approaches to *ḍaraba*. However, much like traditional exegetes, seminaries adopt the most lenient position, such as the minor position attributed to Ibn

‘Abbās of the *miswāk*. Therefore, Islamic seminaries are in many ways a continuation of the traditional discourse of mitigating the potential severity of the verse. Seminaries are also not closed in the sense of stifling questioning. Half our participants did not voice any issue in asking questions on such issues. However, the pedagogical approach, sometimes, does not allow the platform for critical discussion to take place. Seminaries focus more on covering the entire Qur’ān, for example, which leads to time constraints. They are also primarily teacher-focused, in contrast to the academy, which allocates space for students to participate in knowledge construction. These factors restrict students from their own personal critical engagement. Finally, what was most interesting, is that some seminaries also entertain clear reformist positions on the notion of *ḍaraba*, postulating the word to be “metaphorical” or disregard the physicality of the word by teaching there to be “no wife-beating at all” This highlights seminaries as active participants in shaping discourse that is not solely dependent on traditional exegesis or previous authority. This emphasises an intriguing development in the grassroots development of knowledge construction in Islamic thought, which merits further study.

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Chapter 7

Madrasas and Disaster Relief in Pakistan: Why are Madrasas Excluded from the Global Humanitarian Movement?

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Introduction

Madrasas have an enduring presence in Pakistan and anywhere else where Muslims live. The madrassa is not a static institution but one that has continually evolved in response to wider historical transformations, including religious reform, Western ascendancy, nationalism, the rise of the developmental state, and the expansion of mass education (Malik, 2007). Often described by its proponents as one of the largest networks of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), madrasas, at the very least, provide a “basic education safety net; socialization to certain norms of proper behavior and knowledge, and an awareness of an Islamic identity” (Park & Niyozov, 2008:332). A disproportionate amount of writing on madrasas remains stuck within tired frameworks of terrorism and sectarian violence, which speculate how madrasas serve as a pipeline for both (Hanif *et al.*, 2021; Zaman, 1998). Another set of literature unfairly compares madrasas with conventional schools and universities, framing madrasas as outdated and antiquated education providers that do not result in gainful employment (Etzioni, 2006; Schmidt, 2008; Singer, 2001). These sets of literature are used as evidence to make a case for top-down techno-managerial madrasa reforms (Ali, 2009),



which madrasa administrators have largely contested (Bashir & Ul-Haq, 2019; Riaz, 2008). Seen as a whole, this dominant body of literature dismisses the legitimacy of madrasas as worthy cultural and intellectual institutions. Madrasas are seen as archaic arrangements disconnected from national aspirations. They remain illegible to the developmental state.

In response, a comparably smaller but growing body of literature argues for madrasas as locally embedded grassroots organisations that offer multiple contributions beyond those of religious education and moral development (Aijazi & Angeles, 2014; Angeles & Aijazi, 2019; Bano, 2011, 2012; Bano & Nair, 2007). Arguing for the social relevance of madrasas, these perspectives are based on the premise that if it can be empirically demonstrated that madrasas do perform a wide range of extra-religious functions, attitudes towards them may shift. Building but also departing from these ideas, I explore the role of madrasas following the 2005 Kashmir and Northern Areas earthquake. In the earthquake's wake, madrasas were perceived to step outside their traditionally assumed functions of Islamic education to provide humanitarian relief to those affected. Yet, despite opening up this way, they were largely met with pushback and dismissal from the international humanitarian community, which did not recognise them as legitimate partners. International media and think tanks set a familiar tone: madrasas were capitalising on the disaster to influence local communities and recruit vulnerable children into terror networks and, hence, cannot and should not be engaged as legitimate partners in relief provision (Clark, 2006; Gulf News, 2006). Local media and elite think tanks within Pakistan replicated this narrative. This was largely in line with then-in-power Pervaiz Musharraf's (Army General and President of Pakistan from 2001 to 2008) stance of "enlightened moderation" (Amin & Lodhi, 2015; Musharraf, 2004). Alongside showcasing the many ways in which madrasas contribute to the social fabric, I contend that it is crucial to interrogate *why* the global humanitarian community has so readily dismissed madrasas despite their urgent and long-lasting contributions to relief efforts.

Based on intermittent ethnographic research in the earthquake-affected region between 2014 and 2023 and

dedicated research with madrasas between 2009 and 2010, I weave local voices from madrasa staff and students who were engaged in relief work. I attempt to understand the reasons for humanitarian disengagement from madrasas, particularly at a time of increasing calls for localisation within the humanitarian world; that is, improving the quality, impact, sustainability, and timeliness of aid delivery by working closely with locally embedded grassroots organisations (Apthorpe & Borton, 2019). The dismissal of madrasas by international organisations, I argue, is not merely because of a lack of empirical evidence regarding madrasas' broader societal contributions; rather, it stems from madrasas' refusal of secular humanism and absorption into modes of legibility that fetishise spectacular suffering along with the liberal urge to assist. All the while being encapsulated by the "humanitarian profession" rather than an ethical orientation and religious obligation that all Muslims are entitled to embrace. By showcasing how madrasa workers and students perceive humanitarian action, we also gain insight into how madrasa patrons interpret the world.

Madrasas are Islamic schools dedicated to the study of Islam and moral development. They are also local responders; their networked structures allow them unparalleled access to the most vulnerable. Unlike aid organisations, they have a lasting presence; they rely on local goodwill and alternative funding infrastructure, making them more resilient to international funding withdrawal. Often comprised of mostly a rural workforce, madrasas and their networks are embedded within the places and locations where many humanitarian emergencies strike; they don't need to gain entry into communities as external organisations often do. The rejection of madrasas despite these unique features contrasts with the widespread acceptance of Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist engagement in international development and humanitarian work (e.g., DeTemple, 2006; Ha, 2015; Hefferan, 2007), suggesting that this dismissal is unique to Muslim institutions. At the same time, while there is some growing awareness of how Muslim organisations such as Islamic charities and mosques fill "gaps" in humanitarian service delivery (see, e.g., Hasselbarth, 2014; Cheema, 2021; Kotani *et al.*, 2023), madrasas are typically excluded from these conversations.

Madrasas and Colonial Secularity in British India (A Brief History)

While Arab trading routes had already connected the Indian subcontinent to the rest of the world, British colonisation posed a different challenge of modernity, that of colonial secularity. Based on Europe's experiences with the Church, colonial administrators sought to delineate the "secular" from the "religious" and worked to circumvent the functions of each domain. Following this, British rule concentrated on disenfranchising indigenous religious institutions within the Indian subcontinent, including madrasas. State patronage was removed from the madrasas, and any properties that they owned were confiscated (Talbani, 1996:72). The registration of madrasas was made mandatory to enable close monitoring and regulation (Bano, 2007). Colonial administrators set up a parallel educational system to further delegitimise madrasas, which until then served as arms of the ruling class, producing civil servants and state functionaries. Qualifications from this new secular educational system, which relied on the English language, were made mandatory for employment in the colonial administration and other sought-after posts (Talbani, 1996:72-73). Hence, the skills, orientation, and repertoire of madrasa graduates were deemed ineffective for the colonial bureaucracy, systematically delegitimising the madrasas' time-tested ability to produce well-rounded civil servants.

Many Muslim intellectuals of the time, read these disorienting changes as a direct assault on Muslim identity.¹ For the most part, scholars of Islam at the time possessed a far more holistic understanding of Islam or "religion;" there was no intuitive separation from the secular. However, combined with the shock of failure in the face of colonial encroachment, Islamic scholars of the day, despite resistance from some modernist Muslim intellectuals, moved to concentrate on safeguarding and disseminating the wealth of Islamic education (Anzar, 2003:4). Reforms were made particularly through the Deobandi movement,

¹ Ebrahim Moosa (2005:220) notes that the debate on Muslim identity within madrasas tends to only occupy two polar views: "a mild form of cosmopolitanism and uncompromising orthodox authenticity".

which positioned the madrasa at the forefront of resistance against British cultural imperialism (McClure, 2009:337). Subsequently, in sharp contrast to its history, the madrasas withdrew from many social spheres of public life and secluded themselves as institutions devoted primarily to preserving religious sciences. Madrasas chose to reimagine the role of its students “as stewards of public morality rather than professionals in the service of the state, and to reframe the knowledge they purveyed as ‘religious’ knowledge distinct from the ‘useful’ secular knowledge promoted by the British” (Ingram, 2019).² At the same time, madrasa leaders took on some features from British-mandated educational systems. They desired madrasa education to have a “fixed institutional character” (Berkey, 2007:49) with a standard curriculum, frequent examinations and a more scripturalist curriculum that centred on the Qur’an and Hadith (Ibid:49). Stressing uniformity over creativity, religious leaders fashioned a single voice to be transmitted to Muslim youth, a voice that, with time, earned respect for its refutation of foreign influences (McClure, 2009:337). The madrasa was remodelled as an institution for cultural and religious stability against an uncertain and shifting social landscape where traditions and cultural values were being increasingly threatened and challenged.

The success of these reforms lay in their ability to simultaneously incorporate popular coloniser education models and criticise Western immorality (McClure, 2009:338). Educational reform was both “driven by and shaped by competition from those missionary enterprises, in a complicated *pas de deux* intertwining both admiration and hostility to Western culture” (Berkey, 2007:52). As mainstream institutions in British India were forced to adopt English as a medium of instruction, the madrasas became further secluded. Madrasa qualifications were reduced to pieces of paper, valuable only

² This is, of course, not to say that madrasas (particularly Deobandi madrasas) are solely the products of colonial modernity. Madrasas continue to draw from texts, traditions, and discourses that long predate colonialism. Most will even consider themselves to be anti-modern yet appropriating modernist educational frameworks. Rather, madrasas emerged “within and against colonial modernity” (Ingram, 2019:208).

to those who obtained them. The graduates of madrasas, once recognised as qualified and esteemed intellectuals, were systematically sidelined.

Following the withdrawal of the British and the subsequent partitioning of the Indian subcontinent, the ruling elites in the newly formed nation-state of Pakistan maintained a preference for Western-style education, and madrasa education continued to operate on society's fringes (Anzar, 2003). The damage to madrasas was long and lasting. Some small steps were taken, such as the mandatory introduction of Islamic studies within mainstream school curricula (Talbani, 1996). However, these were seen as tokenistic by madrasa leaders who wanted the madrasas to flourish once again and reoccupy a more central and dynamic space in society. This has yet to happen.

The 2005 Kashmir and Northern Areas Earthquake

In October 2005, an earthquake tore down communities in the portion of Kashmir under Pakistan's control and its continuity with Northern Pakistan. Over a hundred thousand were killed, countless more injured, and some 3.5 million rendered homeless. Heavy damage was caused to public infrastructure such as schools and hospitals, and a large number of children lost their caregivers. The earthquake occurred amidst the continuing atmosphere of insufficient service provision, political exclusion, and cross-border conflict between India and Pakistan over the disputed territory of Kashmir (see Aijazi, 2024).

In the absence of a national disaster management apparatus and under the military ruler Pervaiz Musharraf, the Pakistani military took official charge of the initial phases of relief and rescue. American military stationed in Afghanistan were permitted to fly in to assist in relief and rescue along with troops from the UK. With the Pakistani military at the helm of relief and reconstruction, civilian authorities and institutions were sidelined (Özderem, 2006).

Because of the mountainous terrain, large sections of earthquake-affected areas were rendered inaccessible. The military took significantly longer than the official records indicate to enter communities. Reports indicate that it took almost a

month after the earthquake for many villages to receive any aid (BBC, 2005a). Deployed soldiers had no prior training in relief work, and hence, a sharp learning curve was involved, leading to further delays and inefficiencies (BBC 2005b). Many residents reported receiving humiliating treatment from the military during relief provisions, such as being beaten or hosed down with water.

Shortly thereafter, the Pakistani government organised a UN donor conference to seek funding for reconstruction and development. This initiative brought millions of dollars into the country, along with numerous humanitarian organisations. Although the international humanitarian response was initially delayed, it proved to be extensive. Aid organisations significantly transformed the landscape of the affected region, with dozens establishing offices—some remaining for several years, while others departed just a few months later. Despite the significant amounts of money and aid organisations flowing in, communities continue to struggle with the aftermath of the earthquake, with hundreds of schools still unrepaired and many displaced families yet to be resettled. (Ashfaq, 2019; BBC, 2015).

In this context, madrasas also become activated. Madrasa workers and patrons quickly arrived at the scene of destruction, unlike aid organisations, which took considerable time to penetrate communities. Many madrasas, especially those considered academically elite, are situated in Pakistan's urban centres. This sharply contrasts with their members – students, teachers, and administrators alike – who often come from rural Pakistan, including many remote earthquake-affected regions.³ Additionally, the earthquake struck during the month of Ramadan, when most madrasas are closed across the country, and their patrons return home. Members of the madrasas living in quake-affected areas acted quickly to mobilise, utilising their networks throughout the madrasa system. “I was already in my village when the earthquake struck,” Behzad, a madrasa student from Northern Pakistan, said. “Many of my classmates come from nearby villages. As the devastation became more apparent,

³ It is also important to keep in mind that defying global trends, the majority of Pakistan's population remains rural, 62% in 2022 (see <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=PK>).

we knew in our hearts that we needed to mobilize,” he continued. However, journalistic accounts quickly grouped all Muslim volunteers and organisations as “Jihadists” or “Islamists.” (McGirk, 2005; Walsh, 2005a).

The earthquake response in Pakistan, the majority of which was funded by the US, unfolded primarily in the shadows of the “War on Terror”. Terms like “Jihadis” and “Islamists” were used without any consideration of their actual meanings, the broader discourses they reference, and how these labels shape the global perception of Islam and Muslims. US earthquake assistance formed part of a broader global strategy to win over “hearts and minds,” focusing on how goodwill for the Empire can be cultivated through humanitarian aid in distant geopolitical edges and borderlines. Religious organisations, including madrasas, were viewed as direct competitors to American efforts aimed at gaining the support of the local population. The Americans learned a crucial lesson: providing aid swiftly is essential before “militant groups” can sway the community locals.

Interestingly, in 2010, when Pakistan faced yet another humanitarian crisis—this time in the form of catastrophic floods—the Pakistani government raised a familiar alarm: send in aid ASAP before Islamic charities, possibly linked to militants, can provide assistance to flood-affected communities, winning local support (Flintoff, 2010). At a special meeting of the UN General Assembly, Pakistan’s foreign minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, stated: “We cannot allow this catastrophe to become an opportunity for the terrorists” (Ibid).

Islamic Organisations and Disaster Relief

During the initial stages of the relief operation, there was no clear directive for aid organisations on how to engage with Islamic organisations. Many aid agencies, at least in the early days of the relief effort, supported the idea that no groups should be barred from responding to the earthquake to save as many lives as possible (Wilder, 2010:s417). But this was more of an operational and logistical necessity. For example, one staff member of the World Food Programme reported that they had to rely rather

heavily on local Islamic groups who had access to mules needed to transport food to high altitudes when helicopters were unavailable (Ibid). Similarly, many other aid organisations relied on whom they identified as “Islamic militants” for the distribution of tents, shelter supplies, and other necessities (Qureshi, 2006). This relationship was purely opportunistic. Islamic organisations were not invited to UN coordination meetings, and no real efforts were made to work with them long-term once humanitarian organisations achieved a level of operational independence. On the rare occasion that an invitation was extended to an Islamic organisation to attend UN planning meetings, the request was rejected by them on the grounds “we don’t need your help. The food is for the people—why should we report to you?” (Wilder, 2010:s419).

Humanitarian organisations were encouraged to partner with secular NGOs and secular members of civil society, but religious groups and other ideological-led movements were to be avoided. This was an interesting directive given the global humanitarian movement is very much an ideological movement in itself. One cannot deny “Christianity’s constitutive role in the specific construction of secular humanitarianism” (Doha, 2003:4), a point also elaborated by Didier Fassin (2012). At the same time, a report by the NGO Oxfam points out: “The humanitarian project is not just a European tradition. It is rooted in the universal behavior to help other human beings in distress. It has been encapsulated in all faiths, from Dana, one of Hinduism’s and Buddhism’s vital practices, to Islam’s Zakat, and Christian charity. It is no coincidence that local religious organizations are at the forefront of providing relief” (Cairns, 2012:25).

The exclusion of Muslim institutions from relief work in Pakistan is not an isolated trend. McGregor (2010) noted a similar pattern of exclusion after the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia, when international aid organisations chose not to work with Muslim institutions such as mosques in the heavily disrupted Aceh region. For McGregor, this was a missed opportunity; aid organisations could have enhanced their material and psychosocial support if they had acknowledged the authority of religious institutions and engaged with them.

Voices from Madrasas

Madrasa workers have the necessary credentials to address religious needs after a disaster. This includes burying the dead and providing funerals according to Islamic teachings. These provisions go beyond the capabilities of traditional aid workers but are essential components of relief efforts. Following the earthquake in 2003, madrasa volunteers also assisted locals in reconstructing and repairing damaged mosques and distributing Qurans and prayer mats to those who needed them. “Who will repair these mosques?” Jamal, a madrasa volunteer, asked. “The NGOs won’t, it is up to the people and up to us,” he continued. Some international NGOs, responding to local demands, also contributed to the repair of mosques, but this was not a standard or consistent policy.

Most madrasa workers whom I spoke to did not see their volunteer efforts following the earthquake as something beyond (or outside) the ambit of their madrasa education. Javaid, a madrasa student who assisted in clearing rubble in search of survivors remarked, “How is this work [volunteering in disaster relief] so different from what we learn in the madrasa? Helping people during difficult times is part of our training, this is our mission.” Javaid added, “We at the madrasa are ultimately being trained to serve *insaniyat* (humanity). This work is just an extension of that mission.” *Insaniyat* can be loosely translated as humanity, though neither the English word nor the associated concept of universal humanism as employed by humanitarians fully captures its depth (Aijazi, 2020:33). According to Yasmin Saikia (2011), “*insāniyat* is not a learned ethic nor enforced as a normative principle by an external authority, nor a legal responsibility. Instead, it inheres in human encounters” (2011:74). *Insāniyat* exceeds the purview of the nation-state and is simultaneously a state of being, an emotion, and an ethical position (Ibid), which students saw as being at the core of their madrasa training.

Shafiq, a madrasa student and resident of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, was home when the earthquake struck. He noted: “My education in the madrasa has helped him realize my place in this world, and it has been a journey of

self-realization.” “Helping people in their time of need is part of the ethics of being a Muslim,” Shafiq clarified. “I do it for Allah,” he says.

Kaleem, another local volunteer and madrasa student, remarked, “I want to work for the development of Pakistan; that is my true passion. I don’t understand how all these people think of us as the opposite – as people who do not contribute anything to our nation.” Kaleem continued, “After the earthquake, who do you think showed up first? It was us *deeni log* (religious people).” Madrasa volunteers viewed their involvement in disaster relief as a natural extension of their religious service to society.

Junaid, an administrator at a madrasa on the outskirts of Islamabad, explained the two pillars of madrasa education: *taleem* (education) and *tarbiyyat* (enrichment). “*Taleem* refers to the general instruction and knowledge imparted via texts, lectures, and discussions. All types of educational institutes, secular or Islamic, claim to provide *taleem*. That is not enough. At the madrasa, we also focus on *tarbiyyat*. By this, I mean socialization into Islamic manners, morals, and values. All of which point towards respect and service for *insāniyat*.” Others agreed, “Secular schools only train their pupils to secure high-paying jobs and hustle. Where are they now?”

Echoing his peers, Arham, a teacher at a madrasa in Rawalpindi, stated: “We inculcate in our students a passion for social change, for defending the poor and to develop an ethic of care. Look at these NGO workers; they are here only to earn money. They get paid in dollars; they are not here to serve Pakistan nor to serve the poor. They are careerists.” Many others also cast doubt on the ethics of humanitarianism as a “profession,” where one’s livelihood is so deeply entrenched in the suffering of others, and one is “paid” for tasks that everyone should be doing anyways as an ethical duty and moral imperative. Arham recited a well-known Quranic verse: “And whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved the lives of all mankind.” Arham is signalling an interruption of secular humanism, bringing Allah to the fore. Basit Kareem Iqbal, drawing from his ethnographic work with Islamic charity organisations in Jordan in the aftermath of the Syrian crisis, notes that Islamic charities “bypass the

humanitarian fetish for spectacular suffering, as people are moved to act by a divinely imposed obligation (not simply by compassion for a generic suffering Other). Nor is the scene of such charity determined by the asymmetrical relationship between benefactor and beneficiary, for God is a mediating third who makes the relation between ‘benefactor’ and ‘beneficiary’ reversible (for the ‘beneficiary’ is the one who occasions the practice/possibility of the ‘benefactor’s’ piety in the first place)” (Iqbal, 2023:50).

In her work with Kashmiri freedom fighters in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, Cabeiri deBergh Robinson notes that after the earthquake, the freedom fighters engaged in relief work: “[they] described their involvement in the relief work as a part of their practice of jihād—a practice they called “humanitarian jihād”” (Robinson, 2013:238). Some madrasa volunteers also referred to their work in earthquake relief as a form of “jihād.” In Arabic, jihād means to strive in the way of Allah and is frequently framed as fighting a just war in the name of God. “Seeking knowledge is a form of jihād; helping those in need after the earthquake is also a form of jihād,” Akbar, a madrasa teacher, clarified. Many madrasa students, administrators, and teachers referred to their involvement in relief work as a form of jihād. They tirelessly set up tents for the unhoused, distributed food, water, and medicine, transported the injured to distant clinics, buried the deceased, assisted in repairing mosques, and cleared rubble to search for survivors.

Unhoused Children

Pakistan’s foster care system is inadequate, and the regulation of child adoption is insufficient. The earthquake significantly disrupted extended family networks, which are typically relied upon in times of need. Relief agencies worked tirelessly to locate family networks for orphaned children or to place them in local institutions like SOS villages (UNICEF, 2005). In an effort to prevent exploitation and child trafficking, the Pakistani government implemented a complete ban on child adoption (Walsh, 2005). However, enforcement proved challenging, resulting in reports of missing children and illegal adoptions (Hamilton & Halvorson, 2007). Madrasas, which serve as passive safety networks, played an active role in this situation.

Disrupted communities trusted madrasas to provide temporary or medium-term housing for vulnerable children until they could be reintegrated into their communities. Additionally, madrasas offered a safe and familiar environment for children to continue their education. The principal of a large madrasa that received many unattended children after the earthquake shared that most students chose to stay longer at the madrasa even after it was safe for them to return home to complete their education at the madrasa.

Given the large number of vulnerable, unhoused, and uncared-for children following the earthquake, madrasas spread the word through their communication network that they were open to enrolling these affected children. Because madrasas typically do not require payment for tuition, accommodation, and meals, they became an appealing option for those in need. Some affected children already had siblings, relatives, or friends studying at a specific madrasa, so their family members arranged for them to join the same institution to facilitate integration. Additionally, current madrasa students volunteering at various relief camps suggested their respective madrasas as potential homes for the affected children.

In a similar vein, faith-based organisations and Muslim non-governmental organisations played a significant role in advising desperate families and relatives to consider enrolling vulnerable children in reputable madrasas. In some cases, workers even volunteered to accompany these children to the city themselves. Despite the existence of a complete ban on adoption, many orphaned children found themselves informally adopted by affluent relatives or even unrelated families. Unfortunately, this often resulted in these children being forced to abandon their education and enter the labour force. However, some of these children managed to escape from their adopted homes or were eventually taken back by concerned relatives and enrolled in a madrasa as a better option.

As described earlier, the earthquake struck during the religious month of Ramadan, a time when madrasas are typically closed. Many madrasas opened their campuses and transformed them into temporary shelters for the displaced. These madrasas served as transient shelters until relief agencies relocated affected

individuals to purpose-built relief camps. Additionally, madrasas played a crucial role in mobilising donations from communities and forwarding them to relevant relief organisations. One madrasa administrator recalled how, even several years after the earthquake, his institution continues to receive admission requests from earthquake-disrupted communities. He is unable to accept them all and refers most applicants to other madrasas in the city. During the height of the emergency, his madrasa suggested to the NGOs operating in the region to consider constructing additional facilities in the madrasa so that they could accommodate and accept more students. This request was turned down. One NGO worker, though sympathetic to the suggestion, said that it would be impossible to convince donors in the US and Europe to invest in madrasas, institutions that remain illegible to Western donors.

Noting the widespread destruction of educational institutions throughout Pakistan-administered Kashmir, the International Crisis Group argued that the most important implications of “jihadi and Islamist movements” in the earthquake response are likely to be felt in the education sector. They wrote: “[Kashmir] is one of the country’s most literate regions, and the earthquake destroyed almost all of its education institutions. Integral to jihadi and Islamist relief efforts was the establishment of schools and madrasas for young people in AJK [Pakistan-administered Kashmir]. The Deobandi Wifaq-al-Madaris Al-Arabiya (Pakistan’s largest union of madrasas) plans to build 1,500 mosques and 300 madrasas in AJK and NWFP [adjacent province]. The purely Islamic education that these institutions will provide will inevitably sideline provincial or state curricula. In the medium and long term, if the jihadis and Islamist groups are allowed to continue with their rigid religious curriculum, this will radicalise the young in AJK and will form a convenient recruiting base for the militant activities of these organisations.” (Qureshi, 2006:3)

Conclusion

At the height of the global war on terror following 9/11, Pervaiz Musharraf famously said: “How many mosques ... [are] there in the country to accommodate all these millions of [madrasa]

students as Imams?” The impulse to dismiss madrasas as being unequipped for the modern world is rooted in exclusionary Islamophobic and secularising discourses that fail to make room for Muslim subjectivities that do not so readily conform to the nation-state and its founding principles of liberal humanism. This also mimics the stance of British colonial rule towards religious institutions.

Madrasas must be approached on their own terms. They are as much tethered to the world as any other institution. They may not be excellent accomplices in upholding capitalist modernity (and other expectations of neoliberal education), but that is also not their function (Tahir, 2022). When understood as anti-colonial institutions, they are resilient, locally embedded, and historically coherent. They have survived British colonial rule and Pakistan’s administration, which wavers in its support.

Madrasas in Pakistan are only visible through the prism of post-9/11 security regimes. They have, for the most part, remained invisible to the humanitarian movement. The contemporary humanitarian movement sets itself apart from a religious obligation to assist humanity by asserting the secular value of life. “Rather than merely claiming a secular will to universal benevolence against religious justifications of human suffering, modern humanitarianism reconfigured (secularised) elements of Christianity and was historically institutionalised through imperial and liberal formations” (Iqbal, 2023:35). “Humanitarianism” or “secular humanism” are not neutral labels. Till Mostowlansky writes such labels “have histories, imply political and ideological positioning and are linked to colonialism, Cold War and geopolitics as much as to the language of administration in mainstream international organizations” (2019:2). Nora Derbal argues that “Rather than assuming a universal definition of humanitarianism, we should trace when and under which conditions these diverse activities have come to be represented in the language of humanitarianism” (2019:2).

Whether the humanitarian contributions of madrasas following the 2005 earthquake are made legible through the framework of “humanitarian jihad” or “Muslim humanitarianism,” it is important to note the “forms of moral reasoning and ethical orientations” that this work entails and

whether it is “even appropriate to describe socially and culturally embedded forms of compassion and benevolence” within these frames (Billaud, 2019:1). For most patrons of the madrasa, relief work is an ethical obligation and religious duty that their education prepares them for. In their view, relief work as a contribution to *insaniyat* cannot and should not be monetised into a professional career. It is a privilege to be in the service of others, and the ultimate adjudicator of this work is God.

International aid organisations do not consider madrasas as worthy collaborators because of the madrasa’s default rejection of secular humanism that governs and shapes the sensorium of global humanitarianism. The dismissive attitudes of international aid organisations are rooted within a desire to militantly protect the borders between the “secular” and the “religious,” what each domain can possibly entail, and the futurities they may suggest. In Pakistan, madrasas continue to “walk a fine line between state approval and rejection, undermining the possibility of a synergistic partnership” (Aijazi & Angeles, 2014:501). This inconsistent position can be attributed to the country’s contradictory political imaginary and unevenness towards religious and secular modernities (Aijazi, 2017). At the same time, others have argued that Islam in Pakistan is very much a process of generative experimentation and becoming where a coherence to religious aspiration has not been fully worked out and will likely never be (Khan, 2012). It is within these ambiguities that madrasas must operate.

Religious education in Pakistan is seen as a threat to the nation-state rather than a tool for social development and integration. This is despite conscious efforts made by madrasas to realign their goals. More and more madrasa administrators now use the familiar and expected language of nation-building and national development. This move is two-fold: an adjustment to the state’s belligerent attitude towards religious education as well as a more complex interpretation of Islamic education.

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Chapter 8

Between Spirituality and Scholasticism: The Case of the Barelwis in Britain

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Within Islamic education in the West, there are many factors which impact and shape the educational philosophies, institutions, and approaches to how Muslims can be educated in, and for, the contemporary experience. One such factor is that of ideology and sectarian identity construction. With this in mind, then, this chapter will be dedicated to *Barelwi* educational philosophy and the evolving modern *madrasas* aligned with the *Barelwi* tradition, culminating in a specific case-study of one such educational organisation in contemporary Britain. Namely because, somewhere between *Sunni* normativity and Sufism within South Asian contexts-*Barelwism* exists as a socially and religiously significant tradition - a tradition which warrants further nuancing and complexification in academic research and literature. Not least because, by virtue of the mass immigration of South Asians (predominantly as economic migrants) to Britain in the latter half of the 20th century, Britain is now home to a significant number of *Barelwi* adherents. Moreover, they have gained the interest of academics of Islamic studies, Sufi studies, and British Muslim studies particularly in the 21st century (Geaves, 2015; Hamid, 2016; Bowen, 2014; Gugler, 2015).

In existing literature, the *Barelwi* movement has often been discussed in relation to three major themes. Firstly, its relationship and historic (and continuing) polemic with its

ideological adversary or antagonist, the *Deobandi* school (Gugler, 2015; Geaves, 2014). Secondly, its presence and significance within the ‘traditional Islamic networks’ (Geaves, 2014; Hamid, 2016) in the contemporary West. Thirdly, its ritual practise and association with Sufism and/or “folk Islam” (Basu & Werbner, 1998). However, little has been written about the *Barelwi* tradition and Islamic education and/or its scholarship, in of itself. The *Barelwis* have subsequently become synonymous with, and often defined by, culturally centred ritual practises closely associated with Sufism in the South Asian sub-continent and little more. Although this has caused the establishment of major numbers of mosques in Britain, this has seemingly been at the expense of large-scale and centrally governed educational institutionalisation and/or formalised networks of Islamic education. However, as well as the identity rebranding (as ‘Sufi’) that arguably has given the *Barelwis* a revival in the 21st century in Britain (Hamid, 2016), arguably, the education of the *Barelwi* adherents is perhaps returning to its formative period and, more specifically, that of the intended ideology of its founder, Aḥmad Riḍā Khān (1856–1921). This will be further discussed in sections 2, 3 and 4 of this chapter and will form the basis of the arguments made throughout the chapter, dedicated to *Barelwi* education, its foundations, development, and future in an increasingly globalised and digital world.

The case of Islamic higher education in Britain, particularly the interest in *Dār al-‘Ulūm*’s and traditional seminarian spaces, has mostly gained the attention of academics and historians in relation the *Deobandi* movement of 19th and 20th century India. This is understandable because of the *Deobandi* tradition being deeply rooted in the production of scholars via the *Dars-e-Nizāmī* curriculum within India and, therefore, being mirrored in diasporic communities the world over. Moreover, in the latter part of the 20th century, it is a continuation of this tradition that the *Deobandis* made their primary concern through the establishment of an organised network of *Dār al-‘Ulūms* (although vast and varying in their activities, ethos, and outreach) across Britain. This has, in turn, created the production of a vast number of graduates in the tradition, with only somewhat varying trajectories post-graduation. Some remaining insular and simply returning to the *Dār al-‘Ulūm* system as teachers, other

branching into chaplaincy and other taking to *Tabligh* (group travel to proselytise and evangelise to Muslims and non-Muslims the message of Islam). However, through the formulaic and perhaps rigid institutionalised *Dār al-‘Ulūm* centres with their predominantly unchanging curriculum, the *Deobandis* seem currently slow to the debate and actualisation of a meaningful and contextualised British Islam – seemingly, the call of the day for the British Muslim experience of its community (Murad, 2020).

This chapter, therefore, seeks to answer three significant questions. Firstly, what was the educational philosophy and scholastic methodology of Aḥmad Riḍā Khān and can this be realised in a meaningful way by his fervent followers in the contemporary West? Secondly, what have been the activities of *Barelwi* educational endeavours thus far in Britain since their arrival upon the British religious landscape? Finally, how are *Barelwis* developing their means of education for contemporary Britain and its evolving religio-spiritual needs, demands and the contours of the complex landscape of British Islam and the lived experiences of British Muslims? By answering these questions, this chapter will not merely nuance the literature and understanding of the modern *madrasa* but will also complexify understandings of Islamic education and its purpose, mechanisms and functions and how these might be reframed and re-understood in a contemporary Britain. Moreover, the chapter will nuance perceptions of the *Barelwi* tradition itself and highlight conscious and considered mechanisms of dissemination utilised by its founder that address the need for contextualisation of scholarly contributions for the lived experience of the laity and subsequently, made accessible scholarly outputs for the laity at the time; needs which are arguably even more pertinent for the lived experience of the 21st century Muslim in Britain and beyond.

Aḥmad Riḍā Khān: Development of a Spiritualist Educational Philosophy

To understand the *Barelwi* educational philosophy, one must first understand the personal and scholastic development of Aḥmad Riḍā Khān (1856–1921), as to appreciate his scholarly contribution and preferred methodology. Particularly, because it is this methodology and educational philosophy which continue to characterise and

define *Barelwi* educational institutions in contemporary Britain. This section, therefore, will form the basis of an exploration of some of these contemporary educational organisations, by first exploring the development of Khān's thinking during his lifetime. Because, when beginning any discussion relating to the *Barelwi* tradition, it is, perhaps, most appropriate to discuss the life and perspective of its founder, as to fully understand his educational philosophy and methods which still impact and inspire adherents today. A figure who, as I will argue throughout this section, is a prime example of both Islamic revivalism within socio-spiritual and political unrest and a scholarly figure of the 20th century who is deeply misunderstood in the 21st. Moreover, Khān is a figure who is often wrongly but primarily conflated with sectarian identity construction and intra-religious polemic – a perspective that I would argue to be both reductionist and disadvantageous in relation to his contribution and the broader religious context of the modern period of South Asia. For the subject in hand, namely, the ways in which the *Barelwis* have and continue to navigate education and scholarly endeavour, returning to a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the perspective and example of its namesake – is arguably the most fundamental task for the future of the *Barelwi* tradition.

Although the *Barelwis* are often discussed in terms of Sufi ritual devotion to the Prophet Muhammad and little else, Khān was an example of scholastic dynamism and socio-religious revivalism that was unprecedented and unique in the modern period. His considered scholarly outputs were concentrated on the religious and spiritual health of the laity of South Asia, within a difficult, and often tense, socio-religious and spiritual climate. Although the mechanisms for his scholarly endeavours and their dissemination were unique, arguably less organised, and formulaic than other revivalist movements of the time, his methods (and by extension his educational philosophy) were seemingly most appropriate for the motivations which he had – this will be discussed further below.

During Khān's life and later into the 20th century, the madrasas that were set up under the shared ideological understanding of Khān and his teachings, similarly to the *Deobandi Dār al-'Ulūm* system, continued to teach the

Dars-e-Nizāmī syllabus. They differed in their lack of centralised institutionalisation and so were, therefore, far more individual and unique to the style of the scholar who initiated and set up the individual madrasa (Sanyal, 1999). Moreover, the *Barelwi* scholars who set up madrasas under the ideological banner of Khān, paid significant emphasis to his *fatāwā*, their relationship (or lack therein) with other revivalist movements whom Khān did not accept as *Ahl al-Sunnah* (see Khān's work *Ḥusām al-Ḥaramayn*) and unsurprisingly, their engagement with and emphasis upon Sufi rituals, particularly those which centralised praise and devotion to Muhammad and emphasised his rank and sanctity within ritual and teaching. This educational philosophy aligns with the methodology that has become synonymous with Khān and the *Barelwi* school. That is, that across all aspects of religious practice, whether that be the commonplace ritual practice of the laity (visiting of shrines of *Awliyā'*, celebration of *Mawlid*) or the high-level scholarship and learning arenas of the scholastic members, the ultimate underlying philosophy (whether educational or lay) is centralisation of Muhammad, and the acceptance of spiritual authority and hierarchy, as the most foundational vehicle to spiritual life.

This methodology can perhaps be traced back to the religious and spiritual education of Khān, which began in his family home under the tutelage of his paternal grandfather and father. Prior to this, his ancestors had migrated and settled in Bareilly from Kandahar (via Lahore and Delhi) and had joined military service but remained significant landowners with considerable wealth and social standing in the region. However, this changed when his grandfather, Raza 'Alī Khān, decided it was scholarship and Islamic learning which he would dedicate himself to, in the face of the British colonial onslaught and simultaneously, the Wahhabi threat- as he saw it. Maheshwari and Singh write,

Perhaps, under his father's wings, it was Ahmad Raza's education at home that helped the son escape the assault of mediocrity on his intellect and thought. What the grandfather, Raza Ali, had sown in spiritual and intellectual terms, and what was carefully nurtured and made to flourish by his father, Naqi Ali, came to Ahmad Raza Khān as a powerful legacy (Maheshwari & Singh, 2021:29).

Arguably, it is this early experience which comes to develop and define Khān's educational philosophy. What is particularly interesting, and perhaps impactful for Khān- and the *Barelwi* school- is that he did not initially receive formal tuition in any established *madrasa* or school. Rather, being recognised as showing considerable aptitude and high intellect for his age, his father and grandfather decided to complete his Islamic learning and develop his scholarly ability, within the familial home. Arguably it was Khān's early experience of learning that cultivated his appreciation for innovative methods of learning as a mechanism of dissemination and preservation of *Sunni* Islam, which will be discussed in more detail later in this section. Moreover, Khān's early education is set within the broader context of his family's social standing but at a time of particular social and political unrest and unease in India. With the British rule coming to an end and the decades leading up to the eventual partition of India and creation of the independent state of Pakistan in 1947, Khān's scholarship and revivalism was undoubtedly rooted in his social and political context, his familial context and responsibility and the varying threats which he determined were of most significance on the South Asian socio-spiritual landscape. Namely, the threat of revivalist groups *Ahlul-Hadith* and the *Deobandi* school, who from the perspective of Khān, were de-centralising the person of the Prophet Muhammad and, for Khān, subsequently destroying the very foundations of Islamic spirituality. What this then resulted in, it seems, is scholarship that was less polemically driven than one may perceive from looking at the contemporary *Barelwi* community within Britain, and beyond, but far more a deeply contextualised and meaningful scholastic endeavour from Khān.

Khān was not primarily concerned with political revolution against the British rule or creating unrest between Muslims and the British; rather, he was concerned with the preservation of pristine *Sunni* normativity, as he saw it. That which centred the veneration of the Prophet Muhammad and preserved the hierarchy of spiritual authority- beginning, again with the prophet and then channelling down to scholars and *pirs*. However, this was not simply to uphold culturally laden "folk Islam" as some have perceived it. Rather, it was to preserve the

religious expressions of the laity, within a framework of Sunni normativity, that Khān believed would be relevant to them and maintain their ritual legitimacy in the face of revivalist threat to Sunni normativity. It seems that Khān understood his own context deeply and the community of the region at the time and subsequently, wished to make scholarly contributions that were not simply controversial in nature but that would be meaningful and impactful for the religious and spiritual lived experience of the community of Muslims around him. Khān's scholarship was arguably in service of the lay people of the region, but through, often contentious, but perhaps necessary scholarly polemic. Khān knew, it seems, that for the lay person, the most significant element of their religious lived experience should be connection to the prophet and acceptance of his rank and untouchable authority.

Within Khān's thinking, scholarship, learning, and higher education were not the most important phenomena to uphold and/or institutionalise – as this, then, would remain a reality only for the people of privilege, scholarly acumen etc. – rather, Khān concentrated on connection to the prophet as a feature both inherently necessary and intrinsically accessible to all people – across social strata, age, ability, and geography. Something which he then subsequently championed in his writing and works. Khān, it seems, was more concerned with *fatāwā* writing that directly centralised belief and theological understanding in a way that affected the laity of the region, i.e. preserving the veneration of the Prophet Muhammad as a fundamental ritual necessity and vehicle to spiritual and religious preservation of Sunni normativity, rather than a formalised and unchanging insistence on formal religious education to scholarly level, unlike the *Deobandi* school who, even in contemporary Britain, are defined by their *Dār al-'Ulūm* system of scholastic education from a curriculum that has remained seemingly unchanged since its medieval inception.

Unlike the Deobandis, the *Barewli*s, who were known simply as *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaat* at the time and in the region, used less concrete and formulaic educational systems to formalise their teachings and methods. Rather, it seems, that Khān was less concerned with the creation of a formulaic curricular system to be endlessly replicated and to produce mass *ulema*, but rather had both different primary concerns and varying methods of

dissemination of the message of *ahlul-sunnah wa al-jamaat*. His primary concern seemed to be the preservation of normative Sunni creed – with centralisation of the rank of the prophet – a religious phenomenon which would affect the lay Muslim on a mass scale. This is discussed by Maheshwari and Singh (2021), who explain;

The Ahl-e-Sunnat madrasas in North India did not have a central institution like the Deobandis' Dar-ul-Ulum. Rather, individual ulema took the initiative in founding these madrasas wherever possible. Though small and ephemeral, the Ahl-e-Sunnat's madrasas were instrumental in creating a network of personal links among the ulema, and in producing new leaders. Like the other rival groups, the Ahl-e-Sunnat too used novel organisational methods such as a fixed syllabus, annual examinations and awarding the students with the best records. They published an annual report and had specialised departments for preaching, publication and debate. (Maheshwari & Singh, 2021:106–107)

What can be seen from the above is not that the devotees of the *Ahlul-Sunnah* movement were not concerned with education; on the contrary, many madrasas were set up across India devoted to the ideology of the movement and the preservation of pristine Sunni normativity and spiritual excellence centred around the veneration of the prophet. But this establishment was not the main concern for Khān, at least. Rather, he saw more benefit and protection of the ideology, in dissemination of his *fatāwā* that would then channel down to the lived experience of the laity and the preservation of their personal spiritual health – all centred on the connection to the prophet – but on a mass level. This “prophetology” and its connection with the early Sufi saint, Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) is discussed by Naeem (2009), who states,

In his writings, as well as his fatāwā, one finds the development of a unique prophetology that is central to his vision and can be viewed as an exoteric elaboration of a number of ideas that were expressed in the Sufi understanding of the Prophet Muhammad associated with the school of Ibn al-‘Arabi but had seldom, if ever, been articulated and emphasized in the manner

that Ahmad Raza was to do. The exoteric aspect really came into view when Ahmad Raza started treating the elements of his prophetology as necessary articles of faith...rather than esoteric knowledge of the Prophet's reality understood only by the khawass, the spiritual elite. (Naeem, 2009:445-446)

What Naeem describes above is a spiritual revivalism of the works of Ibn Arabi, that was, unprecedentedly, brought to the forefront of the South Asian context in the 19th and 20th centuries in a bid to preserve the veneration of the prophet, but interestingly, in a manner both accessible and unrestricted for the laity of the South Asian context. By consciously shifting his focus from institutionalisation of a particular, unchanging educational curricular or school, and rather emphasising on simple ritual devotion (*naatkhwani* – *devotional singing*), *khatham* (communal completion of the Qur'an), *mawlid* (celebration of the prophetic birth) which identified more organically with the laity and their lived experience, Khān seemingly set an interesting precedence for the tradition and its mechanism of dissemination, preservation and its identity construction for its adherents, spanning from the 19th century South Asian to modern-day Britain and beyond.

The above has interesting implications for the *Barelwi* community and the way in which they have navigated their own tradition and its preservation. Because the *Barelwis* did not have a specific educational vision and institutionalisation, as discussed by Maheshwari and Singh (2021), it seems that in the post-immigration period of large numbers of South Asians to Britain in the latter half of the 20th century, and the subsequent settlement and establishment of a significant *Barelwi* community in Britain, their focus was on mosque establishment above all else. Bowen (2014) estimates that up to 90% of Sufi mosques in Britain were initially established by *Barelwi* elders, who made up most of those men who initially migrated from South Asia as economic migrants. Whilst the mosque establishment was a priority for this community, as an obvious mechanism of institutionalisation of Islam in Britain and community formation, an educational equivalent was not created at the same scale. The following section, therefore, will discuss how the *Barelwis* in Britain have

existed and evolved in their religious activities, spiritual practices and educational endeavours.

Barelwis in Britain: An Evolution of Tradition

It was from the 1960s that large numbers of Muslims, usually as economic migrants, arrived in Britain from South Asia, predominantly from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The subsequent decades saw communities of Muslims in Britain establish themselves socially, economically, and institutionally and change the religious and social landscape of Britain forever. Now, a quarter of a century into the 21st century, Muslims in Britain are some 3.87 million strong, as per the 2021 census, and still the dominant ethnic group amongst them are those from South Asia. This has, subsequently, both defined and characterised British Islam in, simultaneously, a fundamental and overt way but also ways which continue to evolve, change but subtly influence the lived experience of contemporary British Muslims. This is not least because many of the institutions formed by Muslims in Britain, be those educational settings, mosques or third spaces, are ideologically linked (even if just historically) and/or culturally tied to religious traditions and trends of South Asia. A large proportion of this, particularly the mosques in Britain, are linked to the *Barelwi* tradition. Although there is a clear tie to Sufi tradition with the *Barelwi* one, a distinction must be made. Although for reasons of identity construction and, perhaps, self-preservation because of intra-religious polemic, the *Barelwis* have often been conflated with the Sufis (at times by themselves, willingly and at other times externally and unwillingly) the *Barelwi* tradition is simultaneously in intellectual, social, and spiritual alignment with the Sufi traditions and quite distinct in its motivations, mechanisms, and historical development. Bowen (2014) discusses the phenomenon in Britain wherein some British-born youth did actively want a different “version” of Islam away from the *Barelwi* tradition. This is acutely clear with Bowen’s reference to the “folk rituals of a foreign, rural culture” of immigrant parents which their children often felt was too culturally laden and, hence, recentred their spiritual practice through travelling non-South Asian Sufi shaykhs and scholars, without a move

away from Sunni normativity. The Sufi preachers and scholars like Shaykh Nuh, Abdul Hakim Murad and Hamza Yusuf offered a particularly intellectualised rhetoric, but this was very different to the still ritual-centric *Barelwi* experience of religious education. Therefore, it is important to establish a distinction between the general Sufi communities in Britain and the *Barewli*s; particularly because they do differ in terms of education.

More fundamentally, Aḥmad Riḍā Khān's scholarship was, primarily a call to Sunni normativity, with a centralisation of the rank of the Prophet Muhammad as paramount for the laity and scholarly classes, alike, as opposed to one which called to Sufi practice as paramount for all lay people. Of course, Khān was a practitioner of Sufism and part of the *Qādirī Ṭarīqah* but his scholarship was centred on the preservation of pristine Sunni creed, as he saw it, with a vehicle to this preservation (for all Muslims in his context (both lay and scholarly)) being the connection and veneration of the Prophet Muhammad (Naeem, 2009). For Khān, both the spirituality of the laity and socio-religious activity of the scholarly classes, were incomplete without pristine belief in both parts of the testimony of faith (i.e. bearing witness to the oneness of God and the finality and rank of the prophethood and person of Muhammad). The conflation of the *Barelwi* tradition with general Sufi tradition seems like a natural mechanism of preservation, in an often-hostile intra-religious context (Gugler, 2015) in Britain.

Moreover, this can be seen in the *Barelwi* educational institutions in Britain that remain closely tied to Sufi practices, and it seems that education has remained a largely un-organised and/or un-institutionalised reality, and the *Barelwi jami'as* are far fewer than the *Deobandi Dār al-'Ulūms* (Scott-Baumann & Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2015). Although mosques often serve as learning spaces, closely affiliated to teachers associated with mosques (and often Sufi tariqas and/or a Sufi master), the *Deobandi* tradition has certainly centralised the wide-spread institutionalisation of the *Dār al-'Ulūm* system (Sidat, 2019). Whereas the *Barewli*s have reverted mainly to ritual-centralism associated with veneration of the Prophet Muhammad and have largely remained unchanging and unwilling to establish

a centralised system of seminaries. However, this does reflect, perhaps, the thinking of Khān and what he deemed to be the most pressing issue of the Muslims in South Asia during his lifetime, namely, the centralisation of the prophet as paramount to the spiritual health of all Muslims, particularly through his *fatāwā* (religious verdicts). This perhaps explains, then, why *Barelwi* diasporic communities have also centralised devotion through Sufi ritual to the prophet as opposed to education. Where British-born *Barelwi* scholars have been produced, it has largely been through education abroad and not on British soil. Strong examples of British-born *Barelwi* scholars include Shaykh Asrar Rashid, Shaykh Muhammad Aslam and Mawlana Sjaad Hussain. This is coupled with *Pirs* and spiritual leaders who are also scholars but still tend to have been trained in and migrated from South Asia including *Pir* Niaz ul Hassan, *Pir* Manawar Shah, *Sayyid* Maroof Hussain Shah, and *Shaykh* Rasul Baksh Sa'eedi and *Pir* Imdad Hussain Pirzada. These figures have taken to public lectures, private teaching, and close affiliation with either local mosques and/or their *tariqa* groups.

Some of the significant *Barelwi* educational organisations include Hazrat Sultan Bahu Trust in Birmingham, which was set up in 1983 by Fiaz ul Hassan and Niaz ul Hassan Sarwari Qadri. Sultan Bahu is, unsurprisingly linked to a large well-funded mosque and is led by the two founding brothers who are *pirs* of the *Qadiri* Sufi order, affiliated to the large Sufi shrine, of the same name, in Pakistan. The British chapter of the organisation trains would-be scholars through the *Dars-e-Nizāmī* syllabus, with particular embedded Sufi practices also, for students, Birmingham locals and students and devotees of the *pir*.

Another significant *Barelwi* educational organisation is that of the Minhaj-ul-Qur'an centres across the UK. These centres are set up, usually as mosques, but that also cater to Islamic education. Again, the Minhaj-ul-Qur'an organisation has a global presence and exists ultimately as the educational and *da'wah* organisation of the founding *pir*, Tahir ul Qadri, also hailing from Pakistan. Another significant educational organisation, and the one which is arguably the most significant *Barelwi* educational institute, is that of Jami'a al-Karam, founded by *Pir* Imdad Hussain Pirzada in 1985. This is arguably the most significant

within the current discussion because it is the main *madrasa* which is set up primarily for education, without being centred upon (although still connected to) any particular Sufi *tariqa* and caters to the wider British Muslim community, as opposed to just adherents of any one *pir*.

The founder, *Pir* Imdad Hussain provides a unique example of a large-scale seminary, Jami'a al-Karam, which provides traditional learning via the *Dars-e-Nizāmī* system, coupled with emphasis on *Barelwi* traditions and spirituality more generally. The institute hosts both male and female students from across Britain, has boarding facilities and has produced hundreds of graduating *Barelwi* scholars. However, Jami'a al-Karam is an anomaly of sorts, at least at the scale that it operates as a *Barelwi* institution. Subsequently, the majority of *Barelwi* high-level scholars have been formerly trained, to large extents, in foreign countries and institutions, be that in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh itself, al-Azhar in Cairo or University of Damascus. This addresses the lack of educational institution and scholarship that would allow for more high-level study and, subsequently, the production of scholarship in Britain itself. Where *Barelwis* have produced scholars, though, they have predominantly remained fiercely loyal to the final rulings of Khān himself (particularly propagating and reinforcing sectarian sentiments against oppositional groups) but have not seemed to imbibe his religious principles (*ʿUṣūl*) or his dynamic scholarly outputs, arguably.

If one is to analyse the scholarship and thinking of Khān himself, it seems that many of the contemporary *Barelwis* have not so much emphasised the mechanisms of his scholastic work, and only continued his ritual preservation and deep sectarianism, because of his stance on and categorical rejection of certain revivalist movements of his context (This can be found in his work *Husam ul-Haramain*). Khān was first and foremost an adept and dynamic scholar who produced *fatāwā* pertaining to many matters of religious and spiritual life. He was also innovative in his scholarship and comfortable with the use of new and unique mechanisms, as well as producing innovative religious rulings. A prime example of this is the use of new technology to disseminate his *fatāwā* to the masses. Maheshwari and Singh (2021) discuss this and explain,

The Ahl-e-Sunnat madrasas in North India did not have a central institution like the Deobandis' Dar-ul-Ulum. Rather, individual ulema took the initiative in founding these madrasas wherever possible. Though small and ephemeral, the Ahl-e-Sunnat's madrasas were instrumental in creating a network of personal links among the ulema, and in producing new leaders...They published an annual report and had specialised departments for preaching, publication and debate...journals of the Ahl-e-Sunnat steadily grew in circulation, with subscriptions rising as the years went by. The printing presses were a powerful weapon in the war against the Deobandis, as all the fatwas of Ahmad Raza were printed and published by them...much more ambitious in scope and more far-reaching in influence than any of the other Ahl-e-Sunnat organisations. (Maheshwari & Singh, 2021:106-107).

What can be witnessed from the above is just how innovative and comfortable with new and dynamic methods and mechanisms of education and dissemination the early *Barelwi* school was. Not only did Aḥmad Riḍā Khān himself provide huge amounts of religious rulings on pertinent jurisprudential matters but also general religious guidance, as well as the authoring of *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis) and devotional poetry. One pertinent ruling which he produced was regarding the use of paper money (the first scholar to address this thoroughly contemporary and needed issue on the permissibility of such). Another being his ruling on the spiritual hierarchy of the prophetic city of Madina over that of Makkah (the city of Islamic pilgrimage) – a ruling taken directly from the Maliki school and a move away from the Hanafi school, to which he belonged. Although the examples of his own scholarship are both vast and wide-reaching, they all indicate a dynamism in his thinking and *ʿUṣūl* (jurisprudential and religious foundational principles) which addressed deeply the need of the time and his context.

However, it seems that this dynamism and contextualised thinking has somewhat been lost amongst the contemporary *Barelwi* community who remained deeply ritual-centric and unorganised in their dissemination and educational institutionalisation. Although this is not to make any claim for

the need for *Barelwi* seminaries to be established at the scale or style of their *Deobandi* counter parts (particularly because the *Deobandi* seminaries and scholars seem rather insular and lacking in contextualisation in contemporary Britain) but, rather, this chapter seeks to explore the *Barelwi* community, its ideological foundations, its current reality in Britain and what its future may look like. If the *Barelwis* do not return to the forward-thinking and scholarly dynamism of its founder and remain loyal to his *fatāwā* and its cultural expressions of ritual devotion, it may be untenable and unsustainable for future generations of British-born would-be *Barelwis* to continue their tradition at all. However, there are certainly some scholars and educational organisations which do thrive in Britain, and who do have *Barelwi* roots and ideological loyalties of Aḥmad Riḍā Khān (although often would only claim Sunni normativity and traditionalism and not *Barelwism*). But who, in turn, seem to be utilising scholarly and educational mechanisms which serve and benefit the British Muslim spiritual and educational needs, deeply steeped in tradition yet profoundly contextualised to British life. The next section will, therefore, provide a case study of one such educational organisation.

Contemporary Developments

The contemporary educational landscape for Muslims, particularly in Britain, has become incredibly comfortable with digital approaches to traditional learning. This reality transcends ideological loyalties, and examples can be seen across the spectrum of Muslim sects. Examples include *Al-Balagh* – an ideologically *Deobandi* institute founded by Rafaqat Rashid, and International Open University, founded by Bilal Philips, a prominent Salafi preacher, as well as institutes that use a hybrid model, catering to in-person and online audiences such as *Al-Maghrib* and *Al-Kauthar*. Unsurprisingly, the *Barelwis* of Britain, too, have contributed to these digital educational spaces, but in a novel way, particularly given the methodology of the *Barelwi* tradition. Namely, as was discussed in the previous sections, the *Barelwi* institutions in the UK have been predominantly still linked to charismatic authority figures (usually *Pirs*) and closely linked to mosque spaces. However, one particular institute is moving

away from this, arguably in-line with the methodology of Khān himself and is re-centralising or reviving Sunni normativity, perhaps more subtly linked to Sufi ritual and less centred around charismatic Sufi authority figures. Therefore, said institute – *The Sacred Text Syllabus* – will be the focus of this section. The section will not only explore the nature of this modern institute but will expand on how it converges (and diverges) with the *Barelwi* school, as to elucidate what the future of *Barelwism* is in Britain, and more specifically, what *Barelwi* education in Britain might look like, in the future of British Islam.

The Sacred Texts Syllabus was established by Sjaad Hussain and Shammās Tubraiz in 2011, two British-born Sunni scholars, from ideologically *Barelwi* roots, who both studied locally (predominantly with Shaykh Rasool Baksh Saeedi and then in Damascus, Syria, in the case of Hussain) and have become prominent teachers in the Midlands region and beyond (both of whom are Birmingham locals). What is particularly interesting and unique is that these would-be *Barelwis* have seemingly subtly taken to a return to the thinking of Aḥmad Riḍā Khān, using technology and dynamic teaching to forward normative Sunni Islam interwoven with spirituality, centred around the rank and person of the Prophet Muhammad, without making any overt claims to *Barelwism* at all.

This may well be another manifestation of the methodology of Khān, who himself simply purported a preservation of Sunni normativity – subtly laying claim to *Ahlul-Sunnah* and rejecting (often not so subtly) those who had deviated from that ideology of *Ahlul-Sunnah*, by decentralising the significance and person of Muhammad (as discussed in section two). Moreover, the organisation offers several courses, at varying levels for students with varying backgrounds or academic intentions and consciously caters to the contemporary Muslim experience. The courses are conducted in-person on a seemingly smaller scale, but they emphasise their ability to cater to online-provision and curating digital learning environments which are most conducive to contemporary Western Muslim experience, laden with the logistical difficulties of the young professionals and their busy lives which they mainly seem to cater to with their courses. This is coupled with an impressive online presence,

particularly their Website which presents the institution as a thoroughly contemporary, forward-thinking, and tech-savvy organisation catering well to the modern Muslim. The Website's homepage states;

The Sacred Texts Syllabus is a competence orientated, integrated syllabus that exists as a bridge between the traditional scholarship programmes and more modern approaches to academic study. The Syllabus was launched in 2012. The aim of the syllabus is to expose students to the breadth and depth of traditional syllabi, laying down the foundations for specialisation. In short, the Sacred Texts Syllabus is the accessible, pertinent and palatable incarnation of the traditional syllabi, specifically tailored for the modern audience. Sacred Texts gives students a chance to learn their religion at the hands of traditionally trained (mujaz) teachers, and promises them an opportunity to become a positive force for good. We currently offer three flagship programmes, all details can be found on our programmes page. (Sacred Text Syllabus, 2024)

Both through academic language and attractive and professional aesthetics, the Website introduces would-be students to both a mode of study which is accessible and academic but also steeped in “tradition”. This directly addresses the context of its founders, who perhaps experienced the intra-religious polemic of the 1990s and early 21st century in Britain, and intended to create spaces away from such polemic and a return to normative Sunni learning, not centred around Sufi ritual (a criticism often laid at the door of the Barelwi community leading to the abandonment of “folk Islam” for often Salafism or political Islam) (Hamid, 2016) yet profoundly interwoven with the spirituality and the pristine *Aqīdah* of *ahlul-sunnah*, as espoused by Aḥmad Riḍā Khān himself. Interestingly, much like Aḥmad Riḍā Khān himself, the institute does not claim anything other than the tradition and Sunni normativity (that is, adherence to one of the two schools of creed (*Asharī* or *Māturīdī*) and one of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence (*Ḥanafī*, *Shāfī*, *Mālikī*, *Ḥanbalī*) and, of course, an acceptance and adherence to a Sufi brotherhood to

varying extents). Conceptually, this is echoed in a new wave of academic literature pertaining to new-traditionalism (Sedgwick & Piraino, 2020) or “traditional Islam networks” discussed by Geaves (2014) in similar terms. Namely, the Sacred Text Syllabus centralised normative Sunni Islam, emphasising knowledge over ritual and academic rigour over emotive devotion, without totally dismissing the latter. As a mechanism for the preservation of the tradition, this is pertinent in its similarity with Aḥmad Riḍā Khān, who too, although partook in Sufi devotional ritual and the defence of common lay practice (visiting of holy shrines, devotional singing etc.) viewed it as a mechanism of preservation of *Sunni aqidah* (creed) and a defence of onslaught from revivalist movements intent on the decentralisation of the persona and rank of Muhammad. Like this particular institution who do not dismiss ritual practices in their teaching, but rather focus on knowledge exchange and academic rigour as a way of preserving and advancing traditional Sunni learning, but upon British soil and addressing the British experience of its students.

Moreover, the Sacred Text Syllabus courses include basic introductory level courses in Islamic studies, Arabic studies and advanced studies of classical Arabic texts. The “Foundations” course, targeted at beginner-level students, is described on the Website;

Developed by the Sacred Text Syllabus team, Foundations is more than just a course- it's a journey to help you connect to God through practical guidance and comprehensive support. We believe in nurturing both the mind and the soul, providing tailored lessons that not only deepen your knowledge but also foster personal and spiritual growth. Join us at Foundations, and build a solid foundation for a meaningful, God-centric life. (Sacred Text Syllabus, 2024)

Moreover, the institute offers this type of contextualised and balanced learning experience (balancing practical guidance, spirituality, and Islamic studies content) at all levels. The advanced Islamic studies course, which, in its content, seems akin to a contextualised *Dars-e-Nizāmī* syllabus, is described as covering subjects of Islamic law (*Ḥanafī Fiqh*), principles of

Islamic law (*ʿUṣūl al-Fiqh*), Hadith studies (*Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth*), creed (*ʿIlm al-Kalām*), logic (*Manṭiq*), rhetoric (*Balāgha*), grammar (*Naḥw*) and spirituality (*Tazkiyah*). The way in which the courses are designed and advertised show a dynamism and ability to contextualise and maintain continuity of scholarship but profoundly rooted in the British context. This is by no means out of a vacuum, but rather stems perhaps from a socio-religious context of misrepresentation and, often, controversy, relating to the *Barelwi* roots which the founders of the institute may have come from. Hence, the institute embodies a resurgence and, perhaps, rebranding of, knowledge-seeking which does not revert to ritual-centricity that forms the basis of so much of the controversy attached to the mainstream *Barelwis*. Nor does it promote the deeply rooted sectarianism that the mainstream *Barelwis* espouse but rather uses the methodology of dynamic scholarship and both vast and deep *ʿUṣūl*, utilised by Aḥmad Riḍā Khān in his religious endeavours and outputs, in a subtle and unspoken way. The methodology of the Sacred Text Syllabus certainly seems to appeal to audiences in Britain and beyond, as they boast over 1,500 students, across varying countries, many of whom are professionals and highly educated would-be knowledge-seekers and spiritual aspirants. The student population is also very balanced in its gendered aspect. Female and male students seem to have similar, if not identical, experience of teaching, access to teachers and resources. All the while, teaching and materials being accessible in high-level English and with a concentration of Arabic as a language of study and no usage of any other foreign languages (namely Urdu) which is still utilised in many *Dār al-ʿUlūms* in Britain (admittedly to varying degrees).

Looking at the *Barelwi* education, and specifically using the example of Sacred Text Syllabus as an off-shoot and perhaps re-imagining of this, it seems they have been able to curate an interesting and thoroughly British experience for their students, utilising modern digital methods that identify with audiences seeking a balance between academic rigour, tradition and spirituality. One that is not simply focussed on ritual devotion, like the mainstream *Barelwis* who remain fiercely loyal to the final *fatāwā* of Khān, but rather utilise his methodology of scholastic dynamism and contextual mechanism of dissemination for the

preservation of Sunni normativity, with the being of the prophet Muhammad centralised as vital to spiritual elevation. Moreover, where the *Deobandis* seem to prefer the class-room style traditional settings and their enclaves, the *Barelwis* seem to be comfortable with new innovative dynamics i.e. moving to digital environments and contextual teaching methods. The Sacred Text Syllabus methodology is seemingly attractive to males and females, alike, and offer similar experience for both, which still seems something that the *Deobandi Dār al-‘Ulūms* have not been able to establish to in a meaningful way. Female students, arguably, continuing to have a deeply segregated and diminished experience. Although further ethnographic data collection is needed to enhance and prove this. The example of the Sacred Text Syllabus is one of an interesting turn in the tide of British Islamic education. It seemingly brings together tradition and spirituality, both profoundly classical and thoroughly contemporary. Through its dynamic methods and its openness to its students and accessibility to audiences, it provides an example of how this type of education may be established and institutionalised in Britain, using the methods of Aḥmad Riḍā Khān without the sectarian divisiveness and polemic rhetoric espoused by mainstream *Barelwis*.

Future Glimpses

Looking forward to the way in which the *Barelwi* community in Britain may cultivate new pathways for the tradition and might work to preserve their expressions of both spirituality and scholarship, it seems that they stand at a crossroads. As the *Barelwis* head into the second quarter of the 21st century, there are many directions that could be taken. In terms of education, though, unlike *tariqa* and the obvious Sufi activities that have come to define them, it seems that perhaps the *Barelwis* need to join the minorities amongst them who have managed to truly cultivate the methodology of Aḥmad Riḍā Khān and prioritise scholarship which both serves and benefits the lay Sunni Muslim, as opposed to expressions of Sufi devotion and little else. It seems that if the *Barelwi* tradition is to survive and even thrive on British soil for coming generations, it needs to prioritise the methodology and mechanisms of the scholarship and scholarly activism of

Aḥmad Riḍā Khān, as opposed to a fervent loyalty to the culture, language and ritual of the geography of Khān. The latter will become more and more untenable as these communities become more deeply and profoundly British as the generations continue and become less connected to the geography and culture of South Asia.

However, that is not to claim some top-down institutionalisation of education is necessary, in the way of their *Deobandi* counterparts. On the contrary, it seems that through the lack of organised and institutionalised *Barelwi* education on British soil, it has left room for contextualisation and spirituality which it seems that the *Deobandis* have been largely unable to do within their *Dār al-‘Ulūms*. However, education cannot be taken for granted and is not akin to the culturally specific expressions of Sufism that the *Barelwis* have become synonymous with. On the contrary, unlike *Ṭarīqah*, *Mawlid* and *Khatham*, which can arguably be passed down within communities from generation to generation, breaking barriers of age and language proficiency, education is something which needs organisation, systemisation and consideration of context and audience. Something which, up until now, the *Barelwis* have not been able to institutionalise on a large and encompassing scale.

Although we see, as has been discussed in section 5 of this chapter, organisations which have seemingly taken to normative Sunni education, with, arguably, ideologically *Barelwi* roots, contextualised to the lifestyles and preferred methods of the British Muslim experience, this has not been actualised on a large scale. It seems then that if the *Barelwis* are going to preserve their traditions, bringing together spirituality and scholarship, with the profoundly contextualised scholarly mechanisms and methodology of its founder, the *Barelwis* of Britain need to prioritise education on British soil, contextualising its teaching for appropriate methods for British audiences and integrate spirituality and prophetic devotion into teachings and propagation – a unique revivalism which was exemplified like no other modern Islamic scholar, in the way that it was by Khān. Without prioritising education and the active preservation and propagation of the tradition, with methods and in language that directly addresses the British *Barelwi* experience, as the

community stand at this crossroads, it may lead to the complete loss of tradition, and arguably more importantly, a complete negligence and loss of the profound scholarship of Khān without holistic understanding of his *ʿUṣūl* (jurisprudential and religious principle) and utilising of that *ʿUṣūl*, for the British experience and lived reality. To truly explore and offer concrete conjecture upon this, I would argue ethnographic research could allow for a more holistic study of this profoundly significant community and its educational, communal, and spiritual future may look like upon the complex landscape of British Islam.

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Chapter 9

The Possibility of Analytic Philosophy in United Kingdom Madrasas

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Introduction

The madrasa system, originating in Khorasan, was embraced by the Seljuq Empire around the mid-11th century. These establishments functioned as centres of advanced learning, with financial backing coming from real estate donations made by private benefactors or the state. Establishing a madrasa involved building necessary facilities, securing ongoing funding from farmland or city properties, and organising its daily operations. Smaller madrasas, often supported by wealthy individuals, typically had limited resources, enough to maintain just one teacher and his family. On the other hand, larger madrasas located in major urban centres provided financial aid to both educators and students, requiring substantial funds for their maintenance. These bigger institutions often included libraries, writing rooms, and areas for paper production. By the 13th century, some even integrated observatories, contributing to scientific breakthroughs.

The Nizāmiyya madrasas, which later influenced the Dars-i Nizāmi system, played a vital role in popularising the madrasa curriculum model and continued to be prominent through the 12th century. Named after the Shāfi'ite vizier Nizām al-Mulk (d. 1092), these institutions were set up in key cities of the Seljuq Empire and provided scholars in notable

fields like logic, Islamic law, and theology (kalām) with stable financial backing. Scholars in these institutions also had the chance to explore areas such as natural sciences and philosophical theology (ilāhiyyāt). The Nizāmiyya madrasas became hubs for academic training, intellectual activity, and promoting scholarly interaction.

From the outset, philosophy was a significant area of study at Nizāmiyya madrasas. The removal of a philosophical manuscript, written by a student of Avicenna, from the Nizāmiyya library in Nishapur before 1082, demonstrates this.¹ However, it was Al-Ghazālī who formally introduced logic and the rational sciences within Islamic disciplines. This went on to play a key role in consolidating philosophy as a subject within madrasas. Although it was previously thought that al-Ghazālī's critique of Avicenna and Aristotelian philosophy led to the decline of Islamic philosophy, recent studies indicate that he was instrumental in incorporating logic into the madrasa system and integrating Avicenna's Aristotelian approaches within mainstream Sunni theology (Ash'arī kalām). Though it is worth noting that philosophy in the 12th century wasn't limited to the madrasa system alone. Scholars like al-Lawkarī and Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī worked outside madrasas, but eventually, philosophy found its way into these institutions, leading to the creation of works suited for madrasa study.

Since the 19th century, Western influences have significantly shaped education and intellectual thought across the Islamic world, with the exception of some madrasas. These exceptional madrasas, often located in geographically isolated regions or excluded from modernising trends, largely maintained their traditional structures. Strict measures would be employed to ensure that these underlying traditional structures remain immune to compromise from various kinds of external reform and progressive thinking which proves antithetical to what madrasas seek to preserve, namely the Islamic faith. Yet, in their current state, many madrasas struggle to provide sustainable educational models for Islamic learning.

This is not exclusively down to the quality of teaching, lack of enthusiasm, or a decline in teachers. Instead, much of

¹ See Griffel (2021:32).

these waning educational models are because of factors beyond the control of the madrasa, such as a shortage of finances, a profusion of private tuition, political pressures, and even bad press. Over time, the scope of their curricula has narrowed. For instance, subjects like Mathematics, once studied in Egyptian madrasas a thousand years ago, began to disappear from their programmes about three centuries ago. This was before European modernism and colonialism had imposed itself upon the Islamic world. The decline of the Mughal Empire and the rise of English education and Western thought exacerbated the matter further. It created somewhat unprecedented challenges for Islamic education, which was only one part of the horrific legacy of British colonialism in India.

Despite these difficulties, some madrasas situated in the Indian subcontinent countered the onslaught on Islamic education with the introduction of the Dars-i Nizāmī curriculum in the mid-18th century. This curriculum covered a wide range of disciplines and a reintroduction of some of those subjects that had been dropped. These included Arabic Grammar, Logic, Philosophy, Mathematics, Rhetoric, Jurisprudence, Principles of Jurisprudence, Scholastics, Dialectics, Quranic Interpretation, and Hadith Studies. Amongst the notable institutions that hosted this curriculum, are the Farangī Maḥall, which maintained intellectual ties to 11th century Baghdad, and the Deoband madrasa, which was established in 1867 by Mawlānā Muḥammad Kāsim Nānotawī and others. Another key institution is the Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’ in Lucknow, which was founded in 1894, in which the renowned scholar Shīblī Nu‘mānī played a major role between 1904 and 1913. Despite financial struggles and limited enrolment, the latter two of these madrasas continue to operate today.

However, the role of Philosophy (falsafah) in Islamic education should not exclusively be measured by whether it was formally taught in higher educational institutions (namely madrasas or universities), especially when comparing it to the West. There are two notable reasons for this. Firstly, traditional Islamic education was often informal, with instruction in Philosophy and Esoteric Sciences happening outside formal institutions and continuing to this day. Secondly, as modernising trends proliferated, some madrasas became susceptible to

their influences. One of the consequences of this was that many disciplines were either neglected or reshaped in ways that diverged from their original meanings. This problem was aggravated by the colonial education of local elites according to Western models, which further marginalised classical educational frameworks.

To restore balance in Islamic educational institutions and offer alternatives to the dominant modernist trends, it is important to return to and preserve the classical madrasa tradition, which once represented the pinnacle of Islamic intellectual enquiry. To address these challenges, Nasr (2016) presents two practical steps. In the first step, he suggests that efforts should focus on strengthening the madrasa system wherever it still exists, not by simply introducing modern subjects like natural sciences but by preserving the madrasa's unique role as a place for the preservation of the Islamic faith and the convergence of different kinds of knowledge. Reviving the madrasa must remain true to the values and sanctity of traditional Islamic learning. In the second step, smaller, advanced centres of Islamic learning should be created. These institutions, unlike large madrasas with thousands of students, would be smaller in scale but would offer intellectually rigorous Islamic education while incorporating some non-traditional subjects through the process of "Islamisation" of knowledge. This approach could help to modernise madrasa education without losing its essence.²

For the most part, I sympathise with both of Nasr's suggestions. However, I think both practical steps offered by Nasr needn't be independent of one another. This does not imply that Nasr has presented them both as mutually exclusive steps and/or in a strict sequence, where the latter cannot be achieved prior to the former having been achieved. Instead, I think a successful combination of both steps, which not only focuses on practical but also theoretical matters, would bring about a more inclusive proposal in addressing the substantial challenges noted above. In what follows, I shall set out to offer this proposal by way of focusing on one particular issue confined to the Madrasas in the United Kingdom.

² See Nasr, in Memon and Zaman (2016).

Madrasas in the United Kingdom fulfil an integral role when it comes to producing Islamic scholars and offering a positive contribution to UK society. As institutions of Islamic education, UK madrasas are not only committed to the academic success of their students, but also encourage them to conform to an Islamic way of life. Therefore, madrasas are instrumental in preserving and transmitting traditional Islamic sciences from one generation to another. More importantly, they try to produce high-calibre Islamic scholars equipped with effective leadership skills to help them to make worthwhile contributions to modern UK society. The desire to prepare the next generation of Muslims in this way demonstrates the relevance of madrasas in a multi-cultural UK society and the world.

Despite this, madrasas appear to be reluctant concerning the introduction of philosophy to their students. As discussed below, this reluctance is particularly acute in the case of analytic philosophy. Given this, I intend to investigate why analytic philosophy, the predominant type of philosophy practiced in UK higher education, is generally not included in the curricula of UK madrasas, and, ultimately, offer some recommendations as to how this can be ameliorated. I argue that there are underlying theoretical and conceptual reasons for this discrepancy. Moreover, engaging with this issue can assist in evaluating the possibility of introducing analytic philosophy to UK madrasas, by ascertaining which areas would prove amenable to collaboration between madrasas and mainstream analytic philosophy in UK higher education.

In this regard, I provide two recommendations responding to the intellectual presuppositions that impede engagement between madrasas and communities of philosophical inquiry (CPI). It is my intention that these recommendations can be useful in reducing madrasas' reluctance towards analytic philosophy, and, ultimately, facilitate the inclusion of analytic philosophy into madrasa curricula. The first recommendation focuses on addressing the theoretical conflicts between analytic philosophy and the Islamic philosophy typically practiced in madrasas. The second recommendation highlights the institutional barriers to engagement, as it concerns various organisations that promote and practice CPI.

Madrasas and Madrasa Education

In their book *The Madrasa in Asia: Political Activism and Transnational Linkages*, Farish *et al.*, characterise the madrasa in the following manner:

The term madrasa derives from the Arabic triliteral root darasa, which means “to study.” Etymologically, a madrasa therefore indicates an institution where lessons are imparted, or a school. In the Arabic-speaking world, the term applies both to schools that teach traditional Islamic subjects, as well as those that are completely secularised. In many parts of Asia beyond the Arab world, however, the word madrasa is generally understood in a more restricted sense as a school devoted to Islamic education, although the ways in which such education is conceived are widely divergent. (Noor *et al.*, 2008:9)

According to Western discourse on the term “madrasa,” both academic and popular, madrasas are frequently characterised as both “Islamic” and “religious,” such as in Richard Bulliet’s definition.³ In this regard, the term “madrasa” is identified with Islam as a religious and social system. One of the notable implications of this view is the suggestion that any discipline or subject introduced into a madrasa curriculum would bear a *prima facie* association with Islam. Although this view is a mischaracterisation of what a madrasa is, it illustrates how an Islamic school functions, and overstates the contextual significance of the term “madrasa”, as outlined in the above reference to Noor *et al.*, (2008). In fact, many diverse subjects taught in contemporary madrasas bear no explicit association with Islam.⁴ Nevertheless, the “Islamic education” offered by madrasas, regardless of its content, strives to educate students with views on religious and moral standards associated with Islam. In this regard, much of what is taught in madrasas has an Islamic theological end in mind, albeit not necessarily an explicit one.

³ See Bulliet (1987).

⁴ For a brief categorisation of subjects that are generally taught in a madrasa, see Gilliat-Ray (2006).

To better demonstrate the diversity of madrasas, both globally as well as in the UK, it is helpful to isolate three distinguishing features that they share in common with other educational institutions, and which are tailored to meet the long-term goals of individual institutions. These include the level of education offered, the curriculum, and the pedagogical method through which that curriculum is actualised. The ways in which these three features are constituted can help to differentiate between different types of madrasa education.

When it comes to the level of Islamic education, one can distinguish between elementary and higher Islamic education. Elementary madrasas,⁵ referred to in Arabic as a maktab or kuttāb, provide rudimentary Islamic schooling for young children that is intended to be holistic.⁶ This usually involves instruction in Qur'ānic recitation and the memorisation of selected excerpts from the Qur'ān, and other supplications from the Hadith. Moreover, it includes a very general instruction in the theoretical and practical aspects of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). Alongside the academic components of the curriculum, these madrasas usually endeavour to instil in students the manners, etiquette, and moral character commensurate with Islamic values.

There is, however, no standardised curriculum or pedagogy at the elementary level. The principal aim at this point is to provide a holistic Islamic education that meets at least two complementary goals; the first of which is to equip Muslim children with sufficient abstract and practical knowledge about Islam to preserve their faith throughout their lives, occasionally supplemented by building their resilience against the influence of irreligion and agnosticism. This is further accompanied by teaching Muslim children how to live in conformity with the teachings of Islam. Only secondarily do these madrasas attempt to prepare some children for higher Islamic education.

Madrasas offering higher Islamic education are more complex institutions committed to producing Islamic scholars. Referred to in Arabic as a jāmi'a or dār al-'ulūm (house of sciences),

⁵ See Scourfield *et al.*, (2013).

⁶ See Gilliat-Ray (2010).

these madrasas are committed to providing an advanced scholarly environment in which various academic sciences and disciplines are taught.⁷ The level of education ranges from foundational to advanced levels of higher education, including specialisations offered in certain areas of study. A'ishah Ahmad Sabki and Glenn Hardaker present a succinct overview of the variety of sciences that these madrasas teach:

Islamic education in madrasas of higher learning is focused primarily on the Muslim community and typically educating Muslims in the transmission of Islamic knowledge through ethnic lines. Religious education is based upon what is termed in Arabic as al-'ulūm al-naqliyya (lit.: the “transmitted sciences”), which consists primarily of the Qur’ānic sciences, the Hadith sciences, and jurisprudence (fiqh). In addition to the “transmitted” or religious sciences supplementary subjects are taught, al-'ulūm al-'aqliyya (lit.: the “rational sciences”), which may include problem solving, philosophy, mathematics, computing, and languages. The higher education madrasa institution is similar throughout the world but there are cultural variations in terms of ... curriculum. (Sabki & Hardaker, 2013:344)

Although similar to the elementary madrasa, higher Islamic institutions seek to achieve at least two additional goals, namely imparting specialised knowledge directed by theocentric propositions, and nurturing traits that ultimately induce a devoutly religious life. As outlined by Timothy Winter, a theoretical dispute emerges concerning how to strike a balance between these two goals.⁸ Consequently, madrasas providing higher Islamic education often vary widely in terms of their institutional goals, their curricula, and their pedagogical methods. Cultural and geographic factors also play a role in determining a given institution’s academic emphasis.⁹

⁷ See Nasr (2006).

⁸ See Winter, in Memon and Zaman (2016).

⁹ For more on the global variations in madrasa education, see Sabki and Hardaker (2013).

One way to better interpret the diversity of global madrasas is to distinguish between madrasas that are “traditional” and those that are not. Vague, contentious, and frequently a source of debate, the term “traditional” can be defined in various ways, both in the broader Islamic context as well as in the particular context of madrasa education. An exhaustive definition of the term in these contexts is beyond the scope of this chapter. For the purposes of this chapter, I intend to employ the term “traditional” in an Islamic context as a synonym of terms such as “orthodox” and “conservative.”

Therefore, I define it as indicating deep-rooted conviction and devout conformity to broadly accepted doctrines and teachings of Islam. This also implies upholding a conventional outlook towards these doctrines in a manner that is conservative and reticent towards change and modernisation that lead to antithetical Islamic trends. In the case of madrasas, “traditional” can subsequently be used to describe the three major features (i.e., level of education, curricula, and pedagogy) that assist us in categorising particular types of madrasas. Consequently, this shall allow us to appreciate what it means for each of the features to be “traditional,” and hence, distinguish between traditional and non-traditional madrasas. Such a distinction is of course contingent on how the term “traditional” is defined and applied to the three major features that assist in analysing and categorising the types of madrasas (i.e., education level, curricula, and pedagogy). Variations in any combination of these features can result in a significant degree of diversity amongst so-called “traditional” madrasas. As a working definition, I shall consider a traditional madrasa as one which is traditional from the perspective of the Islamic education that is imparted in terms of its curricula and pedagogy. Additionally, such institutions usually offer a higher education. However, much of what I discuss is also pertinent to a traditional elementary madrasa.¹⁰

As noted above, all of these features are nonetheless secondary to the fundamental objective of a madrasa, namely, the preservation of the Islamic faith against anything antithetical to Islamic beliefs. This, however, is a conceptually broad category

¹⁰ See Hand and Winstanley (2008).

including everything from various ideologies to customary and occult practices, depending on one's particular understanding of Islam. Furthermore, incompatibility with the Islamic faith may be entirely theoretical, and, therefore, would not pose to be any practical threat. Consequently, it is beyond the remit of a madrasa to devote time to adequately addressing all such potential threats by way of theological discourse and polemics, and, moreover, need not necessarily do so, because a madrasa's primary focus lies in a preservative mode of consolidating the faith of its students.

A different situation pertains, however, where the defensive modes employed in preserving the Islamic faith are themselves to be threatened or even undermined. In this case, such threatening views would not merely present an accidental conflict, limited to the context of polemics or theological exchange. Instead, they would be at odds with the preservation of essential Islamic doctrinal views, in that they would subject the foundations of dogmatic belief to systematic scrutiny. Moreover, analysis of this kind would encourage a vigorous re-evaluation of divine orthodoxy by making it susceptible to theoretical doubt. In this regard, such threatening modes of thought are predominantly found within the purview of philosophy. As Bertrand Russell (d. 1970), the doyen of analytic philosophy, characterised it, philosophy "removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never travelled into the region of liberating doubt" (Russell, 2008:80). If philosophy is to be understood in this way, introducing it to a madrasa would be a figurative Trojan horse, smuggling potentially destructive ideas and inimical modes of thought into the citadel of faith. Philosophy would, therefore, play an active role in endangering the very thing that a madrasa seeks to preserve, namely the Islamic faith.

Nonetheless, Islamic intellectual history suggests otherwise. John Walbridge has noted that from the 12th century onwards, madrasas began introducing a variety of subjects ranging from Mathematics, Astronomy, Medicine, Logic, Metaphysics, and Natural Philosophy.¹¹ Logic and Philosophy also played an important integrating role within madrasa curricula.

¹¹ See Walbridge (2010).

Tony Street¹² and Walbridge¹³ have each specifically elaborated on the inclusion of Logic within the madrasa curricula, while Khaled El-Rouayheb has detailed broader historical trends in 17th-century Islamic intellectual history, including those involving Philosophy and Logic.¹⁴ Without understating the roles of Logic and Philosophy as independent fields of study, the work of these scholars and others cumulatively demonstrates that Logic and Philosophy were, and perhaps continue to be, mostly taught as auxiliary subjects where cultivated skills are transferable to other subject areas. Tony Street, for instance, points out that Logic was acquired as part of obtaining an “intellectual arsenal” for use in other disciplines.¹⁵

Despite the continued inclusion of some form of Logic and Philosophy in madrasa curricula, it is clear that the practice of these subjects has undeniably been in decline.¹⁶ Despite having prospered over the course of six centuries (ca. 1100–1700), rationalistic subjects within madrasa curricula, namely Logic and Philosophy, have been assailed by numerous forces:

In the nineteenth century, it [philosophy] abruptly collided with the forces of modernism, colonial administrators, Christian missionaries, Muslim reformers, and Muslim revivalists. Where it survived at all, it was usually a shadow of its former self, reduced in wealth and prestige and often warped by the conflicting demands of modernism and its own past. Islamic education was swept up in a debate embracing European colonial administrators and intellectuals and parents in virtually every Islamic country. (Walbridge, 2010:153)

Despite some unsolicited and insubstantial criticisms, Phillip Lewis accurately depicted the diminished status of elementary Logic and Philosophical Theology taught at one of the madrasas

¹² See Street, in Gabbay and Woods, 2004).

¹³ See Walbridge (2010).

¹⁴ El-Rouayheb (2004, 2015).

¹⁵ See Street, in Adamson and Taylor (2005)

¹⁶ Arguably, this can be appreciated more at present than in any previous time in history. See Sikand (1998).

in the UK.¹⁷ In fact, it would be inaccurate to say that Logic and Philosophy have completely disappeared from the madrasa curricula, in general, including the UK's curricula. Seyyed Hossein Nasr elaborates on this, arguing that even where marginalised in the pre-modern period, Philosophy and Logic remained an important part of study throughout the Near East and South Asia.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the state of these subjects in madrasa education is far from ideal. Albeit, having maintained a place within the madrasa setting, madrasas have only conserved a modicum of philosophical instruction.

Given this, one would assume that madrasas would attempt to develop their diminished Philosophy curricula, if the opportunity arose. In this respect, it would make sense for madrasas in the UK to not only increase and expand their Philosophy curricula, but to also take advantage of contemporary philosophical thought that is predominant in the UK. In other words, one may expect UK madrasas to introduce not just traditional modes of Philosophy, but also contemporary modes popular in contemporary UK, which may benefit their students.¹⁹ The inclusion of contemporary Philosophy need not be considered as an attempt to redeem an attenuated standard of Philosophy instruction, but rather a pragmatic decision to equip students with contemporary modes of analytic thought. In this regard, Noor *et al.*, (2008) cite a comparison made between the famed theologian and jurist Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's (d. 1111) mastery of Greek Philosophy and the need for 'ulamā to gain fluency in contemporary philosophical discourses.²⁰

Nonetheless, it appears that madrasas have been reluctant to do so. Despite a lack of conclusive evidence that empirically

¹⁷ See Lewis (1994). Also see Geaves (2015); Gilliat-Ray (2006); and Noor *et al.*, (2008). How much of what remains of madrasas' logic and philosophy curricula, and the degree to which it is relevant and applicable to contemporary problems, are different albeit interesting questions. My own anecdotal experience with UK madrasa education involves systematic instruction in elementary logic and philosophical theology from Arabic textbooks.

¹⁸ See Nasr and Chittick (2007).

¹⁹ For an example of this type of reformist thinking in the context of the contemporary Deobandi school, see Noor *et al.*, (2008).

²⁰ See Noor *et al.*, (2008).

verifies this particular claim, past field research conducted in this area suggests a similar conclusion. There is a sufficient amount of published research on madrasa curricula, including studies of both global madrasas as well as those situated in the UK. Notable works in this body of literature include those by Ron Geaves,²¹ Sophie Gilliat-Ray, Noor *et al.*,²² Jonathan Scourfield, *et al.*,²³ Glenn Hardaker and A'ishah Sabki,²⁴ Robert Hefner,²⁵ Philip Lewis,²⁶ Ebrahim Moosa,²⁷ and Timothy Winter.²⁸ A survey of these works concludes that there is no indication of analytic Philosophy being taught in these institutions. Consequently, the absence of evidence for analytic Philosophy, despite the breadth of research on this topic, leads one to infer that although madrasa curricula frequently do include some form of Philosophy, analytic Philosophy, in particular, is not taught in madrasas in the UK. I argue that this not only indicates an ambivalence or disinterest in analytic Philosophy, but also a reluctance that madrasas harbour towards analytic Philosophy.²⁹ I propose that this is the case for two reasons. The first involves the conflicting nature of the kind of Philosophy traditionally included in madrasa curricula which predominates throughout higher education in the UK. Furthermore, I argue that this is related to the practice of CPI, which frequently relies on philosophical presuppositions that are at odds with the fundamentally religious objective of madrasas.

²¹ See Geaves (2018).

²² See Noor *et al.*, (2008).

²³ See Scourfield *et al.*, (2013).

²⁴ See Sabki and Hardaker (2013).

²⁵ See Hardaker and Sabki (2014).

²⁶ See Lewis (2004).

²⁷ See Moosa (2015).

²⁸ See Winter, in Memon and Zaman (2016).

²⁹ My claim that madrasas may harbour reluctance towards introducing analytic Philosophy is not substantiated by empirical data collected at UK madrasas themselves. To my knowledge, there is no current fieldwork which specifically verifies this claim. I intend to demonstrate my point by way of *theorising* in virtue of the *conceptual relationship* between UK madrasas, analytic Philosophy, and CPI. Though I concede that this does not offer *hard evidence* of how things actually are on the ground, it certainly provides a plausible *analysis* on the relationship between analytic Philosophy and UK madrasas. The kind, which from my personal experience, is representative of the reality on this matter.

Different Kinds of Philosophy in the United Kingdom

Islamic Philosophy in UK Madrasas

There is a stark distinction that should be made between the kind of Philosophy incorporated within UK madrasa curricula and the kind of Philosophy that is currently dominant in higher educational institutions in the UK. At the outset, it is important to acknowledge the curricular diversity of UK madrasas, both amongst separate educational institutions, as well as change over time in individual institutions. This diversity is caused by numerous factors, such as a given madrasa's affiliation with a particular legal school, its source of funding, and the ethnic and national background of its founders, faculty, and student body, and the ways in which these variables change over time. Additionally, madrasas in the UK are not centrally regulated by any Islamic educational body, which contributes to a diversity in curricula between different madrasas.

In spite of this diversity, the status of Philosophy instruction in UK madrasas exhibits certain common features. Most of the Philosophy and Logic included in UK madrasa curricula is Aristotelian in some form. This reflects the pre-modern madrasa tradition, where Peripatetic or Aristotelian philosophy was “firmly entrenched” since the medieval period.³⁰ Despite the fundamental role of Aristotle's (ca. 384–322 BCE) philosophy in the Arabic philosophical tradition,³¹ the specific type of Philosophy incorporated within contemporary madrasas reflects a process of gradual accumulation and change as Greek Philosophy and Logic developed³² from the beginning of the ‘Abbāsid translation movement (fl. ca. 750–1100) to the end of the 20th century. This kind of Philosophy and Logic within the madrasa is often confined to elementary book-based learning,³³ in which students progressively advance from more rudimentary to advanced philosophical theology texts, with an emphasis on

³⁰ See Walbridge (2010:95–96).

³¹ See Alwishah and Hayes (2015:1).

³² See El-Rouayheb and Schmidtke (2017).

³³ See Rescher (1963:19).

the interdisciplinary value of Philosophy and skills transferable to other disciplines. This offers them the opportunity to exercise their analytic and evaluative capabilities in order to deepen their insights when approaching a diverse range of subject matters.

Additionally, the Philosophy that occurs within madrasas is predominantly “Islamic.”³⁴ As Peter Adamson has remarked, the characterisation of “Islamic philosophy” distinguishes it not only from Christian and Jewish philosophy, but also from “Arabic philosophy,” i.e., philosophy written in Arabic, and the geographical categorisation “philosophy in the Islamic world.”³⁵ Despite its internal diversity, this type of philosophy is generally characterised by certain common qualities. In this regard, Seyyed Hossein Nasr distinguishes between Islamic and Western philosophy. For Nasr, philosophy in the West relies on the rational and sensuous faculties as a means of arriving at ultimate knowledge.³⁶ He refers to this as “secularized philosophy” in the sense that it has severed itself from revelatory (i.e., religious knowledge). For Islamic philosophy, on the other hand, pursuing ultimate knowledge with the means of reason and the senses is, instead, a supplementary task, given the limitations of human faculties.³⁷

³⁴ On the internal diversity of Islamic philosophy and its historical development, see Ziai, in Winter (2008:55).

³⁵ See Adamson (2016).

It is noteworthy that in certain cases, madrasa Philosophy curricula may engage with philosophical work beyond the conceptual boundaries of “Islamic” philosophy, depending on a given madrasa’s educational objectives. Despite this, I am reluctant to characterise such philosophy under the broader heading of “philosophy in the Islamic world,” for obvious geographical reasons.

In this regard, also see D’Ancona, in Alwishah and Hayes (2015:12–13).

³⁶ This is not to deny the internal diversity that exists within the Western philosophical tradition, which exhibits alternative and competing accounts of reason and rationality that cannot be overlooked. Nevertheless, what is at issue here is the divergent methodological foundations of Western and Islamic philosophy. On this, John Walbridge makes a noteworthy point: “Western ideas about reason are not the standard against which Islamic reason should be judged, there is, in any case, no single Western conception of reason to use as a touchstone, but Western intellectual history is diverse and thus unequalled as a point of comparison. The relationship of the West with reason has been complex and troubled and has generated a number of different conceptions of reason and the rational, as well as several antirationalist schools of thought.” (Walbridge, 2010:16).

³⁷ See Nasr (2006:31).

Consequently, the meaning and role of Islamic philosophy is largely determined by an Islamic ethos in order to serve the underlying and fundamental objective of a madrasa. Philosophy, in this sense, is not merely sympathetic to the Islamic belief system, but, in fact, presupposes it on the authority of sacred texts such as the Qur'ān and Hadith traditions. Consequently, Islamic philosophy considers the fundamental articles of the Islamic faith as foundational beliefs, to be supplemented and explicated via philosophy. Accordingly, the utility of philosophy, is in its function, a handmaiden to Islam. More importantly, such philosophy generally functions via a procedural use of reason, rather than a substantive one. Oliver Crisp alludes to the distinction between these modes of reasoning in the following excerpt:

The substantive use of reason depends on a highly contentious thesis, that reason alone, or reason and the senses, give us fundamental and general non-trivial knowledge about the world around us that every rational person can understand, or is capable of understanding, and on the basis of which every rational person is able to make sense of the world. Theology, on this view, must conform to reason in order for it to be taken seriously as an intellectual discipline. Contrast this strong use of reason in theology with the weaker, procedural sense. On this way of thinking, reason is a tool for establishing the logical connections between different propositions, for distinguishing what I am talking about from what I am not, and whether what I am saying makes sense, or is incoherent. Such reasoning also enables me to consider the validity of a particular argument that is put forward, and whether or not it is subject to less obvious defects of reasoning, like question-begging or affirming the consequent, and so on. (Crisp, in Crisp and Rea, 2009:41)

It would seem problematic to commit to the substantive use of reason while simultaneously espousing certain Islamic beliefs, and no less so in a madrasa setting. The problem would lie in attempting to make substantive sense of certain articles of

faith within the Islamic tradition that are not susceptible to any putative modes of human reasoning, including formal logic.

One such issue concerns God's essence and attributes,³⁸ which exhibits an unequivocal defiance of the law of non-contradiction.³⁹ This is articulated in Abū Ḥaf's 'Umar al-Nasafi's (d. 1142) Māturīdī creed as "God has pre-eternal attributes subsisting in His essence. They are not He and nor other than He" (Nasafi, trans by Watt, in Renard, 2014:114).⁴⁰ Focusing on the second claim of this creed, it would be deemed false by standards of classical logic in that it results in a contradiction. The logical form of this statement would be represented by way of a double negation as follows: $(\neg F(a) \wedge \neg(\neg F(a)))$.⁴¹ This would read as: object *a* does not have property *F*, nor does it *not* have property *F*. This logical notation can equally be represented as $(a \wedge \neg a)$ because, according to the equivalence relation, any instant of a double negation such as $\neg\neg a$ can be replaced without altering the truth value.⁴² Such a claim would explicitly exhibit a logical inconsistency. Consequently, it would fail to provide non-trivial knowledge that possesses any meaningful cognitive content. Therefore, the appeal to a substantive use of reason would work against such articles of belief rather than assisting them, which runs counter to the above characterisation of Islamic philosophy as a handmaid to religious truth.

³⁸ I have chosen to focus on this tenet of belief having appreciated the substantial theological controversy surrounding it. Moreover, my reason for selecting this tenet is not merely because it has, as Nader El-Bizri puts it, "primarily remained a classical madrasa problem" that specifically refers to the matter of God's essence and attributes. (El-Bizri, 2008:137.) Instead, I have selected it as an example of a central theological contention which, despite occasioning sophisticated metaphysical explanations, fundamentally fails to be rationalised. Given this, I feel that it serves as a pertinent example demonstrating the discord between certain tenets of Islamic belief and the philosophical dialogue exercised by CPI.

³⁹ See Restall, in Priest *et al.*, (2004:75).

⁴⁰ "It is important to note that Abū Ḥasan 'Alī al-Ash'arī (d. 936)—eponym of the predominant school of Sunni theology—instead proposed that God's eternal attributes are neither identical to, nor other than God Himself." (Thiele, in Schmidtke, 2016:228)

⁴¹ This can also be expressed as: $\forall x \forall F \neg \Diamond (Fx \wedge \neg Fx)$; meaning 'for any object *x*, and any property *F*, it is not possibly the case that *x* is both *F* and not-*F*'. Or alternatively: $\forall x \forall \Box \neg (Fx \wedge \neg Fx)$ meaning "for any object *x*, and any property *F*, it is necessarily not the case that *x* is both *F* and not-*F*."

⁴² This is according to the principle of double negation: $A \leftrightarrow (\sim \sim A)$.

Given the shortcomings of substantive reason in this regard, it raises the question as to whether a procedural use of reason would have any more success in making sense of such contradictory beliefs. Strictly speaking, it would not, given that a procedural use of reason operates within the system of classical logic,⁴³ leaving no room for accepting contradictions as being true. It is another question altogether as to whether a procedural use of reason can operate within the scope of paraconsistent logics⁴⁴ and Dialetheism,⁴⁵ and whether it would bear any utility for such matters. However, despite the inability to account for contradictory beliefs, it is not necessary to discard the procedural use of reason altogether. It could be, and often is, used in an apophatic sense in determining what cannot be the case when it comes to matters of this kind.

This means to suggest that its functionality need not be focused on substantially affirming or denying the matter in question, and especially not matters that are contradictory.

⁴³ For a more in-depth examination of this, see Restall, in Priest *et al.*, (2004:75).

⁴⁴ In classical logic, a theory Γ is by definition consistent if no pairs of contradictory propositions α , $\neg\alpha$ are deducible from Γ . If, however, a pair of contradictory propositions α , $\neg\alpha$ are deducible from Γ , then it is inconsistent. It is evident that being consistent and inconsistent in this particular case is contingent upon the law of non-contradiction. Violating the law of non-contradiction would allow for anything to logically follow. This is more commonly known as the Principle of Explosion which is referred to as *ex contradictione sequitur quodlibet* in Latin. The principle of explosion in classical logic is a logically valid inference. This means that triggering a contradiction would logically entail everything: α , $\neg\alpha \models \beta$, for all α and β . Given that anything logically follows from a contradiction, it would imply triviality. Nevertheless, paraconsistent logical systems overcome this issue by engaging with contradictions whereby explosion is considered as an invalid inference. On this view, a contradiction would not logically entail everything: α , $\neg\alpha \not\models \beta$. Consequently, paraconsistent logic can be considered as a non-entailment claim. This shift from classical (two-valued) logic not only opens up the prospect for paraconsistent logic to engage with inconsistent information, but it does so within the province of rationality because it circumvents triviality. The primary difference between classical logic and paraconsistent logic can thus be reduced to conforming to and defying the law of non-contradiction respectively.

⁴⁵ Graham Priest, who is one of the prominent advocates of dialetheism provides the following definition: "Specifically, a dialetheia is a true contradiction, a pair, α and $\neg\alpha$, which are both true (or equivalently, supposing a normal notion of conjunction, a truth of the form $\alpha \wedge \neg\alpha$). A dialetheist is therefore a person who holds that some contradictions are true." (Priest, 2005:131). To better appreciate a dialetheist's position that some contradictions are true, consider a trivialist, who holds that all contradictions are true.

Instead, its utility is confined to ruling out instances that occupy the two opposing extremes of this contradiction. Therefore, it can serve as a candidate for circumventing attempts at making substantive and logical sense of the belief itself⁴⁶. In this sense, it could act as a handmaid, despite the limitations of its functionality. Furthermore, such a mode of reasoning would prove to be sympathetic and appreciative towards the epistemological limitations of the Islamic faith. Crucially, it would be capable of espousing the transcendence of an Islamic God, as understood in the Māturīdī creed referenced above.

Analytic Philosophy in UK Higher Education

In contrast to the modes of philosophy practiced in contemporary UK madrasas, the kind of Philosophy currently dominant in higher education in the UK is analytic Philosophy.⁴⁷ As Hans-Johann Glock describes it, analytic Philosophy is a “dominant force within Western philosophy,” (Glock, 2008:1). and is frequently associated with the English-speaking world,⁴⁸ reflecting the greater dominance of analytic philosophy in the United States and the United Kingdom. Such scholars as Aaron Preston⁴⁹ and Greg Frost-Arnold⁵⁰ concur that the dominance of analytic philosophy in the United States and the UK is beyond dispute. Frost-Arnold, furthermore, refers to the UNESCO report that explicitly characterises the current era in the UK as one in which academic philosophy that takes place is analytic and critical.⁵¹

⁴⁶ See Karz (2019).

⁴⁷ I have opted to focus on analytic philosophy as opposed to philosophy generally because of its uniquely fierce tension with Islamic educational institutions and Islamic philosophy generally. Whereas there is, as described above, a type of philosophy that is already taught in Islamic seminaries, a different situation pertains in the case of analytic philosophy. In my other published works, I have addressed specific topics related to the relationship between Islam and analytic philosophy. See: Ahsan (all works) listed in the bibliography.

⁴⁸ See Beaney (2015).

⁴⁹ See Preston (2010).

⁵⁰ See Frost-Arnold, in Lapointe and Pincock (2017).

⁵¹ “The UNESCO report, mentioned above in Sect. 5.3, states ‘[W]e are admittedly, in Britain, living in a period when the dominant temper of academic philosophy is analytic and critical rather than speculative’ (1953:119).” (Frost-Arnold, in Lapointe & Pincock, 2017:56)

One might assume that the dominance of analytic philosophy in the anglophone world derives from its relative superiority over other forms of philosophy, such as UK idealism, the influence of which has been eclipsed since the First World War.⁵² However, it is important to acknowledge that analytic philosophy in the UK has been shaped by other European philosophical movements and historical developments. Thomas Akehurst alludes to this by suggesting that as UK universities adopted what came to be known as analytic philosophy, its differences with the mainstream practice of philosophy in Europe resulted in the split between the analytic and continental philosophical traditions.⁵³ This does not imply that analytic philosophy primarily emerged as a reactionary intellectual movement, but rather that the two emerged via a process of mutual exchange and differentiation.⁵⁴

Similar to Islamic philosophical traditions discussed above, analytic philosophy has, likewise, changed substantially since its inception. As Stephen Schwartz notes, its development is a multifaceted process influenced by political events, technological advances, changes in other intellectual disciplines, and disciplinary self-awareness.⁵⁵ Consequently, a concise definition of analytic philosophy remains elusive. The lack of a commonly accepted definition has had a detrimental effect, having obscured its methods and functionality. For some, however, such a definition is not necessarily desirable. As Aloysius Martinich and E. David Sosa assert in the opening sentence of the introduction of *Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology*, analytic philosophy in the 20th century is not defined nor should it be conceived of as resting upon any particular set of doctrines or methods.⁵⁶ Rather, they caution their readers that philosophers in the analytic tradition are infamous for having espoused diametrically opposed positions and embraced various methods of enquiry to the extent that enumerating or describing them in detail is an arduous task. In this regard, Preston characterises analytic philosophy

⁵² See Vrahimis (2013:4).

⁵³ See Akehurst (2011).

⁵⁴ See Akehurst (2011).

⁵⁵ See Schwartz (2012).

⁵⁶ See Martinich and Sosa (2001:1).

as un-philosophical, claiming that its failure “to provide a metaphilosophical and methodological account of ... [its] manner of philosophizing counts as a tremendous oversight” rendering it “un-philosophical in an important sense.”⁵⁷

Despite the difficulties in defining analytic philosophy, however, the fact that it is identified as a distinct philosophical tradition indicates that there must be some common features distinguishing it from other kinds of philosophy. Consequently, that which is commonly identified as “analytic philosophy” cannot occupy a completely neutral position in the absence of any theoretical presuppositions. In this regard, Nicholas Wolterstorff has highlighted two characteristics common to works classified as analytic philosophy, namely, a reliance on logical positivism, and a basis in classical foundationalism.⁵⁸ Elaboration on these two characteristics is beyond the scope of this chapter. Rather, what is important is emphasising the fact that analytic philosophy subscribes to particular foundational views and has done so throughout its history.⁵⁹ To that end, one can state that analytic philosophy exhibits a few distinguishing methodological features. To borrow from Scott Soames, these are not necessarily explicit rules, but rather, underlying themes and tendencies.⁶⁰ Michael Rea has presented two of these themes, which he calls, “the rhetoric[al] style and ambitions of analytic philosophy.”⁶¹ Concerning the latter, he states:

The ambitions [of analytic philosophy] seem generally to be to these: (i) to identify the scope and limits of our powers to obtain knowledge of the world, and (ii) to provide such true explanatory theories as we can in areas of inquiry (metaphysics, morals, and the like) that fall outside the scope of the natural sciences. (Rea, in Crisp & Rea, 2009:4)

⁵⁷ See Preston (2010).

⁵⁸ See Wolterstorff, in Crisp and Rea (2009).

⁵⁹ Putting aside the intellectual presuppositions of particular thinkers associated with analytic philosophy, it is clear that the analytic tradition as a whole has developed over time in such a way that it is associated with specific philosophical presuppositions. In this regard, see Symons, in Poli and Seibt (2010).

⁶⁰ See Soames (2003).

⁶¹ See Rea, in Crisp and Rea (2009:4).

These ambitions help to illustrate the distinction between analytic and continental philosophy. For a continental philosopher, the first of these ambitions would be an investigation into the parameters of conceivability and an attempt to outline the confines of the power of human apprehension in obtaining knowledge. However, as indicated by Rea, the primary ambition of analytic philosophy is, instead, undertaking a critical project determined to examine the conceptual feasibility of particular kinds of epistemological foundations. This ambition, thus, seeks to demonstrate how the acquisition of knowledge is possible, in general, and attempts to establish the foundations of knowledge that allow for the emergence of various epistemological theories. Building on this, the second ambition attempts to implement certain modes of reasoning in order to obtain local and global explanations of the world. The local, i.e., particular explanations of phenomena, include morality, causation, and composition. These contribute to erecting more comprehensive structures that provide global explanations, such as human cognitive structures and fundamental properties and entities.

An alternative, and perhaps, a broader way to characterise analytic philosophy is articulated by John Symons.⁶² Drawing on contemporary analytic philosophy and ontology, he presents three competing principles by which they are conditioned. The first is an implementation of common-sense theses and explanations. The second involves subscribing to and applying a realistic approach to basic philosophical questions. The third is a commitment to how language and logic inform ontology. While these principles and ambitions are not to be taken as conclusive, they are, nonetheless, helpful in identifying analytic philosophy's more prominent methodological features.

From Symons' and Rea's accounts of analytic philosophy, it would, therefore, seem that analytic philosophy predominantly operates via a substantive use of reason. Both of their accounts epitomise the rational and epistemological modes by means of which it makes sense of the world.⁶³ Despite being frequently

⁶² See Symons, in Poli and Seibt (2010).

⁶³ Nicholas Rescher makes an unequivocal identification between philosophy and the project of making sense of things. He, therefore, suggests that the abandonment of

represented as a pluralistic enterprise, analytic philosophy is highly committed to a certain realist metaphysics and particular axioms within the domain of classical logic which allow it to rationally explicate various phenomena. From the perspective of a substantive use of reason, such intellectual commitments would necessarily be extended to theological matters. In other words, these same modes of thought would be carried over and applied in making sense of all matters of faith. This, in turn, results in what is referred to as analytic theology.⁶⁴ In the case of the contradictory article of faith from the Māturidī creed referenced above, both substantive and procedural uses of reason would conclude that this article is false. The difference between them lies, however, in the choice between making logical sense of what is believed to be the case, on the one hand, and determining what cannot logically be believed, on the other.

An apophatic application of the substantive use of reason would not leave room to subscribe to the contradictory belief, for two reasons. First, because negating both horns of the dilemma would leave no intermediate position, as it would be a clear violation of the law of the excluded middle.⁶⁵ Second, adopting either position would demand making further substantive and logical sense of that same position. Consequently, despite the procedural use of reason being able to demonstrate what is not the case with respect to both opposing views on the issue, it would reject the subsequent assertion of a contradictory belief. This kind of philosophy would, thus, not seem amenable to the underlying and fundamental objective of a madrasa, i.e., the preservation of the Islamic faith, in that it would actively call into question particular articles of faith which are themselves not consistent with the modes by which analytic philosophy primarily operates. Alternatively, the procedural use of reason need not be

philosophy would imply withdrawing from the project of making sense of things. See Rescher, in D'Oro and Overgaard (2017). A.W. Moore holds a similar view: "Philosophy is an attempt, by humans, from their unique position in the world, to make sense both of themselves and of that position" (Moore, in D'Oro & Overgaard, 2017:45).

⁶⁴ For a description of analytic theology and its relationship to analytic philosophy, see Rea in Crisp and Rea (2009:7).

⁶⁵ The law of excluded middle: $\alpha \vee \neg\alpha$.

so demanding, being satisfied once having demonstrated what is not the case. In this regard, I am of an opinion similar to Ann Margaret Sharp, who has also advocated a procedural use of reason, specifically as a means of diversifying CPI.⁶⁶

The Promotion and Practice of Philosophy via CPI

In addition to being a dominant force within philosophy departments in the UK, analytic philosophy also exerts an influence beyond the academy with the help of organisations that promote and practice in CPI. As I shall go on to demonstrate, the way in which most of these organisations introduce and coordinate CPI in non-academic settings may, in fact, correspond to methodologies that are predominantly associated with analytic philosophy.⁶⁷ This does not imply that CPI is a homogenous enterprise that is necessarily connected to analytic philosophy. Such a claim, either way, would be extremely difficult to prove.⁶⁸ Consequently, I argue for neither an absolute connection nor disassociation between analytic philosophy and CPI, but rather propose that CPI often operates via methodologies predominantly associated with analytic philosophy. The most significant of such methodologies are the use of critical thinking and informal logic.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Sharp states that “we can educate children to identify and agree upon a procedural conception of what it is to reason well... this education is an education in procedural principles (as contrasted with substantive principles) that can help young persons to move towards objectivity, towards an impartial and shared view of the world that has been subjected to public inquiry” (Sharp, 1987:39–40).

⁶⁷ I should like to emphasise that the academic pursuit of analytic philosophy, which is usually associated with universities, and the philosophy introduced in non-academic settings are not completely distinct. The most significant differences between the two involve how both are taught and presented. This does not mean that organisations promoting and practicing CPI are confined to the analytic tradition, and it is likely there are such organisations making use of continental and other modes of philosophy also. Nevertheless, I maintain that no organisation involved with CPI can claim *absolute* conceptual neutrality, and moreover that the underlying presumptions subtending CPI are the very same underlying frameworks generally associated with analytic philosophy.

⁶⁸ This is because such a claim would require ascertaining a universally accepted method of practicing CPI, as well as a decisive definition and method of analytic philosophy. Given the lack of consensus on both of these issues, any claim to a connection between them would be premature and reductive.

⁶⁹ “Also called logical pragmatics. Informal logic investigates the relations of implication arising from subject matter words and the contents of a discourse.

As for critical thinking, its influence in the Western academy can be traced to the 1950s, which observed a shift in focus from emphasis on cognitive skills to critical thinking. The questions that catalysed this transition were first explored by the educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom (1913–1999) and his colleagues at the University of Chicago.⁷⁰ As a result of their work, amongst others, the concept of critical thinking gained traction, and fast became a major objective of the educational system. However, this concept was not without its sceptics and detractors. As Matthew Lipman put it, this was largely because of “sovereign Piagetianism, the dominant force in child psychology from the 1930s through the 1970s.”⁷¹ An even more fervent resurgence of critical thinking occurred in the late 1970s, at which time the concept was aligned with the contemporaneous movement for informal logic. Matthew Lipman notes that while the term “informal logic” itself may have originated “with Gilbert Ryle’s use of it in his article ‘Formal and Informal Logic,’ ... there can be no doubt that the analysis of natural language by [Ludwig] Wittgenstein, [J. L.] Austin, and [Gilbert] Ryle had done much to prepare the way for an informal logic movement.”⁷²

The “analysis of natural language” to which Lipman refers is one of the major features of the so-called “linguistic turn” in Western philosophy, which was itself the point at which analytic philosophy was born.⁷³ Additionally, as mentioned

It concerns the nature and function of arguments or assertions in natural language whose richness cannot be exhausted in formal logic. Informal logic is not as precise as formal logic and its findings are relative to given contexts. Its major topics include matters such as incomplete patterns of arguments, conversational implicature, informal fallacies, and rhetorical techniques for persuasion. In contrast, formal logic deals with semantic rather than pragmatic relationships, especially with the entailments arising from the formal or structural words of propositions. While formal logic regards argument as a set of propositions and examines their truth-value, informal logic deals with the use of propositions to carry out the various aims of dialogue in everyday reasoning. Informal logic takes account of the wider context of dialogue and seeks to understand how we legitimately convince or persuade in reason-able discourse” (Bunnin & Yu, 2009:347).

⁷⁰ See Lipman (2003:39).

⁷¹ See Lipman (2003:39–40).

⁷² See Lipman (2003:40–41).

⁷³ For more on the connection between the linguistic turn and analytic philosophy, see Dummett (2014).

above concerning the methodology of analytic philosophy, Symons' third competing principle appears to accentuate the significance of language in analytic philosophy.⁷⁴ To make the connection between critical thinking, informal logic, and analytic philosophy a little more explicit, Glock asserts the following: "analytic philosophy is to a considerable extent informal logic, 'critical thinking' in the lingo of contemporary syllabi, applied to philosophical discourse."⁷⁵ As I previously emphasised, this does not imply that CPI and analytic philosophy are necessarily connected. It does, however, demonstrate that the inclusion in CPI of such features as critical thinking and informal logic involves the insertion of methodologies predominantly associated with analytic philosophy.

Let us take stock of the implications of this. Analytic philosophy, as we have noted, exercises a substantive use of reason. Therefore, it appears to be at odds with certain articles of the Islamic faith. If this is the case, then it follows by extension that the incorporation of methodologies associated with analytic philosophy into the practice of CPI would, therefore, also put it at odds with articles of the Islamic faith. Such a practice of CPI would be problematic for madrasa education, insofar as it would be at odds with their fundamental objective, viz. the preservation of the Islamic faith. Consequently, this can lead to a reluctance towards incorporating this kind of philosophy within its curriculum.

This problem is, of course, limited to only those practices of CPI that incorporate critical thinking and formal logic in their methodology. While there are some organisations practicing CPI that opt not to include such methodologies, the question emerges as to how effective their alternative approach can be. Consequently, organisations opting to practice CPI without critical thinking and formal logic may instead choose to associate themselves with continental philosophy, which manifests these features somewhat differently. In that regard, Lipman notes that the connection between critical thinking and continental philosophy can best be observed in "the work on rhetoric and argumentation of such writers as Chaim Perelman, Paul Ricoeur,

⁷⁴ See Symons, in Poli and Seibt (2010).

⁷⁵ See Glock (2008:134).

Arne Naess, Hans Blumenberg, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jacques Derrida.”⁷⁶

Organisations that adopt a continental approach towards CPI may prioritise features of rhetoric and literary projections instead of more rigid methods of analysis such as informal logic. However, despite the stark methodological differences between these overall philosophical approaches, it seems that both would work towards a common goal, as far as CPI is concerned. Lipman succinctly summarises how we can reconcile this despite their methodological differences because both pursue a similar goal:

In a sense, informal logicians and rhetoricians attack the same problem from different directions and in the best of all worlds could be expected to meet somewhere in the middle, like the crews building a tunnel by starting at either side of a river. Both are examining claims to reasonableness (and therefore are concerned with the theory of rationality). But the informal logicians move toward a new conception of reasonableness by broadening and refining the concept of logic, while the rhetoricians do so by examining writing that is not or does not appear to be formally logical, in an effort to determine what justification such prose may claim to have to being reasonable. Moreover, both are inclined to focus on argumentation, but the one group emphasizes the persuasive force of argument while the other emphasizes its logical force. (Lipman, 2003:41–42)

Alongside these approaches, there are further approaches to CPI not necessarily affiliated with specific philosophical movements. Such approaches, instead, focus on components of problem-solving and/or decision-making. The choice to disassociate from a particular kind of philosophy may be unintentional but can also, in fact, be a conscious choice on the part of such organisations that do not want to identify themselves with any particular mode of philosophy, be it continental, analytic, or Eastern philosophies. Instead, they may present themselves as being open to implementing a whole range of

⁷⁶ See Lipman (2003:41–42).

pedagogical methods that allow them greater flexibility in obtaining their objectives. For example, such an approach may involve subscribing to a basic form of the Socratic method (i.e., a method rooted in dialogic questioning), and successively building on it from a variety of perspectives, perhaps considering shared experience and new research.

While such an approach may be putatively neutral and thus appealing, these organisations are like philosophical movements, which are characterised by theoretical presuppositions, regardless of the diverse types of pedagogical approaches to which they may be amenable. This is because adopting any pedagogical approach necessarily assumes an underlying philosophical position. Even the choice to utilise the Socratic method still requires some theoretical or pragmatic groundwork as justification for its use instead of alternative approaches.

Consequently, on closer inspection, it is clear that such an approach cannot itself be called neutral in an absolute sense. Such a claim would be unsubstantiated and contrary to the very foundations upon which the concept of CPI is erected. Moreover, in the absence of theoretical or pragmatic groundwork, assuming the neutrality of such an approach would result in trivialising that form of CPI and render it effectively arbitrary. This is precisely why most methodological approaches employed in mainstream philosophy are substantiated by certain philosophical axioms. These axioms are not merely responsible for providing the underlying theoretical substance of subsequent positions.

A set of axioms do more than this, however. They not only provide the groundwork for subsequent philosophical work, but also shape the way in which that work is carried out. To illustrate this, suppose it is inferred that CPI is promoted and practiced by means of some so-called “neutral” method, such as that suggested above. By design, such a methodology would disassociate itself from mainstream philosophical traditions and would furthermore exhibit openness to a variety of pedagogical approaches. Altogether, this would purportedly create a genuinely impartial environment for thinking and discussion. Putting aside the various ways in which one could construct such a purportedly “neutral” framework, one must ask exactly how neutral this

putative neutrality can be. For the reasons discussed above, I am not convinced that such neutrality can be easily proven or disproven in the absence of additional presuppositions. One reason for this is that an attempt to substantiate either claim inevitably relies on assuming some position on the matter, with its own presuppositions, thus resulting in an argument that collapses into a paradox of self-reference. Moreover, one might ask how neutrality can be adequately predicated, if it is independent from any presupposed views.

Granted the concession that no absolute form of neutrality is possible for the practice of CPI, it follows that relying on some theoretical, or in this case, philosophical position is unavoidable. This does not imply that such positions need be associated with analytic philosophy. Although it is important to note that presupposed theoretical or philosophical views certainly have a considerable influence on how philosophy may actually be practiced. I shall demonstrate this particular point in light of how certain presupposed views may influence our philosophical methodology and the practice of CPI. Let me begin with the claim that there are certain underlying positions that can dynamically shape subsequent philosophical work. To appreciate these, take the notion of truth for instance:

The question of truth and one's response to it are what give shape to the way in which one practices philosophy (including the philosophy of religion), and so far from being a peripheral question, it lies at the very heart of metaphilosophy. As John Sallis has noted: "It is not as though philosophy is first delimited as such and then brought to bear on the question of truth; rather, the way in which the question of truth is addressed, the way in which truth is determined as such, determines the very project of philosophy." (Trakakis, 2013:367)

One's conception of truth thus determines and shapes philosophical praxis. This can be substantiated with a view to either logic or metaphysics. If subscribing to the laws of logic, it means that I hold them to be true. Therefore, I would declare that a contradiction must necessarily be false, and a tautology must

necessarily be true. My acceptance of these fundamental axioms would then demand that I accept whatever outcomes emerge, where they are validly applied. Otherwise, accepting the laws of logic as true while rejecting the consequences of these laws would be inconsistent. Logic thus presupposes a notion of truth and falsehood. Furthermore, the notion of truth is interrelated with metaphysics, in the sense of either determining or being constrained by it.

To illustrate, suppose I accept a particular type of correspondence theory of truth. The way that this notion of truth is understood would determine how I proceed to use it in considering and making sense of the world. It would thus shape the way in which I philosophise, ensuring that my thoughts and conclusions are consistent with this specific way of conceptualising truth, i.e., the particular correspondence theory to which I subscribe. Moreover, this conception of truth would also constrain my perspective of the world, in that it would preclude an opposing or alternative theory of truth that may have allowed me to conceive of the world differently. These considerations are relevant to CPI insofar as they demonstrate that preconceived views on logic and truth can considerably shape the way in which one practices philosophy. Therefore, these presupposed views would, in turn, influence the philosophy that occurs in a given CPI context. In this sense, it is difficult if not impossible to consider CPI itself free from certain underlying philosophical views.

To appreciate this further, let us consider how CPI is characterised and how it generally operates. Despite the difficulties in defining CPI, it can be said that, at a minimum, it presupposes a notion of truth and the classical laws of logic. This is something which prominent practitioners who have actively engaged in CPI have indicated.⁷⁷ Lipman for instance,

⁷⁷ As a philosophy practitioner, I have witnessed the practical implementation of both these presuppositions that are deeply entrenched in CPI. My experience has entirely consisted of observing CPI in sessions that have been prepared and coordinated with a presupposed notion of substantive truth and the classical laws of logic. Despite the productivity of such initiatives, my engagement with CPI has led me to conclude that repeatedly building upon these presuppositions has created an implicit and institutionalised mindset as to how it should function and the results that it should produce. I have thus witnessed that an implicit approval of these presuppositions

refers to the connection between communities of inquiry and logic, stating that “communities of inquiry are characterized by dialogue that is disciplined by logic. One must reason in order to follow what is going on in them.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, Ann Margaret Sharp,⁷⁹ Nadia Kennedy and David Kennedy⁸⁰ have all referenced these components in their attempts to characterise CPI. Sharp, in particular, acknowledges that the cumulative experiences that a child has in the course of practicing CPI would fail in accurately determining its underlying philosophical presuppositions. In this regard, Sharp makes an important distinction between superficial qualities, which might easily be considered indicative of CPI, and the underlying presuppositions upon which each of these qualities and behaviours are implicitly established, one of these being how participants conceive of certainty and truth.

In their analysis, Nadia Kennedy and David Kennedy characterise CPI as a multifaceted discursive activity which specifically engages in systematic dialogue with respect to philosophical concepts. Aside from the descriptive aspects of their account, Nadia Kennedy and David Kennedy notably refer to a few of its prescriptive aspects as “claims [that] are argued through standard logical entailment,” including the use of “classical laws of thought [such as] (identity, non-contradiction, and the excluded middle).”⁸¹ The application of these prescriptive aspects would prove fundamental in allowing CPI to fulfil the functions with which it is characterised. One way to appreciate this is to think about how effectively the current and predominant characteristics ascribed to CPI could be fulfilled without the classical laws of logic and/or with an alternative notion of truth. Although such alternatives might not render CPI completely counterproductive, it would nonetheless give way to inconsistencies and hinder the kind of progress attributed to CPI,

has almost become an underlying substrate upon which a great deal of varied discussions of CPI have been established. In this sense, the outcomes of such sessions appear to be marginally predetermined, as they impact the presuppositions of CPI facilitators and participants.

⁷⁸ See Lipman (2003:92–93).

⁷⁹ See Sharp (1987).

⁸⁰ See Kennedy and Kennedy (2011).

⁸¹ See Kennedy and Kennedy (2011:269).

at least with respect to classical logic. As a result of these views, it would seem reasonable to assume that no organisation involved in promoting and practicing CPI is devoid of certain fundamental underlying philosophical presuppositions. Therefore, organisations promoting CPI cannot lay claim to being absolutely neutral in this sense.

From the above considerations, there are thus three interrelated conclusions that can be drawn that have significant implications for the relationship between analytic philosophy and UK madrasa curricula. First, organisations involved in promoting and practicing CPI cannot lay claim to absolute conceptual neutrality. In other words, all instances of CPI include underlying philosophical presuppositions. Second, if these underlying philosophical presuppositions exercise a substantive use of reason and subscribe to the classical laws of logic, as most of them seemingly do, then CPI is generally at odds with certain fundamental articles of the Islamic faith. Finally, this implies that, as currently practiced, CPI is actively at odds with the underlying and fundamental objective of a madrasa, viz. the preservation of the Islamic faith. Therefore, it is difficult to consider how madrasas may incorporate analytic philosophy, as practiced both academically and by organisations engaging in CPI, given that its method of philosophising poses an active threat to the preservation of faith. Consequently, accommodations must be made to facilitate the inclusion of analytic philosophy in madrasa curricula.

Reconciling Analytic Philosophy and Madrasas: Two Recommendations

In the course of what I have discussed so far, one can distinguish between two different kinds of philosophies and the modes in which they are practiced, both in madrasas and institutions of higher education in the UK. Generally, the philosophy practiced in UK madrasas is a type of Islamic philosophy. Therefore, it is driven by an Islamic ethos in order to serve the underlying and fundamental objective of a madrasa, namely, to preserve the Islamic faith. This kind of Islamic philosophy operates having presupposed Islamic religious beliefs and is deployed in service to these. Moreover, this philosophy is practiced

in a mode consistent with the goal of preserving the Islamic faith, and functions by means of a procedural use of reason that can apophatically account for articles of faith that are treated axiomatically.

Alternatively, analytic philosophy is the predominant type of philosophy practiced in higher educational institutions in the UK. The nature of analytic philosophy is somewhat elusive. Its commitment to particular kinds of linguistic and logical analyses can complicate attempts at defining it. More often than not, such analyses are self-critical, giving the impression that analytic philosophy does not subscribe to any foundational epistemological attitudes. Attempting to define it methodologically is, however, a highly contested area that does not offer conclusive answers. Despite these definitional and methodological ambiguities, analytic philosophy cannot be said to occupy a completely neutral position. Rather, it necessarily subscribes to various underlying theoretical assumptions. In light of some of the more distinct theoretical assumptions of analytic philosophy, it can be said that it primarily functions via a substantive use of reason.

Consequently, there are not only different kinds of philosophies being practiced in various educational institutions in the UK, but the ways in which they are practiced also vary. This complicates the task of introducing analytic philosophy into madrasa curricula. To that end, I propose two tentative solutions to this issue, neither of which are intended to be exhaustive or conclusive. They are brief prospective outlooks on the problems posed throughout this chapter that deserve further exploration. The first of these focuses on how analytic philosophy should be modified so as to accommodate a belief system which espouses alternative and contradictory beliefs. It approaches this issue of divergent philosophies and philosophical modes from a theoretical perspective. The second of these focuses on how various organisations that promote and practice CPI should be more comprehensive in their approach. Consequently, this solution approaches the issue from a practical and institutional perspective in order to address how various organisations can promote and practice CPI in a broader and more inclusive way. In this regard, this approach can accommodate the central objective of madrasas as religious institutions. Returning to

Nasr's suggestion expressed in the introduction, I believe that both recommendations not only concur with Nasr's two practical steps but successfully manage to combine them. I think that this combination plausibly posits one way of addressing the challenges encountered by madrasas while preserving the classical Islamic intellectual tradition.

Recommendation One

As my first recommendation, I argue that analytic philosophy should be more open to criticising the foundational axioms that it considers to be self-evident. Such self-evident truths differ from the type of propositions that are usually associated with analytic philosophy. This is because analytic philosophy emphasises arguments that are logically rigorous, i.e., constructed in a specific way that includes a proposition and premises supporting that conclusion. Naturally, we often assume that the minimum number of premises supporting any given proposition is greater than zero. However, this is not the case with self-evident propositions, which are independent of supporting premises. Such propositions, of course, fail to conform to the standards of logical argument in that they do not present any reasons in support of the purported conclusion. Nevertheless, when such propositions are accepted without supporting argumentation, it implies that nothing can contradict them and, therefore, they are referred to as "self-evident" truths. Given this, if there is any true statement which serves as the premise of a self-evident truth, it would result in the conclusion being true. Furthermore, if a self-evident truth is supported by an argument, then that argument cannot be invalid. One prominent example of a self-evident truth is known as the law of non-contradiction. This rule simply states that it cannot be the case that something is, and is not the case at the same time in the same way. Since antiquity, the law of non-contradiction has generally been considered to be self-evident, and its validity has not been seriously questioned within the bounds of classical logic.⁸² Self-evident truths, such as the law of non-contradiction,

⁸² The law of non-contradiction is conspicuous as one of Aristotle's views that has not been significantly contested, let alone widely rejected, since antiquity. Graham Priest sums this up rather succinctly in the following manner: "With the exception

are not challenged within the purview of analytic philosophy as often as one might expect.⁸³ One likely reason for this has to do with the difficulties in being able to articulate why something that itself appears as self-evident should be challenged.

There are, however, non-classical systems of logic, such as paraconsistent logics, that do challenge some of the presumptions of classical logic by means of which most of analytic philosophy operates. Such logics are able to deal with contradictory scenarios, avoiding triviality by rejecting the Principle of Explosion, which maintains that any conclusion can be reached from a contradiction.⁸⁴ The particular ways in which these non-classical logics challenge the presumptions of classical logic is beyond the scope of this chapter. What matters, however, is that they do. This implies not only a different way of conceiving of logic, but also implies alternative modes of understanding the world, both semantically and metaphysically. It would appear that their understanding of contradictory statements does not have to result in conceiving them as logically and intuitively false. Awareness of such approaches provides a broader conceptual outlook into matters that are otherwise quickly discarded as contradictory and false by the standards of classical logic.

Analytic philosophy should be more open to exploring such approaches. It should not do so merely to engage with certain contradictory articles of belief within the Islamic tradition. Instead, I believe that broadening the methodological approaches of analytic philosophy would allow it to function

of Hegel and his fellow-travellers, and whilst Aristotle's opinion on nearly every other matter has been overturned, or at least challenged, nearly every Western philosopher and logician has accepted the authority of Aristotle on this matter. There is hardly a defence of the Law since Aristotle's worth mentioning." According to Priest, Aristotle's view regarding the law of non-contradiction has been upheld as high orthodoxy since the medieval times, especially in the Western philosophical tradition" (Priest, 2006:7).

⁸³ This attitude has not merely persisted, but, as J.C. Beall puts it, remains "an entrenched 'unassailable dogma' of Western thought" (Beall, in Priest *et al.*, 2004:3).

⁸⁴ *Ex falso quodlibet*, also known as explosion, the absurdity rule, or negation elimination, indicates that the rule of inference that allows one to infer any formula whatsoever from a contradiction (that is, from a formula and its negation). It is the distinctive feature of paraconsistent logics that *ex falso quodlibet* fails.

beyond the current semantic, metaphysical, and logical modes that are predominantly advocated. It would thus have the conceptual liberty of being able to analyse in a multidimensional mode, allowing analytic philosophers to operate in ways that are multifaceted yet contextual. A broader perspective of this kind would create greater theoretical diversity and allow for a sympathetic awareness of religious contexts, in the sense that it would require analytic philosophers to consider religious truth-claims and value-claims in light of a whole range of current and new truth theories. This would include rethinking which claims are considered philosophically meaningless pseudo-claims about states of affairs that do not obtain. It would also mean reconsidering the criteria which arbitrate between states of affairs that obtain, and those that do not obtain.⁸⁵

Recommendation Two

My second recommendation involves those organisations responsible for promoting and practicing CPI, which play an important role in the dissemination of philosophy in non-academic settings. Organisations of this kind usually attempt to create an environment in which a dialogue on various philosophical concepts can be coordinated. Amongst numerous reasons for coordinating such sessions, one of its major objectives involves equipping participants with a certain set of cognitive and conceptual skills. Such dialogue necessarily requires that certain philosophical presuppositions be accepted for it to function. It is these presuppositions of which organisations promoting and practicing CPI need to be more aware.

If organisations promoting and practicing CPI are unwilling to compromise on certain underlying presuppositions that exclusively seek consistency in order to make logical sense of certain fundamental aspects of faith, it would seem a non-starter in appealing to madrasas. Repudiating certain presuppositions that involve inconsistencies that are deemed necessarily false under the rubric of classical logic would only contribute towards

⁸⁵ To gain some idea of what this may look like, see my publications listed in the bibliography.

their reluctance in this matter. Instead, organisations promoting and practicing CPI should rethink what would count as meaningful cognitive content when considering claims that fail to represent any state of affairs and ones that result in contradictions. Such pursuits need not be ones that are confined to the substantive or deflationary categories of truth.

In order for organisations of this kind to be able to successfully appeal to religious institutions like madrasas, they must seriously reconsider three points. The first of these involves the kind of philosophy that they practice. The second is the mode in which this philosophy is pursued. The third involves the way in which the first two points are presented. Regarding the first and the second points, organisations should opt for analytic philosophy to be practiced in a more comprehensive way, as discussed above. I should emphasise that this does not mean that they restrict themselves to analytic philosophy alone. Rather, it is important that they remain open to a diverse range of philosophies and modes of philosophical discourse. Concerning the third point, organisations practicing and promoting CPI should be more open to adopting a diverse range of philosophies and methods of thought which need not be at odds with the objective of a madrasa. I believe this to be the crucial point in bridging the existing gap between the philosophy practiced in such institutions and that of UK madrasas. If organisations can successfully demonstrate that their practice and promotion of CPI is considerate of and sympathetic to the underlying and fundamental objective of madrasas, this would likely ameliorate any resistance on the part of the latter to the incorporation of analytic philosophy into their curricula.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that it is possible to incorporate analytic philosophy into UK madrasa curricula. However, such a possibility depends upon the capacity of analytic philosophy to develop in such a way as to become more sympathetic to the underlying and fundamental objective of a madrasa, namely the preservation of the Islamic faith. Moreover, if organisations that promote and practice CPI can successfully engage with

a sympathetic philosophy of this kind, then the likelihood of its inclusion in madrasa curricula would increase. Making UK madrasas more receptive to analytic philosophy, especially with respect to the practice of CPI, fundamentally relies upon identifying reasons why madrasas may be reluctant towards introducing analytic philosophy to their students. Engaging with these underlying issues is essential to facilitating the relevant conversations that must take place between madrasas and organisations that promote and practice CPI. Addressing such concerns, with the help of the recommendations provided above, can create the conceptual openings necessary for meaningful engagement and the introduction of analytic philosophy to madrasa curricula.

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Chapter 10

The Horizons of Madrasa Education: Rethinking ‘Islamic Knowledge’ in the Modern World

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Introduction

‘In the view of his peers and superiors, he achieved great mastery in languages, history, biography, epistolography, prose, poetry, medicine, astrology, astronomy, trigonometry, jurisprudence, theology, ethics, Sufism, art, music, and calligraphy’ (Pickett, 2020:127). This is the description of the polymath ‘Abd al-Qādir, a Muslim scholar from modern day Uzbekistan who lived and worked in the mid-19th century.

While the scope of ‘Abd al-Qādir’s learning was remarkable, the mastery of various sciences was not limited to him. As Pickett notes, “this cornucopia of competencies is breathtaking—and yet, Abd al-Qadir’s eclecticism was far from extraordinary among the ‘Ulamā” (Pickett, 2020:127). Rather, it was part and parcel of an intellectual climate that promoted an epistemic openness to a variety of different “disciplines” of knowledge. For ‘Abd al-Qādir, and his coterie of colleagues, theology, medicine, art and music all sat within the pursuits of divine knowledge. A Muslim scholar, therefore, would be expected to master various sciences, viewing these ostensibly disparate disciplines as guided by a single harmonious divine truth.

While Pickett details the state of play in Central Asia, Dalrymple provides similar insights in India, noting that British officials were struck by the depth and scope of teaching in

the madrasas. Dalrymple quotes a general of the East India Company stationed in Delhi, who notes “he who holds an office worth twenty rupees a month commonly gives his sons an education equal to that of a prime minister” (Dalrymple, 2006:95). Additionally, the memoir comments on the variety of disciplines being distilled by Muslim educators. It states,

‘They learn, through the medium of Arabic and Persian languages, what young men in our colleges learn through those of Greek and Latin – that is grammar, rhetoric, and logic. After his seven years of study, the young Muslim binds his turban upon a head almost as well filled with the subjects that would be taught at Oxford – he will talk as fluently about Socrates and Aristotle, Plato, Galen and Avicenna. What is much to his advantage in India, the languages in which he has learnt what he knows will come to use throughout his life’ (Dalrymple, 2006:95).

In much contemporary discourse, whether in South Asia, the Middle East, or Europe, the term “madrasa” is often associated with images of cloistered seminaries that promote rote learning, resist change, and whose graduates are restricted to knowledge regarding ritual, scripture, and dogma (Bano, 2012). In popular media and even in some policy circles, madrasas are portrayed as spaces of stagnation, fundamentalism and potentially even extremism (Bano, 2012). To view the history of the madrasa through such a lens, however, distorts a far more complex historical reality. The two examples cited above do not exist as anomalies. They represent a long educational tradition that was expansive, integrative, and deeply embedded in the intellectual currents of its time. As we proceed to discuss the future of madrasa education in the modern world, it is key to consider that its history contains rich resources for reimagining its role today.

This chapter is structured in three parts. The first section explores the history of madrasa education and the scope of “Islamic knowledge”. It highlights how the madrasa encompassed a flexible intellectual tradition that adapted and imbibed a variety of intellectual currents that transcend what would today be described as a solely “religious” focus. Section two turns to the colonial encounter and examines how the epistemic

separation between the “religious” and the “secular” redefined the madrasa’s role, reshaping its function and identity. Reflecting on this, section three discusses future directions for madrasa education, exploring how this tradition might be reimagined in ways that remain faithful to its intellectual heritage while also responding to the challenges and opportunities of modernity.

History of the Madrasa

Research suggests that the earliest madrasas emerged as fully-fledged institutions in and around the 11th century under the patronage of the Seljuq vizier, Nizām al-Mulk. This template, described as the “Nizāmiyyah College Network” became a key model established across the Islamic world (Makdisi, 1981). Prior to this, other famous educational institutions had already been established, such as the al-Qarawiyyīn in Fes. However, because of state sponsorship and systemic endowment, the Nizāmiyyah colleges were established across key cities in the Muslim world, and as a result, they appear to have had a stronger political and cultural impact. Nevertheless, all of these institutions contributed to the intellectual climate of the madrasa. As Nasr argues, “in many parts of the Islamic world, the madrasa incorporated the jami’ah and provided what would at once correspond to secondary, as well as to college and university education” (Nasr, 1987:124).

A core aspect of the curriculums within these educational spaces was jurisprudence and theology – this orientation reflected the need to train jurists and bureaucrats to staff courts and the broader administration (Berkey, 1992). However, alongside these disciplines, students also engaged with a variety of different disciplines, which included fields such as languages, Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Philosophy, as well as ancillary sciences such as Mathematics and Astronomy (Robinson, 2001; Zaman, 2002). By the 13th century, madrasas were fixtures in most major cities across the Islamic world, ranging from North Africa to India, shaping an intellectual and scholarly culture that transcended particular regions. Their legacy and influence have led some scholars to argue that they represent a precursor to aspects of the European university tradition, particularly in their structured curricula and financing through endowments (Makdisi, 1981).

The breadth of the curricula established throughout the madrasas has also been explicated by Zaman, who argues that the contemporary bifurcation between “religious” and “secular” sciences would not have translated into pre-modern conceptualisations of knowledge by Muslim educationalists. Rather, he argues, these scholars differentiated between the “*manqulāt*” (revealed sciences) and the “*ma‘qulāt*” (rational sciences). This dichotomy is occasionally mistranslated as religious and secular to abide by contemporary categorisations – however, the notion that knowledge acquired by reason was viewed as contradictory, or outside the purview of, the endeavour of Islamic scholarship is misleading in the classical Islamicate context. As Zaman argues,

Medieval Muslim scholars often distinguished between the ‘traditionally transmitted’ sciences—such as morphology and syntax, Quranic studies, Hadith (the traditions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad), law (*fiqh*), principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*), theology, and so forth— and the ‘rational’ sciences, for example, logic, philosophy, astronomy, and arithmetic. The rational sciences were also studied in madrasas, whereas the study of the “transmitted” –or for that matter, any other–sciences was not confined only to these seminaries (Zaman, 1999:297).

Zaman proceeds to argue that much of the modern discourse centring on the role of the madrasa have centred around how to preserve the “religious” nature of the madrasa curriculum. However, such concerns “are eminently modern debates with little precedent in medieval Islamic societies” (Zaman, 1999:298). They simply do not translate trans-historically as they represent categories that have been developed within the modern period, and as a result, should not be treated universally.

This point is also developed by Nasr (1987), who argues that “the main activity of the madrasahs was instruction in the religious sciences, especially Divine Law (*al-sharī‘ah*) ... based on the careful study of the *Qur’ān* and its commentaries, of the traditions of the Prophet, and of the sacred history of Islam”.

This remained a shared canon across classical institutions. Additionally, however, the madrasas taught topics such as Logic, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Philosophy. Unlike the transmitted (naqlī) sciences of revelation and tradition, these were “arrived at by human intelligence” (Nasr, 1987: 126).

Within its first century, the Islamic world came into conversation with the much older traditions that had been established across the Near East and inherited the philosophical legacy of Hellenism, especially in cities such as Alexandria and its offshoots in Pergamon, Antioch and Edessa (Netton, 1994). Additionally, Muslim scholars engaged with intellectual inheritances of Persia, as well as Indian scientific traditions in spaces such as the renowned academy of Jundishapur. Prior to the rise of Islam, these spaces had constituted major hubs for learning, especially in fields such as astronomy and medicine. Islamic civilisation also assimilated Chinese alchemical knowledge, as can be found within the tracts of Muslim physicians, and in this way, the educational traditions developed by Muslim scholarship emerged as a fundamental custodian of nearly the entire corpus of ancient scientific knowledge (Netton, 1994).

Importantly, however, as Nasr notes, the incorporation of these previous traditions into the rapidly developed Islamic corpus was not purely because of expediency. Rather, “as a way of knowing, Islam could not remain indifferent to other ways of knowing, to philosophies and sciences which also claimed to explain the nature of things” (Nasr, 1987:130). As Islam recognised the validity of previous revelations (to varying degrees), “Muslims could not but engage in theological and philosophical debates with followers of these religions” (Nasr, 1987:130). Muslim scholars, therefore, were compelled to negotiate with traditions of scientific knowledge rooted in antiquity, alongside philosophical and theological discourses of religious groups of their times. As a result, as Muslim scholars came across new forms of knowledge, these increasingly became part of the corpus and curricula that were being taught across educational institutions.

This openness to diverse knowledge was reflected across curricula within major centres of learning throughout Islamicate history. During the Ottoman Empire, the network of Suleymaniye

madrasas in Istanbul, established in the 16th century, taught a range of disciplines. While they retained the teachings of the Quran, Hadith and Jurisprudence, tuition also included Logic, Astronomy, Medicine, and Mathematics—disciplines viewed as essential for the formation of fully developed scholars (Sen, 2021).

Similarly, in South Asia, the Dars-i Niẓāmī curriculum spread widely. As demonstrated by Dalrymple’s previously cited example, this syllabus equally included a range of topics. This form of tuition was expected to create elite scholars who could become administrators for the state and advise government. Therefore, such scholars were expected to have an intricate knowledge of scholarly currents in their contexts. In turn, a scholar who had undertaken study of the Dars-i Niẓāmī in India would be expected to be knowledgeable about Ibn Sīnā’s *Qānūn fī al-Ṭibb*, Plato’s *Theory of Forms*, treatises on Mathematics as well as a strongly situated understanding of Hanafi Jurisprudence and Qur’anic exegesis (Robinson, 2001; Zaman, 2002).

The intellectual climate that exemplifies this holistic approach to knowledge is perhaps best demonstrated through the Abbasid era project, the Bayt al-Ḥikma (House of Wisdom). Established in Baghdad in the 9th century, the Bayt al-Ḥikma promoted the translation of inherited texts from other knowledge traditions in the Arabic language – which included works on Philosophy, Mathematics, Medicine and a variety of other sciences (Bennison, 2009). It was during this period that the “philosopher of the Arabs” al-Kindī became prominent, and oversaw translations of Greek, Syriac, and Persian works into Arabic, helping to preserve and transform the intellectual heritage of antiquity. Works from Aristotle, Galen and Ptolemy were all preserved through their Arabic translations and were taught freely across educational spaces once available in Arabic (Bennison, 2009).

Having outlined the breadth of classical Islamic learning, it is instructive to consider individual scholars who exemplify this holistic approach. This epistemic stance is evident in renowned Muslim scholars, who were shaped by such intellectual environments and made significant contributions to knowledge, both in disciplines that would now be considered “religious” and “secular”.

The contributions of Ibn Sīnā stand out as perhaps the most influential in medicine. His *al-Qānūn fī al-ṭibb* synthesised Galenic medicine with his own observations and remained a standard medical text in both the Islamic world and Europe for centuries. It was studied in madrasas up until the modern period. Ibn Sīnā, of course, was a well-established Muslim scholar, who drew on the ancient works that preceded him, and synthesised that knowledge to provide a medical encyclopaedia that benefited all. There is little doubt that Ibn Sīnā saw his medical studies as equally meritorious in the eyes of God as his legal pursuits (Starr, 2024).

Another famous example can be seen with Maliki jurist Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406). As well as having a strong grounding in Islamic law, his intellectual contributions centred around sociology, political theory and history. His *Muqaddimah* emphasised that societies can be studied according to a set of laws in a similar fashion to the natural sciences, which led to him being dubbed as the “father of sociology” (Verza, 2021). Another key scholar to consider is the renowned philosopher jurist Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), who contributed key works in Islamic law, such as *Bidayat al-Mujtahid*, as well as important philosophical commentaries including *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence), which constituted a defence of philosophy against Al-Ghazālī’s *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (Ibn Rushd, 2008).

While philosophy was clearly a topic that permeated scholarly life, a variety of other topics that perhaps would not be considered solely “religious” in contemporary discourse were equally developed in classical Islamic discourses. For example, Ibn Jamā‘ah al-Kinānī (d. 1333), a prominent Shāfi‘ī jurist, wrote extensively on the philosophy of education. His treatise *Tadhkirat al-sāmi‘ wa-l-mutakallim* articulated the ethics of teaching and learning, the responsibilities of teachers and students, and the spiritual purpose of knowledge (Ibn Jamā‘ah, 2015). Additionally, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (d. 934), a student of al-Kindī, composed *Maṣāliḥ al-abdān wa-l-anfus* (Sustenance for Body and Soul), a work that addressed both physical and mental health. He proposed treatments for anxiety, depression, and obsessive thoughts, effectively pioneering a holistic model of psychosomatic health (Badri, 2013).

This small coterie of thinkers — al-Kindī, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn Jamā'ah, and al-Balkhī—demonstrate the extraordinary range of scholarship cultivated within the Islamic world and preserved in its educational institutions. As has been demonstrated, the contemporary distinction between religious or secular forms of knowledge struggles to be transmuted historically. The bifurcation between *‘aqlī* and *naqlī* sciences should not be read as religious or secular; rather, within classical Islamic thought, the pursuit of all knowledge was ultimately viewed through the lens of the divine. It for this reason that educational institutions were settings in which both flourished, enabling Islamic civilisation to produce advances in philosophy, medicine, history, sociology, psychology, and education.

Therefore, the contemporary understanding of a madrasa solely as a seminary to produce jurists and theologians overlooks its significant role in the development of global knowledge. Its graduates included historians, physicians, philosophers, and scientists whose works shaped both Islamic and Western intellectual traditions. Recognising these contributions not only challenges simplistic understandings of the madrasa but also questions contemporary conceptualisations of the genealogy (and teleology) of Islamic thought more broadly.

Of course, this naturally raises the question as to why contemporary madrasas have not maintained the previously held vitality and dynamism. Regarding this shift, Nasr notes that while the multi-faceted curriculum was commonplace throughout Islamic history, a fundamental shift took place during the colonial period. He states, “there is no doubt that, when the modern Western educational system was brought to the Islamic world in the 19th century, there was practically no madrasa which had preserved its former vitality in the different fields of knowledge, especially in mathematics, and the natural and medical sciences” (Nasr, 1987:125). The following section will explore the impact of the colonial period on Islamic education and madrasa spaces.

The Colonial Period and the Epistemic Binary

The encounter with European colonialism constitutes a profound moment for the history of Islamic educational spaces.

As demonstrated, in the pre-modern period, educational institutions and Muslim scholars more generally were grounded in a knowledge tradition that fostered a holistic epistemic vision. Colonialism reconfigured this vision and fragmented an entire ecology of knowledge. By privileging certain forms of learning and marginalising others, colonial regimes produced a new epistemic order in which the madrasa was reconstituted as a space for “religious” sciences and knowledge, whereas modern institutions and colleges were repositories of “secular” or worldly knowledge.

As Asad (1993) has demonstrated through his genealogical analysis of the concept of religion, these categories are not universal or natural frameworks. Rather, the distinction between the “religious” and the “secular” arose from European political and intellectual history, particularly the contestations between church authority and secular philosophies during the Enlightenment. Further, the development of the concept of “religion” also relegated certain spheres of knowledge to the private domain, “anchored in personal experience, expressible as belief-statements, dependent on private institutions, and practiced in one’s spare time’ which was differentiated to ‘common politics, economy, science, and morality” (Asad, 1993:72).

As a result, educational institutions across the Muslim world encountered significant epistemic shifts during this period. Administrators of colonial regimes promoted particular types of knowledge and privileged certain disciplines, such as the natural sciences, and marginalised others, such as philosophy and metaphysics. The rational sciences, long central to madrasa curricula, were relocated to newly established colonial colleges and universities. By contrast, madrasas were reclassified as narrowly “religious” institutions, with their scope confined to ritual law and textual study. An epistemic binary that had not existed previously began to be inculcated (Moosa, 2015; Ingram, 2019).

This new epistemic order forced Muslim scholars into defensive positions. Deprived of state patronage and excluded from new bureaucracies, madrasas sought to preserve the transmitted sciences as a distinctive identity marker. Rational disciplines were abandoned not because they were considered

“un-Islamic” but because the institutional conditions for their flourishing had been dismantled. As Zaman notes, this was accelerated in the aftermath of 1857, as many madrasas “were abolished or their existence was effectively jeopardized” (Zaman, 1999:296).

The effects of this epistemic reordering extended beyond education. By constructing “religion” as a concept that remains within the private domain, and subsequently monopolising rational and technical knowledge within state institutions, colonial regimes reshaped Muslim subjectivities. Scholars who had once moved confidently between law, theology, medicine, and astronomy now faced a stark choice – to preserve tradition in an increasingly narrow sense, or to embrace “modern” education and risk alienation from their scholarly heritage (Moosa, 2015).

It was from this context that many contemporary reformist movements emerged. One example can be seen with the establishment of Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband, which was established in the wake of the 1857 mutiny. Ingram notes that the British, having defeated the Mughal state, allowed Muslims to discuss religious and moral concerns so long as they did not threaten the political status quo. In this emergent framework, the ‘Ulamā were reimagined as stewards of public morality rather than as professionals serving the state—a striking departure from their historical role in governance of the state (Ingram, 2019).

It was within this emergent colonial order that Dār al-‘Ulūm Deoband was founded in 1866. The institution deliberately occupied the newly delineated “religious” space, emphasising the study of transmitted knowledge over rational sciences, codifying a vision of Islamic learning centred on law and Hadīth rather than political or administrative training (Ingram, 2019). The Deoband case illustrates how the project of reviving classical Islamic learning was articulated precisely within the conditions of colonial modernity, shaped by its epistemic and political ruptures. Ingram (2019) suggests that the movement’s valorisation of “tradition” was inseparable from colonial modernity itself. By framing transmitted knowledge as distinct from the secular knowledge promoted by the British, the Deobandi project simultaneously preserved continuity with the past and engaged with the structural realities of colonial power.

In doing so, and through its focus on particular aspects of the inherited Islamic tradition and rejection of others, Deoband implicitly accepted the imposition of colonial epistemologies. In other words, the projection of Islam as a “religion” that focused on personal piety that was distinct from the “secular” ultimately acceded to the framework that was being promoted by colonial authorities. Therefore, Deoband simultaneously became a symbol of resistance and continuity, while equally being shaped and circumscribed by that very resistance. This was not limited to Deoband, of course. Many of the revivalist movements in the colonial period followed a similar mode of thinking and reinscribed modern frameworks of religion and secularity.

By the early 20th century, the madrasa across much of the Muslim world had come to be identified primarily with “religious” training. The rational sciences had been ceded to modern universities, which now monopolised technical expertise. This narrowing was reinforced by the rise of nationalist states after independence, many of which sought to control or marginalise religious education (Bano, 2012). In some instances, states did provide madrasas patronage – primarily envisaged as training grounds for “religious clerics”. This, however, simply reinforced the epistemic binary and further entrenched the madrasa as a seminary space.

The colonial period, therefore, represented a key moment in the history of madrasas and Islamic education more broadly. As the disciplines that were once considered “the rational sciences” became increasingly associated with colonial colleges, and madrasas were stripped of state patronage, a previously holistic vision of knowledge became bifurcated, and a long-standing Islamic tradition was upended. The resulting epistemic binary between “religious” and “secular” knowledge reshaped not only institutions, but also scholarly self-image. Scholars who once advised governments, worked as state functionaries, and contributed to advancement of knowledge in a variety of disciplines became reimagined as stewards of piety and morality – with their authority circumscribed within a privatised domain.

As a result, by the mid-20th century, the madrasa had been transformed into a seminary focused primarily on ritual and theology. Its precolonial expansiveness simply was not preserved

as part of a selective rendition of “tradition”. Situating the impact of European colonialism on the history of the madrasa remains essential for any serious discussions about the future of madrasa education. For the madrasa to be reimagined for the contemporary world, then, recognising the impact of the colonial period on the knowledge traditions of Islam becomes essential.

The Future of the Madrasa

This rupture between precolonial breadth and colonial narrowing has been the subject of extensive discussion amongst Muslim intellectuals and reformers. Amongst the most influential responses can be found with the Islamization of Knowledge movement and the works of scholars such as Ismail Al-Faruqi (d. 1986) and Naguib Al-Attas. The Islamization of Knowledge movement argued for an epistemic reorientation of Islamic knowledge, claiming that a reintegration of the classical knowledge tradition was needed to recalibrate Islamic thought. The project called for a recovery of Islamic contributions to a variety of disciplines, whether Economics, Psychology, or Political Theory. This was an attempt to shift Islam away from simply being viewed as a set of rituals and beliefs, as it had come to be circumscribed by the concept of “religion” (Al-Faruqi, 1986; Al-Attas, 1993).

On the other hand, there was also a conscious attempt to decentre the supposed objectivities of Western disciplines and analysis. Part of the project involved a critical interrogation of modern Western disciplines, exposing their claims to neutrality and their detachment from moral and spiritual purpose (Al-Faruqi, 1986). This decolonial move was needed to ensure that Islamic knowledge remained rooted within the Islamic tradition and Islam and did not imbibe intellectual visions that were contrary to Islam. In doing so, there was an attempt to wrestle Islam away from the seminaries and the Western style universities – attempting to create a third space to critically discuss Islam.

Consequently, the project worked to revive the classical epistemic position that allowed students to comfortably navigate between Ritual, Law, and Theology, and Mathematics, History, and Natural Sciences, not through a series of compromises

but components of an integrated learning aligned with the classical heritage of Islam. Because of this vision, a number of “Islamic discourses” became increasingly prominent in the late 20th century, through the growth of Islamic economics (Ahmad, 1976), Islamic psychology (Badri, 1979) or Islamic education (al-Attas, 1993). Through the works of the early pioneers of these disciplines and the epistemic shifts that were established, these fields continue to grow and develop in different directions (Asutay, 2019; Rothman, 2022; Sahin, 2013; Suddahazai, 2023). The development of these disciplines highlights that the epistemic reinterpretation resulted in practical consequences, creating discursive (and physical) platforms in which Islamic scholarship could engage with contemporary intellectual currents.¹

This historical trajectory provides precedent for contemporary madrasas. If classical institutions once benefited from the advancements found across Hellenic, Persian, and Indian knowledge – and this subsequently became imbibed as part of the “Islamic” canon – this provides a methodological framework to engage with contemporary Western thought paradigms, ensuring that Islamic principles remain central even as the scope of knowledge expands.

Furthermore, there is a broader epistemological question at play. The integration of different knowledge systems cannot simply consist of reshaping modern disciplines to align with a particular theological framework without careful justification. Systematically adapting the social and natural sciences to conform to pre-existing theological positions presents significant challenges. This tension helps to explain why, in practice, the Islamization of Knowledge project has sometimes been criticised for remaining relatively superficial in terms of fully operationalising its vision across diverse disciplines.

The question of engagement with “new disciplines” remains central when attempting to navigate epistemic reintegration.

¹ Mehmet Asutay, Abdullah Sahin and Imran Suddahazai were previously lecturers at the Markfield Institute of Higher Education (MIHE). MIHE was set up distinctively to function as a ‘third-space’ educational provider – developing discourses on ‘Islamic Finance’, ‘Islamic Education’ and ‘Islamic Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care’. Therefore, the creation of epistemic spaces, in certain cases, has also translated into the creation of physical spaces to explore these critical conversations.

A key question that is raised is the extent to which Muslim scholars are able to critically engage with knowledge produced in “secular” universities. This question becomes particularly pressing when we consider that much of the knowledge produced in Western universities and, by extension, in many non-Western institutions whose curricula have historically been modelled on Western frameworks, has been shaped by Eurocentric assumptions, often with detrimental effects for the non-Western world, as decolonial scholarship has demonstrated (Mignolo, 2011; Grosfoguel, 2007).

Additionally, while recovering the history of the madrasa may be symbolically appealing, it is necessary to acknowledge that the pre-modern madrasa was constructed in a vastly different historical context. Therefore, attempts to replicate the institution wholesale are invariably limited. The conditions that allowed the classical madrasa to flourish no longer exist. In line with this, a more useful approach may be to draw inspiration from the past, while also reimagining its role for the present and the future.

Given that, a few final thoughts are presented regarding the horizons of madrasa education. Firstly, viewing the curriculum as fluid and adaptable would allow madrasa graduates to be equipped with the polymathy of their predecessors. This remains somewhat controversial, however. For some, the idea of “updating” or amending the classical syllabus as it is currently understood borders on the sacrilegious. As Moosa notes, “Protagonists of the Nizami curriculum believe the canon of texts is infused with providential sanctity. They view any change to the curriculum as offensive and a step towards spiritual dereliction... In the Orthodox tradition, there is a widely held belief that a favourable reception of a text, or the good reputation of a scholar, is a sign of divine approval.” (Moosa, 2015:145). Shifting these perceptions remains central for any serious curriculum renewals to be enacted. Nevertheless, the potential benefits from some changes are substantial (Memon *et al.*, 2021). Recognising that such a change is not so much an “update” but in fact a return to “tradition” may placate fears regarding spiritual dereliction.

For example, in the same manner that Ibn Sīnā’s Canon of Medicine once influenced scores of graduates across the Muslim world, contemporary works on medicine could be incorporated to address questions of well-being and public health. Additionally,

in the same manner that traditional scholarship critically engaged with Aristotle and Plato, madrasas in the modern world could equally contribute to philosophical debates – impacting and influencing contemporary intellectual currents. In the social sciences, disciplines such as economics and political thought could be approached as vehicles for moral and societal renewal. Consider the impact that a cadre of madrasa graduates who had been trained to work towards the eradication of child poverty could have, or scholars working towards social justice and challenging modern forms of slavery (Bashir, 2023; 2025).

It is not to suggest that every madrasa graduate would necessarily need to master all these disciplines. Rather, this is where specialisation and institutional differentiation become essential. Distinct pathways could be developed, with some madrasa routes focusing on practical training – such as public health, environmental stewardship and community development – while others could emphasise theological and philosophical directions. To facilitate such, institutional networking could play a role. Engagement with universities or public bodies could lead to exchange programmes and research projects. Examples of such can be seen with the Markfield Institute and University of Johannesburg joint conference (2022), or the Madrasa Discourses project, initiated by Prof Ebrahim Moosa (Moosa, 2017). Additionally, the recent intellectual trends towards the decolonisation of knowledge also provides an opportunity for collaboration. By drawing inspiration from the past, while responding strategically to contemporary knowledge currents, madrasas can fulfil a renewed role in shaping intellectual capacities for Muslim communities in the modern world.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to achieve three things. In the first section, the chapter demonstrated the history of madrasa education, and the scope of “Islamic knowledge” was fluid, adaptable and expansive. It highlighted that the madrasa encompassed a flexible intellectual tradition that imbibed a variety of intellectual currents that transcend what would today be described as a solely “religious” focus. The second section focused on the colonial encounter and explored how the epistemic separation between

the “religious” and the “secular” redefined the madrasa’s role, reshaping its function and identity. Reflecting on this, section three turned towards the future directions for madrasa education, exploring how this tradition might be reimagined in ways that remain faithful to its intellectual heritage while also responding to the challenges and opportunities of modernity.

Looking ahead, the madrasa cannot remain shackled to a defensive posture, as it came to be characterised in the colonial and post-colonial period. To do so would be to reject its broader history and legacy. Rather, attempts must be made to reintegrate its prior holistic epistemology. A curriculum that integrates Qur’anic exegesis, jurisprudence, and theology with philosophy, mathematics, and social justice can produce scholars capable of navigating the contemporary world comfortably. Such an approach would cultivate intellectual versatility, allowing graduates to engage critically with contemporary issues while remaining anchored in ethical and moral principles.

Ultimately, an adaptive, morally grounded, and intellectually comprehensive curriculum ensures that madrasas remain vibrant institutions of learning, capable of producing scholars who are not only custodians of tradition but also agents of social transformation. By embracing this dual mandate, preserving intellectual legacies while engaging constructively with contemporary realities, madrasas can reclaim their historical role as centres of integrated scholarship. They can become spaces where spiritual formation, ethical reasoning, and intellectual enquiry coexist harmoniously, equipping graduates to navigate complex landscapes while remaining committed to the principles and values that have long defined Islamic education. In this way, the madrasa of the future can embody the dynamism and moral vision that characterised its past, ensuring its continued relevance and transformative potential.

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Rethinking the Madrasa: Tradition and Transformation in Contemporary Islam brings together a diverse group of scholars to reconsider one of the most enduring institutions of Islamic learning. Moving beyond reductive portrayals of the madrasa as static, insular, or resistant to change, this volume examines its complex histories, contemporary transformations, and possibilities for the future. At the heart of the volume is a fundamental question: how can madrasa education preserve the intellectual and ethical resources of its tradition while engaging meaningfully with modernity? Rather than approaching this as a simple choice between tradition and reform, *Rethinking the Madrasa* highlights the negotiations, tensions, and creative possibilities that emerge when different modes of knowledge encounter one another.



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