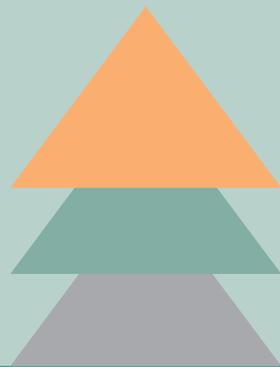


# Religions and Development Research Programme

## **Allowing for Diversity: State-Madrassa Relations in Bangladesh**

**Dr Masooda Bano**  
University of Oxford



Working Paper 13 - 2008

**RaD**

# Religions and Development

## Research Programme

The Religions and Development Research Programme Consortium is an international research partnership that is exploring the relationships between several major world religions, development in low-income countries and poverty reduction. The programme is comprised of a series of comparative research projects that are addressing the following questions:

- How do religious values and beliefs drive the actions and interactions of individuals and faith-based organisations?
- How do religious values and beliefs and religious organisations influence the relationships between states and societies?
- In what ways do faith communities interact with development actors and what are the outcomes with respect to the achievement of development goals?

The research aims to provide knowledge and tools to enable dialogue between development partners and contribute to the achievement of development goals. We believe that our role as researchers is not to make judgements about the truth or desirability of particular values or beliefs, nor is it to urge a greater or lesser role for religion in achieving development objectives. Instead, our aim is to produce systematic and reliable knowledge and better understanding of the social world.

The research focuses on four countries (India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Tanzania), enabling the research team to study most of the major world religions: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and African traditional belief systems. The research projects will compare two or more of the focus countries, regions within the countries, different religious traditions and selected development activities and policies.

The consortium consists of six research partner organisations, each of which is working with other researchers in the four focus countries:

- University of Birmingham, UK: International Development Department, Department of Theology and Religion, Centre for West African Studies, Centre for the Study of Global Ethics.
- University of Bath, UK: Centre for Development Studies.
- Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi.
- Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, Ibadan.
- University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
- Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan.

In addition to the research partners, links have been forged with non-academic and non-government bodies, including Islamic Relief.

# Religions and Development Working Paper 13

## Allowing for Diversity: State-Madrassa Relations in Bangladesh

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# Contents

	<b>Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>Glossary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
	1.1 Methodology	3
<b>2</b>	<b>Situating Aliya and Qomi madrasas in the Bangladeshi education system</b>	<b>5</b>
	2.1 Aliya madrasa system	5
	2.2 Qomi madrasas	9
	2.3 Islam in Bengal	11
	2.4 The rise of the madrasa tradition	12
<b>3</b>	<b>Why reform? The rise of Aliya madrasas</b>	<b>19</b>
	3.1 State-specific factors	19
	3.2 The role of the Bengali Language Movement	21
	3.3 The history of Jamiat-i-Islami	23
	3.4 The nature of incentives	24
	3.5 Conclusion	25
<b>4</b>	<b>Why resist? Qomi madrasas' position vis-à-vis Aliya madrasas</b>	<b>26</b>
	4.1 Existing claims	26
	4.2 Qomi Madrasas' approach to Aliya madrasas	26
	4.3 Notions of reform	32
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>37</b>
	<b>Notes</b>	<b>38</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>39</b>
	<b>Annex 1 List of Respondents</b>	<b>40</b>
	<b>Tables</b>	
	Table 1: The educational structure of Bangladesh	5
	Table 2: Distribution of madrasas across divisions according to education level	7
	Table 3: Share of enrolment by type of education	7
	Table 4: Percentage of madrasa students in rural/urban areas	8
	Table 5: Percentage of trained teachers	8



## Summary

Within South Asia, Bangladesh has apparently been most successful in implementing state-administered madrasa modernization: 30 per cent of secondary students in Bangladesh are in Aliya (reformed) madrasas. Given the current emphasis on madrasa reform programmes by many donor agencies, this study attempts to understand the nature of madrasa reforms in Bangladesh and to identify factors that led to acceptance of the programme within the religious establishment. The study argues that Aliya madrasas have indeed been able to combine secular subjects with religious education. On the other hand, while some present day Aliya madrasas might have converted from the traditional Qomi madrasas, as argued by some authors, these state reformed madrasas have failed to displace the Qomi madrasas' control over the Bangladeshi religious establishment. It is the Qomi madrasa students that are being trained to fill religious positions in Bangladeshi mosques. Aliya madrasa students, on the other hand, are being trained to compete for jobs teaching the children enrolled in the secular schools. The control over religious authority and public interpretation of Islam remains in the hands of the ulema of the Qomi madrasas. Therefore, the study argues that it is misguided to see the Bangladeshi madrasa reform programme as a model for a more liberal interpretation of Islam, which is the focus of current reform efforts. Rather it is a very good model for making madrasas an effective tool for promoting education in conservative societies, where there is a clear demand for combining secular education with a strong religious input. Also, it argues that good financial incentives alone do not explain the rise of Aliya madrasas. The spread of the Aliya madrasa is embedded in a complex interaction between Islam and the Bengali language movement, in pre- and post- liberation (1971) politics, and in the support for the Aliya tradition within an influential segment of the Bangladeshi religious establishment, that is Jamiat-i-Islami. The paper thus argues that in studying madrasa reform programmes, it is important to be clear about the objectives of the reform. Modern interpretations of Islam within madrasas cannot be achieved simply through the introduction of secular subjects. They are only possible if the leadership of Qomi madrasas is successfully convinced of the need for a modern reinterpretation of religious texts and is supported in that process.

# Glossary

Adab	Mannerism
Alim	Religious scholar
Alim	Equivalent of Higher Secondary degree
Aliya madrasa	Government-aided reformed madrasa
Dakhil	Senior Secondary Certificate
Dars-e-Nizami	Eight year madrasa syllabus
Ebetdayee	Equivalent of primary education
Fazil	Equivalent of Bachelor of Arts
Fiqh	Jurisprudence
Hadith	The Prophet Mohammad's sayings
Kamil	Equivalent of Master of Arts
Khateeb	The one who gives the sermon
Khutba	Sermon
Madrasa/Madrasah	Islamic religious seminary
Madrasas/Madaris/Madrasahs	Plural of madrasa
Masjid	Mosque
Qomi madrasa	Traditional (unreformed) madrasa
Sunnah	Practice of the Prophet Mohammad
Tableeg	Preaching Islam
Tafseer	Explanation of the Quran
Ulema	Religious scholars

# 1 Introduction

Since 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, madrasas (Islamic seminaries) in the Muslim world have become the focus of international attention due to their alleged links with international militancy. Many development agencies are currently exploring ways to support governments in the Muslim world, to help weed out militant tendencies within madrasas and to introduce modern subjects within the madrasa curriculum. In this context, some have argued that Bangladesh provides a successful example of madrasa reform, given the dramatic growth of Aliya madrasas (state-funded madrasas which combine secular and religious subjects), in response to a government-led madrasa modernization programme introduced in the late 1970s (Asadullah and Chaudhury, 2007). Asadullah and Chaudhury argue that 34 per cent of the Aliya madrasas are ‘converts’, i.e. they were initially Qomi (traditional) madrasas, and conclude that madrasas can be reformed successfully if the right incentives are given. If true, Bangladesh would indeed be an interesting case for those planning madrasa reforms, given that similar efforts in India have had limited success and in Pakistan have faced tough resistance. This study set out to understand the factors that helped the state push its reform agenda vis-à-vis madrasas in Bangladesh, and the characteristics of the madrasas that accepted the state-proposed reforms to their curriculum. In contrast to Asadullah and Chaudhury’s assertion, however, the study questions the claims that older madrasas have been successfully converted to the Aliya system, and raises an important question about what madrasa reform really means.

## 1.1 Methodology<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this study is to understand the dynamics of the state-madrasa relationship in Bangladesh and the factors that have facilitated the rise of Aliya madrasas. This first required an understanding of the working of the Bangladeshi state and madrasa establishments in their own right, using a qualitative approach in which the emphasis was on gathering a wide range of perspectives on the dynamics of state-madrasa relationships. The study therefore focused on identifying and interviewing key respondents, including the government officials concerned with the madrasa reforms, the madrasa leadership, and the academic and journalist community that has observed this interaction over time. Fieldwork was undertaken in 2007.

The primary method of data collection was in-depth interviews. In the first stage, interviews were conducted with officials of the Ministry of Education and the Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board in Dhaka to understand the working of Aliya madrasas and the state’s philosophy in promoting this

model. Their views were also sought on the Qomi madrasa system. These interviews were followed by in-depth interviews with prominent ulema (religious scholars), some of whom sit on the Wafaq ul Madaris Al-Arabia (Qomi Madrasa Board), in order to develop an understanding of the Qomi madrasa system and to understand their position vis-à-vis the Aliya madrasa system. In parallel, interviews were conducted with prominent academics, journalists and public intellectuals who have been observing the evolution of the Bangladeshi state and its relation with Islam, so as to get a neutral view of the political, economic and social factors that have contributed to the state-madrasa relationships we see today.

These in-depth interviews with key respondents were supplemented with study of four madrasas in each of Dhaka and Chittagong divisions to get a closer insight into the working of Aliya and Qomi madrasas, their differences and similarities and their perspectives on each other. The emphasis was on engaging with the top Aliya and Qomi madrasas in the country. Since the Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board operates in the same manner across the six divisions of Bangladesh, it was thought best to focus on Aliya madrasas in Dhaka division, as Dhaka city hosts the head office of the Board and the parent Aliya madrasa (which relocated from Calcutta). On the other hand, for insights into the Qomi madrasas, Chittagong division was a clear choice, given that it is the stronghold of Qomi madrasas, including the undisputed leading Qomi madrasas in Bangladesh. In Dhaka, interviews were conducted in Dhaka Aliya Madrasa, Tameer Millat Madrasa, and Jamia Rahmania Arabia. In Chittagong, interviews were conducted in the four leading Qomi madrasas: Darul Uloom Moinul Islam Hathazari, Al-Jamiya Al-Islamiya Pattia, Al-Jameatul Islamia Al-Arbia Mozaherul Uloom, Jamiah Darul Mar'arif Al-Islamiah. Observations from these visits and the interviews, which are blended throughout the text, were critical in understanding not only the state-madrasa dynamics but also, equally importantly, the similarities and the differences between the two madrasa traditions.

The flow of the paper is as follows. The next section explains the role of madrasas in the Bangladesh education system, to give the reader an idea of the extent of madrasa education within the state education system in Bangladesh. It then provides an historical account of the rise of the two madrasa traditions: Qomi and Aliya. Section 3 provides an analysis of the factors that enabled the rise of Aliya madrasas. Section 4 offers an explanation for the survival of the Qomi madrasa tradition. In doing so, it raises the important question of the need to be clear about the purpose of 'reform' before any claims can be made about its success. Section 5 presents the conclusions.

## 2 Situating Aliya and Qomi madrasas in the Bangladeshi education system

This section of the study provides basic data on and a description of Aliya and Qomi madrasas in Bangladesh, followed by an account of their historical origins.

### 2.1 The Aliya madrasa system

Madrasa education features prominently in the Bangladesh Ministry of Education’s plans, from primary to tertiary level. At the primary level, pupils have a choice between general and madrasa education, while at the secondary level, it is between general, technical/vocational and madrasa education. These three streams continue into higher education: general education (including the pure and applied science, arts, business and social science), madrasas, and technology (agriculture, engineering, medicine, textiles, etc.). Madrasa education covers the same core courses as the general stream at primary, secondary and post-secondary levels but gives additional emphasis to religious studies; after the post-secondary level, however, the focus shifts primarily to religious education.

**Table 1: The educational structure of Bangladesh**

Age	Grade												
26+													
25+	XX					Ph. D(Engr)	Ph.D(Medical)						
24+	XIX			Ph. D	PostMBBS Dipl					Ph. D (Education)			
23+	XVIII			M.Phil	M.Phil(Medical)								
22+	XVII	MA/MSc/MCom/MSS/MBA		LLM	M B B S BDS	MSc(Engr)	Msc.(Agr)			M B A	M.Ed & M A(Edn)	MA(LSc)	
21+	XVI	Bachelor (Hons)	Masters (Prel)	LLB(Hons)	BSc.Eng BSc.Agr BSc.Text BSc.Leath	Bsc.Eng	Bsc (Tech.Edn)	B B A	B.Ed & Dip.Ed	BP ED	Dip.(LSc)	Kamil	
20+	XV		Bachelor (Pass)										
19+	XIV						Diploma (Engineering)				Diploma in Nursing	Fazil	
18+	XIII											Alim	
17+	XII	Secondary	Examination			HSC		HSC Vocational	C in Edu.	C in Agri	Diploma in Comm		Dakhil
16+	XI		HIGHER SECONDARY EDUCATION										
15+	X		Examination			SSC		TRADE Certificate/ SSC Vocational		ARTISAN COURSE e.g. CERAMICS			
14+	IX		SECONDARY EDUCATION										
13+	VIII		JUNIOR SECONDARY EDUCATION										
12+	VII											Ebtedayee	
11+	VI												
10+	V	PRIMARY EDUCATION											
9+	IV												
8+	III												
7+	II												
6+	I												
5+		PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION											
4+													
3+													

Source: Ministry of Education, Bangladesh. Note: The extreme right column represents the madrasa degrees.

Table 1 indicates the position of madrasa education within the state education system. The madrasas have five different levels, which can be aligned against the system of secular schooling. Ebtedayee education, the first level, is equivalent to primary education. It comprises five years of schooling (grades I - V). The normal age of entry is six and the child finishes class V at the age of 11. Another seven years of madrasa schooling (5+2) are equivalent to the secondary education system. The first qualification, taking five years, is called Dakhil. It is equivalent to the senior secondary certificate within the secular stream, which is obtained after studying from grade VI – X. The Dakhil level is followed by two further years of education, which lead to the Alim (higher secondary) stage. During these seven years of secondary and post-secondary education, madrasa students are free to choose from various subject options, such as humanities, science and business education.

The final stage of a madrasa education parallels the tertiary education system and comprises four (2+2) years of formal education. Students must have the alim qualification to be admitted to this level. The first two years of education lead to a fazil degree, followed by two more years leading to the kamil level, the highest madrasa degree. In these final four years of madrasa education, the emphasis is on specialization in religious texts and the secular subject content is reduced. There are four streams of courses in kamil level education: hadith, tafsir, fiqh and adab. The focus at the highest level is thus on religious education. The Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board conducts the fazil and kamil examinations and awards the certificates.

### **2.1.1 Data on students**

According to Ministry of Education data, there are 1.77 million students within the Aliya madrasa system, operating across the six divisions of the country. This amounts to 30 per cent of the total state regulated secondary education in the country. The largest number is in Rajshahi with 551,903 students, while the lowest is in Sylhet division with only 60,496 students (See Table 2).

**Table 2:**  
**Distribution of madrasas across divisions according to education level**

	Dhakil	Alim	Fazil	Kamil	Total madrasas	Percentage of the total in each division
Barisal	871	180	131	15	1197	13
Chittagong	903	271	254	53	1481	16
Dhaka	1355	294	226	39	1914	21
Khulna	899	168	98	21	1186	13
Rajshahi	2345	355	298	37	3125	34
Sylhet	225	49	29	9	312	3

Source: Ministry of Education, 2006.

The madrasa education system forms a pyramidal structure with 1,084,850 students at Dhakil level, 302,309 at Fazil level, and only 91,135 students continuing all the way up to Kamil level. Thus, as the Aliya madrasa education moves towards specialization in religious education, the number of students is dramatically reduced. This means that madrasa students as a percentage of all students in the overall education system is much reduced when all three tiers of secular education are combined: madrasa students account for only 16.32 per cent of total student enrolment (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Share of enrolment by type of education**

Type of education	Enrolment	Type of education %
General education	8,765,798	80.58
Madrasa education	1,775,443	16.32
Technical education	242,640	2.23
Professional education	60,285	0.55
Teachers' education	34,735	0.32
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,877,597</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Ministry of Education, 2006.

Among Aliya madrasas, the male-female ratio presents a near balance: 47.6 per cent of students in post-primary madrasa education are girls as opposed to 52.4 per cent boys. Given that madrasas were historically a male institution in South Asia, this high female participation is striking and shows a dramatic increase in recent years. However, there is still a very slight gap in the gender ratio when compared with the secular education system: in post-primary general education 50.6 per cent of students are female against 49.4 per cent male. Further, the ratio of female enrolment goes down the

higher the madrasa education level: at the alim level 48 per cent of students are female, at the fazil level their share comes down to 37.3 per cent, and at the highest level (kamil) only 17 per cent of students are girls. This might reflect the fact that females have less incentive to study till the highest level, since they cannot achieve positions within the religious hierarchy.

The data also show that the Aliya madrasas are heavily concentrated in the rural areas in all six divisions.

**Table 4: Percentage of madrasa students in rural and urban areas**

Division	Urban	Rural
Barisal	10.51	89.49
Chittagong	10.01	89.99
Dhaka	13.93	86.07
Khulna	9.86	90.14
Rajshahi	7.55	92.45
Sylhet	11.48	88.52
<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>10.45</b>	<b>89.55</b>

Source: Ministry of Education, 2006.

### 2.1.2 Data on teachers

Government data show that the Aliya madrasa system provides a good employment option for its students: 29.8 per cent of current teachers in Aliya madrasas are kamil (the top level) graduates who were educated in Aliya madrasas, followed by secular graduate degree holders (24.3%); the lowest percentage is that of senior secondary certificate holders (4.3 per cent). The data, however, also show that madrasa teachers have far less access to teacher training facilities than those in regular schools.

**Table 5.**  
**Percentage of teachers in secular and madrasa schools who are trained**

Division	Secondary school (including school and colleges <sup>2</sup> )	Madrasas
Barisal	48.4	10.1
Chittagong	60.5	12.6
Dhaka	64.0	15.8
Khulna	55.1	16.5
Rajshahi	43.2	12.3
Sylhet	49.6	8.5

Source: Ministry of Education, 2006.

### **2.1.3 Data on financing**

Aliya madrasas are state supported, which mainly means that the salary of all the madrasa teachers of secular as well as religious subjects is covered by the government. The government data show that 15.2 per cent of the Aliya madrasas' income comes from student fees, which is close to the percentage for regular schools, at 17.8 per cent. Other key sources include: 72.0 per cent in salary support by the government, 2.0 per cent from property income, and only 4.9 per cent from public donations.

The Aliya madrasa system is thus an integral part of the Bangladeshi education system. These madrasas are not owned by the state. Apart from three state-managed kamil madrasas situated in Dhaka, Sylhet and Bogra, the rest are managed by independent boards. The government pays 90% of the salary of the teachers and staff of these institutions, as it does in the case of all other state aided non-governmental schools. Thus, these madrasas are run by independent private boards, which get financial support from the government, and follow the curriculum and examinations set by the Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board.

## **2.2 Qomi madrasas**

As the above analysis shows, the role of madrasas in the education system is significant. But the real role of madrasas in the system is even higher than captured in the data above, which only relate to Aliya madrasas, i.e. state supported madrasas. Besides these, there is an equally large, if not larger, parallel structure of private madrasas called Qomi madrasas. The difference between the two types of madrasa most commonly quoted by government officials and the ulema of the Qomi madrasas is the source of funding. While Aliya madrasas are state sponsored, the Qomi system represents the madrasa stream that has chosen to reject state funding, relying instead on the Qom (the public).

There is no reliable data on Qomi madrasas, but estimates suggest they are more numerous than the Aliya madrasas: 15,000 are registered with the umbrella organizations of the Qomi madrasas, while the number of unregistered ones has been argued to be as high as 64,000 (Ahmed, 2005). These Qomi madrasas constitute a non-formal stream of religious education and are characterized by a hierarchy similar to the Aliya madrasa system (i.e. hafizia, qiratia, quaumi and nizamia). At times, they are referred to as a kharizia system. Qomi madaris follow the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum, though the

level taught varies according to the teaching capacity of the madrasa. A majority of them also house and educate orphans.

While Aliya madrasas draw on the tradition of the Calcutta Aliya madrasa established by Warren Hastings in 1780, the Qomi madrasas take their inspiration from the Darul Uloom Deoband. They are spread all over the country and work with support from community contributions. Chittagong is the stronghold of Qomi madrasas and it hosts the most prestigious of Deobandi madrasas. A description of some of these big Qomi madrasas provides an insight into their origin and working.

Darul Uloom Moniul Islam Hathazari, the most prestigious Jamia of the Qomi madrasas in Bangladesh, was established in 1901 by the combined efforts of several scholars: Muhammad Habubullah, Maulana Abdul Waheed, Maulana Azizur Rehman, and Maulana Jamiruddin. The students come from all over the country and pay no fee. The annual expenditure of the Jamia is about Taka 18,000,000 (£1 was equal to Taka 135 in mid-2007), which is largely met from charity and donations by the general public. The Jamia does not receive any financial assistance from the government or affiliated organizations. It teaches up to Dora-e-Hadith (i.e. kamil level). It conducts classes in English and Bengali, with an emphasis on learning Urdu as one of the working languages. It covers secular subjects until eighth grade, after which it specializes in 27 different subjects within the religious studies offered under the Dora-e-Hadith.

An important role of the Jamia is to provide fatwas (interpretations of the religious texts in the light of modern day issues) to Muslims without a fee and in the light of the Quran, Sunnah, Ijma, and Qias. To perform this function, it maintains a board of learned muftis (ulema qualified to give fatwas). It teaches and encourages students to carry on Tableeg (preaching Islam) activities among Muslims, emphasizes to its students dedication to a life of thrift according to the Islamic way, and builds up their skills in the art of writing kutabs (Friday prayer sermons). Particular emphasis is placed on teaching the students the art of debate and discussion, so that they can conduct cross-religious debates. The library has a large collection. On completion of their studies, the students of the Jamia are expected to teach in religious institutions within the country, as well as taking up jobs in the Middle East. Al-Jamiya Al-Islamiya Pattia in Chittagong, the other prominent Qomi madrasa, has similar functions.

Jamia Darul Maarif Al-Islamia, another prominent Qomi madrasa in Chittagong, is inspired by the Nadwat-ul-Ulema (another famous madrasa within the Deoband tradition of India), which led a reformist tradition within Deoband to adapt madrasa education to modern day life. The Jamia was established in May 1975 by Maulana Mohammad Sultan Zoak Nadwai and the current leadership argues that, with changing times, the community also demands change. The religious scholars of the madrasa have therefore made an effort to match the curriculum to modern demands. All the degrees of Maarif Al-Islamia are recognized by Nadwat-ul-Ulema.

Similarly, Jamia Rahmania Arabia, another of the most prominent Qomi madrasas in Dhaka, was established in 1986 by Sheikh ul Hadees, a prominent religious political figure in Bangladesh who is now 90 years of age. The madrasa has 12,000 students who all reside within the madrasa. Poor students are provided with books and free food, while the remaining 700 finance their own expenses. There are 50 teachers and 30 other staff. The annual expenditure is 6 to 7,000,000 Takas. The merchant community is a big donor base.

As to why Chittagong became the hub of Islamic learning in Bangladesh and the stronghold of Qomi madrasas, the answer provided by the ulema as well as the historical texts indicate Chittagong's role as a port city. The Bengal coast was a stop-over for many Arab traders on the eastern routes, and it has been argued that some of them established a small colony of Muslims in the Chittagong region. Some evidence of Arab contact with this region as early as the eighth century is found in the writings of the Arab geographers of that time, who mention names of certain ports and cities. Many sufi saints and scholars are believed to have come even before the Muslim conquest: for example, Baba Adam Shahid of Rampal, Shah Sultan Rumi and others. Saint worship (pirism) is an important element of popular Islam in Bengal.

The next section attempts to trace the history of the two alternative madrasa traditions in Bangladesh.

## 2.3 Islam in Bengal

Islam in Bengal spread even before the conquest of the Muslim invaders (Huque and Akhter, 1987). Many Sufi saints or scholars are believed to have come, even before the Muslim conquest, and Sufism even today is integral to Bengali Islam. The first modern census in India conducted in 1872 documents a large concentration of Muslims in the areas now constituting Rajshahni, Dhaka, and Chittagong

divisions, with 56, 59 and 67 per cent of the population respectively being Muslim in these areas. Later, in the 1881 census, the Muslims of Bengal constituted more than one-third of the total Muslim population of India. According to local legends, prominent Sufis from places like Mecca, Balkh, Yaman, Bistam, Ghazni and Delhi came to Bengal even before the conquest of North-West Bengal by Bakhtyar Khaliji. The conquest attracted even more Sufis from Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia, Samarqand, Bukhara and Northern India to settle in Bengal. The success of these Sufis, who had been arriving since the thirteenth century, in developing followers within the region has, it has been argued, resulted in a continued flow of saints and Sufis to Bengal from West and Central Asia. It is suggested that the process continued uninterrupted until the seventeenth century.

## 2.4 The rise of the madrasa tradition

### 2.4.1 *The early period*

The madrasa tradition in South Asia goes back to the thirteenth century and its spread and consolidation was linked to the establishment of the Mughal Empire. Arabs formally entered the sub-continent in the eighth century during the Umayyad Caliphate of Walid I (705-715) by sending a young Arab general, Mohammad Ibn Qasim, to fight off some pirates off the coast of Sind. The real foundation of the Muslim empire in India, however, was laid during the Sultanate period (1175-1526) and the Islamic Sharia (or code of law) was institutionalized by the end of the fourteenth century (ibid). The madrasa tradition can trace its history to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in the early thirteenth century. Sultan Qutubuddin Aibek established a number of mosques to provide religious as well as modern education, a tradition that was continued under the Mughal Empire, leading to the rise of a strong madrasa establishment. Funded mostly by the state, these madrasas trained the elite during the Mughal period.

The displacement of the Mughal Empire by British rule, however, entirely transformed the status of madrasas in Indian society, and played a decisive role in shaping the current madrasa tradition in South Asia. First of all, with the demise of the Mughal Empire, the official sources of support to these groups dwindled. The British government changed the policy with respect to the Madad-i-Ma'ash (revenue free lands) that sustained various institutions of Muslim education and learning. This made the madrasas even more dependent on voluntary financial contributions from the community. Nizami (1983) and Metcalf (1978) show that those madrasas that were unable to secure additional public support eventually closed down.

At the same time, with the changes in the administration and economy introduced by the English East India Company, madrasa education lost much of its utility. Whereas earlier, Muslim education had relevance to both religious and secular needs, gradually it became increasingly otherworldly. Hence the Muslim educated classes became divided between the modern educated and the madrasa educated. The economic irrelevance of madrasa education under the new regime led it to attract increasing numbers of children from economically less well resourced families. This made the madrasa system even more dependent on public donations and also made it less appealing to the affluent classes (Metcalf, 1978; Robinson, 2001). Apart from the need for greater public support, British rule also brought other changes to the madrasa system. Some Muslims who attended modern educational institutions, like the Delhi College, transferred the principles of these western institutional models to religious education in the post-1857 period. The idea of formal classes and a set syllabus, which was introduced in Darul Uloom Deoband, as opposed to the old practice of flexible teaching between the Alim (scholar) and the student, reflected the influence of the western education that some of the initiators of the madrasa had received at Delhi College.

In order to survive in this changed environment, madrasas were required to dramatically reorganize themselves. This period thus saw the rise of a reformist madrasa tradition that came to be known as Deoband, and is today at the centre of controversy around militancy in South Asian madrasas (Ahmed, 2005). Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband was set up 1866 in response to the changed status of madrasas and Islam in general within Indian society following the establishment of British Raj. The ulema leading this tradition argued that in changed times it was important for Muslims to focus on individual reform and personal religious responsibility. The focus shifted to individual action and the purification of Islamic principles. The Deoband school adopted the Dars-i-Nizami that evolved at the Farangi Mahal madrasa during Mullah Nizamuddin's lifetime in the eighteenth century and in the years immediately following his death, and that remained the dominant system of Indian Islamic education. Dars-i-Nizami consolidated the rationalist traditions of scholarship derived from Iran. However, the Deobandi ulema placed much emphasis on the Quran and Hadith, known as the traditional sciences, as opposed to Farangi Mahal's emphasis on logic and jurisprudence, known as the rational sciences (Metcalf, 1978; Robinson, 2001).

Deobandi ulemas aimed to train educated ulema who would be dedicated to reformed Islam and individual reform. Deoband also established the tradition of setting up sister madrasas. Today Deoband represents the dominant ideological tradition within madrasas in Pakistan as well as Bangladesh (Asadullah and Chaudhury, 2006). The syllabus, literature and method of instruction developed at Deoband continue to be followed by madrasas with allegiance to the Deoband school of thought. Other important schools of Islamic thought in South Asia include Sunni-Berelvi, Ahle Hadith/Salafi and Shia. The Berelvi madrasa tradition, which has the second largest following among South Asian Muslims, was also founded during the colonial period, in 1904. Its followers, known as Berelvi, are spread all over India. The Berelvi tradition is strongly opposed to the very puritanical strains of the Deoband movement, which have an aversion to saint and Sufi worship.

In Bengal, colonial rule was also important in another way in giving rise to present day madrasas. Here the British themselves initiated a new madrasa tradition in a bid to reform the madrasas. It did not go much beyond Bengal, but within Bengal it developed roots, though it remained from the start and to date outside the religious hierarchy. The Aliya Madrasa, initially known as the Calcutta Madrasa, was the earliest of the state-managed educational institutions initiated in India under British rule. It was established in October 1781 by Governor-General Warren Hastings, who also bore its expenses for one and a half years. The Bengal Government took it over in April 1782. The purpose of the Aliya Madrasa was to train students in Persian, Arabic and Muslim Law (Fiqh) for appointment to lower posts in government offices and the courts, particularly as interpreters of Muslim law. The madrasa took up the same syllabus as was taught in traditional madrasas (the Dars-i-Nizami), but also added secular subjects. In 1826, English courses were introduced at elementary level. In 1850 a major reorganization took place and the Madrasa was divided into two separate departments, an Arabic (Senior) Department and Anglo-Persian (Junior) Department. The plans to bring the madrasa within the fold of Calcutta University, however, did not materialize.

After the partition of the sub-continent, the Calcutta Aliya Madrasa was shifted to Dhaka. During the research field visit to the madrasa, the principal was most proud to highlight how the table in his office had been moved from the original madrasa in Calcutta. Only a limited number of madrasas were established under the Aliya system before 1971; instead expansion came after 1979 when the state initiated a formal madrasa reform programme and gave systematic incentives to madrasas to modernize (Asadullah and Chaudhury, 2006).

### ***2.4.2 The post-independence period: 1947-1977***

Both East and West Pakistan inherited a good number of Deobandi madrasas at the time of partition. Further, many ulema trained in the Deobandi tradition migrated to West Pakistan (Bano, 2007). There is less evidence of similar migration to East Pakistan. There are two main reasons for this: first, West Pakistan shared the same language as that of Deoband, i.e. Urdu. Second, geographically it was closer to Uttar Pradesh, the stronghold of Muslims and home to Deoband, Nadwa and other big madrasas. Thus, for ulema wanting to migrate to Pakistan after partition, West Pakistan was a more natural destination, with some senior ulema from Deoband migrating. In Bangladesh, on the other hand, the top Qomi madrasas in Chittagong were established by Bengali students who had studied in Deoband or Nadwa and set up these madrasas on their return.

Talk of reforming madrasas within Pakistan started soon after partition. The country was created in the name of Islam but the leadership was in secular hands. Thus an attempt to produce a more liberal Islam started within a few years of the country's establishment. A number of committees were formed to attempt to reform madrasas. One such committee was the Dars-e-Namazi Jaiza (review) Commission, which included prominent ulema, educationists and government officials, and was established to review the syllabus used in madrasas. The New Education Policy in 1970 also asked for the introduction of modern subjects in the madrasa syllabus, in order to produce graduates capable of meeting the demands of modern science and industry. None of these recommendations was seriously pursued, either in East or West Pakistan, due to lack of political will. The scenario in East Pakistan, however, changed dramatically after the war of liberation and the establishment of Bangladesh in 1971.

### ***2.4.3 Establishment of the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board***

The post-1971 period brought many changes to the madrasa education system in Bangladesh. In 1978 an ordinance was passed which enabled the formation of a Madrasah Education Board<sup>3</sup>, which started operating in 1979. The establishment of this Board marked the culmination of the older Aliya Board in East Pakistan, which was linked to the Calcutta Madrasa Aliya. The Madrasah Education Board, as well as the Aliya Madrasa, was moved to Dhaka from Calcutta in 1958. The system continued until 1979, when the new Madrasa Education Board was established. The Board gradually developed a reformed madrasa curriculum in which secular subjects were given a prominent position.

In 1985 the first madrasa qualification level (Dahkil) was recognized as equivalent to the senior secondary certificate and in 1987 Alim (the next level) was given the status of the higher secondary certificate. The purpose of establishing the Board was to prepare Muslim students to excel in all fields. The key responsibilities of the Madrasa Education Board include: to review, approve and register madrasas; to conduct examinations for Dakhil, Alim, Fazil and Kamil qualifications; to publish results and issue certificates; to approve the appointment of management committees for the madrasas; and to develop the curriculum and syllabus.

#### **2.4.4 Establishment of the Wafaq ul Madaris Al-Arabia**

While the state was working on developing the Aliya madrasa tradition, the Qomi madrasa leadership was also organizing itself into collective platforms to protect its position vis-à-vis the state and also to ensure standardization of education within the Qomi madrasas. In 1978, a Qomi madrasa board was set up in Bangladesh with the name of Wafaq ul Madaris Al Arabia, Bangladesh. It was a continuation of the process that had already started in West Pakistan in 1957 with the establishment of Wafaq ul Madaris Al-Arabia, Pakistan. The main purpose of this platform was to develop a standard curriculum for the Qomi madrasas, to conduct centralized exams and to issue standard degree certificates. It developed a three-tiered representative system, with an executive body, followed by a top committee comprised of the senior madrasas and a third tier of ordinary members comprised of the smaller Qomi madrasas. Membership of the Wafaq was voluntary, but all madrasas wanting their students to have Wafaq-recognized degrees had to register with it.

Currently there are almost 9,000 madrasas registered with this board, with the following estimated breakdown: 300 offer education to master's degree level (takhmil), 200 to bachelor's level (fazilat), 1,000 to secondary level (sanaria ammah), 2,000 at the lower secondary level (mutawassitah), 3,000 at the primary level (ibtedayi) and 2,000 for Tahfeezul Quran (reading of the Quran). As in the case of the Aliya madrasas, it is thus a pyramidal structure, with the number of madrasas being the highest at the primary level and shrinking dramatically at the post-secondary level.

The madrasas attached to the board follow a standard curriculum. In the early years, depending on their teaching capacity, all Qomi madrasas teach secular subjects to grade 8. From class 9 onwards the focus shifts exclusively to religious education. In addition to this, there are also a few other regional boards of Qomi madrasas, which often revolve around a specific madrasa. Ittehadul Madaris is

another influential Qomi madrasa board, mainly under the influence of the famous Al-Jamiya Al-Islamiya Pattia in Chittagong. Unlike the Aliya madrasas, whose degrees are recognized by the government, the degrees issued by the Qomi madrasa boards are not recognized by the state. Thus they cannot be used for securing a government position. However, they are important for Qomi madrasa students seeking teaching positions within the religious hierarchy of Qomi madrasas, for religious jobs in the Gulf region and for jobs in the private sector.

### **2.4.5 Madrasas and militancy**

Since the early 1990s, there have been growing concerns about the rise of religious militancy in Bangladesh. Qomi madrasas are often implicated in this debate, as groups involved in religious militancy have been argued to have links with Qomi madrasas. Islamic Oikya Jote, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI), the Jihad Movement, Arakan Rohingya National Organization and Rohingya Solidarity Organization are the prominent Islamic groups blamed for Islamic militancy (Lintner, 2004). Islamic Oikya Jote was a member of the four-party alliance led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in the 2001 elections and won two seats. The main jihadi organization in Bangladesh, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, has an estimated strength of 15,000 and is argued to be sympathetic to Al-Qaida and the Taliban (Lintner, 2004). Established in 1998, Arakan Rohingya National Organization is a platform of Rohingya migrants from Burma fighting for an autonomous Muslim region in Burma's Arakan state. The Jihad Movement is another platform for several of these Islamic groups in Bangladesh.

The biggest Islamic political party in Bangladesh remains Jamiat-i-Islami which, after a chequered history, has now become a prominent political force. Jamiat-i-Islami has also been blamed for supporting militant groups and so has its student organization, Islamic Chhatra Shibir (ICS), which has a stronghold in Chittagong University. With the concentration of many of these groups in Chittagong region, which also hosts the biggest Qomi madrasas, some have argued that there is a close link between these groups and Qomi madrasas. The post-September 11<sup>th</sup> period has thus seen many development agencies becoming involved in the madrasa reform programme, which is aimed mainly at the Qomi madrasas. USAID and DFID are the two development agencies most active in this field (details in Section 5).

Some have also suggested links between Aliya madrasas and militancy. According to the report of the Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR):

“The state support to madrasas, which are increasingly being held responsible for fermenting extremism across the world, has increased exponentially during the current BNP-Jamaat rule. It is not only Saudi funds. The Government of Bangladesh has been using assistance for education from UN agencies, western donors and other multilateral financial institutions to fund the madrasas..... These figures relate to about 9,000 government-registered madrasas. There are about 15,000 Qomi madrasas under the Bangladesh Qomi Madrasa Education Board which are totally out of government control and have their own curriculum... There are thousands of other madrasas which are not registered under any organization... Madrasas have been consistently used as training centres by the Jihadis<sup>4</sup>.”

However, the evidence for these claims remains extremely weak.

There are thus two parallel systems of madrasa education operating in Bangladesh today. What has made the state invest seriously in the madrasa modernization programme, and what has made some madrasas accept state money, leading to the increased size of the Aliya madrasa tradition, is an interesting puzzle, given that similar measures in India and Pakistan have met limited success in the former and tough resistance in the latter. The next section attempts to identify some of the factors.

### 3 Why reform? The rise of the Aliya madrasas

In order to understand the dramatic expansion of the Aliya madrasa system after the liberation of Bangladesh, this section explores the factors that have shaped state-madrassa relationships in Bangladesh.

#### 3.1 State-specific factors

The most important factor in the rise of the Aliya madrasa tradition has been the role Islam has played within Muslim politics in South Asia and more specifically in Bangladeshi politics since 1971. The creation of Pakistan (East and West wings) was the result of the demand of Muslims of the sub-continent for recognition that Hindus and Muslims were two different nations and needed different states. The leadership of the Muslim League, the party that led the movement for the creation of Pakistan, was largely secular in its orientation, but to mobilize the Muslim public to demand a separate homeland, it used religious rhetoric extensively. Thus, the creation of Pakistan in 1947 was the fulfilment of the claim that the Muslims of India wanted a separate homeland in which they could lead their lives according to Islamic principles.

In the newly formed country, there was tension between its two wings from the start: East Pakistan made up 44 million of the newly-formed Pakistan's 69 million people, but the country's civil service and military were dominated by West Pakistanis. The West Pakistan leadership, which after the initial unsettled period moved into the hands of the military under General Ayub Khan, continued to use Islam to legitimize itself and to conceal ethnic and regional differences within the country. The bitterness that grew within East Pakistan due to continued domination of the ruling elite by West Pakistan led to a resistance movement by the Awami League, organized on the basis of socialist ideals and using a socialist vocabulary. During the war of liberation, the Pakistani army not only committed many atrocities against the population of East Pakistan, but also described the Bengalis as kafirs (infidels). In the newly formed state of Bangladesh, Islam for some time had to take a back seat. The opposition of Islamic countries to the establishment of Bangladesh during the war of liberation had some role to play in this. Islamic political parties were thus banned on the creation of Bangladesh.

The constitution of the new country, framed in 1972, reflected the public sentiment that religion should be kept away from the state. The preamble to the constitution stated secularism as one of the four fundamental principles of the constitution. As Huque and Akhter (1987) note:

“Article 12 of the constitution specified that the principle of secularism would be realized by the elimination of: communalism in all its forms; the gathering by the state of political status in favour of any religion; the abuse of religion for political purposes; and any discrimination against, or persecution of, persons practicing a particular religion. Article 38 provided for freedom to form associations, but provided that ‘no person shall have the right to form, or be a member or otherwise take part in the activities of, any communal or other association or union which in the name or on the basis of any religion has for its object, or purposes, a political purpose’.”

The constitution prohibited the operation of a number of political parties which had striven to establish Islam in Bangladesh. Article 41 of the constitution stated that every citizen had “the right to profess, practice, or propagate any religion,” and that no person “attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction”. At the same time, politico-religious party organizations were abolished and the “formation of such organizations” was prohibited. Huque and Akhter (1987) also provide a detailed account of why this strict separation of the state from religion was artificial in terms of public sentiment, which deep down remained Islamic despite the secular overtones of the war of liberation.

This meant that the separation of Islam from politics was never complete, even in the time of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (the leader of the Awami League)<sup>5</sup>. The strong appeal of Islam among the masses and the geo-political reality that the Bangladeshi leadership also wanted to find a support base within the oil-rich Arab states made Islamic identity important for the country even under its secular leadership. The Islamic card became all the more critical to Bangladeshi politics under the military regime that displaced Sheikh Mujibur Rahman within four years of the birth of the country. General Zia, who had replaced Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s government, needed an ideological platform to justify military involvement in politics and build resistance to the Awami League. He chose to play the Islamic card and his party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, allied with Islamic forces in the country. Gen. Hossain Muhammad Ershad (1982-1990), who took over in 1981 after Zia’s assassination, took the same strategy even further.

In 1988, Ershad declared Islam the state religion of Bangladesh. He also changed the weekly holiday from Sunday to Friday and, more significantly, removed the ban on Islamic parties engaging in politics. It was this context of the re-Islamization of Bangladeshi politics and the military regimes’ use of Islamic

ideology to gain political legitimacy that gave a strong impetus for investment in the Aliya madrasa system and the establishment of the Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board in 1978. These were among the many measures of the Zia regime intended to convince the public of the government's Islamic credentials.

The Board thus had a very different origin from the madrasa reform measures planned in (West) Pakistan during the 1960s and 1970s and even today. The emphasis there was, and today remains, on modernizing the madrasas; the state is vocal in its critique of the madrasa education system and openly imposes its own ideas of reform. The birth of the Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board, on the other hand, was presented as a genuine effort to support and strengthen Muslim children's right to gain both secular and religious education. Given the prior history of the Aliya Madrasa in Bengal and the pro-Islamic credentials of the state, the Board was not resisted by the madrasas as it was in (West) Pakistan.

### **3.2 The role of the Bengali Language Movement**

Closely intertwined with the war of liberation and also the rise of the Aliya madrasas was the issue of the Bengali language movement. In 1948 the Government of Pakistan had declared Urdu the official language. The Urdu language was viewed as the lingua franca of Indian Muslims. It had developed under Persian, Arabic, and Turkish influence in South Asia during the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. Having developed on the basis of the Arabic script, Urdu was closely associated with the identity of Indian Muslims. As opposed to this, the Hindi and Devanagari scripts symbolized Hindu culture. Urdu developed most among the Muslims of North India, while Bengali remained the dominant language of Bengal.

The declaration of Urdu as the national language led to strong resentment in East Pakistan, as it meant that Bengalis would be at a disadvantage in applying for any government position. This resentment turned into a popular movement when a protest organized by students of the University of Dhaka in 1952 met severe resistance from the police, resulting in the death of several students. This tragedy resulted in the launching of a proper Bengali Movement, which was effective enough to get Bengali recognized as the second official language of Pakistan in 1956; it also became a forerunner of the Bengali nationalist movement. In Bangladesh, 21<sup>st</sup> February is observed as Language Movement

Day and is a national holiday. The Shaheed Minar monument was constructed near Dhaka Medical College in memory of the movement and its victims.

The critical role of the Bengali language in the entire liberation movement placed the Qomi madrasas in an awkward position. Despite the strong emphasis on Bengali in East Pakistan, the madrasas were one place where Urdu had priority. The Darul Uloom Deoband, on which the Qomi madrasas are based, was centred in Uttar Pradesh, the heartland of the Urdu language. Many of the senior ulema of the top Qomi madrasas had studied at top Jamias in Uttar Pradesh, i.e. Deoband or Nadwa. Much of the scholarship on Islam was in Urdu too, as the South Asian ulema often contributed to Islamic publications, sometimes on issues not discussed even in the Arabic language. The madrasas were thus reluctant to break their link with Urdu and continued to use it as the medium of instruction. However, after the 1971 war of liberation, the significance of Urdu for social and economic purposes became much less.

The issue of language was thus creating pressure for reform within the madrasa community. Despite this, when the government Madrasa Education Board proposed madrasa reforms, including switching to teaching in the Bengali language, the idea did not prove controversial. Even the bigger Qomi madrasas, like Hathazari, which still place much emphasis on Urdu, now treat it as an additional language and not as the main medium of instruction. For the smaller Qomi madrasas, at times even teaching Urdu as an additional language is not an option, given resource constraints. Thus, Urdu has gradually been phased out of madrasa education in Bengal and the government package helped that shift.

In the view of Dr Imtiaz Ahmed, a prominent Bangladeshi academic:

“Madrasas were financially weak in the 1980s. More importantly, they were giving education in Urdu and they were losing students as they were not getting jobs anywhere and the curriculum was also very biased towards certain kind of jobs. So there were structural issues that forced them to come to participate in the government reform. The Islamic elite had affiliation with Arabic but less so with Urdu so it was an affiliation they could consider giving up. This was strategic thinking as it helped get government funds plus meet community requirements.”

### 3.3 The history of Jamiat-i-Islami

The third factor that helped in the dramatic rise of the Aliya madrasa system is linked to the role of Jamiat-I-Islami in Bangladeshi politics. Formed in 1940 by the famous Islamic scholar Sayyid Abul Ala Maudud, Jamat-I-Islamic continues to operate in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh to date. In India it maintains a non-political platform, while in the other two countries it participates in electoral politics. The Jamiat's political philosophy is to work for the establishment of a state governed by Islamic laws. In Bangladesh, the Jamiat has had a turbulent past. During the war of liberation, Jamiat supported Pakistan against the Bengali nationalists, ostensibly because it believed in Muslim unity and could not ideologically support the breaking up of a Muslim nation.

This is, however, only one interpretation of Jamiat's pro-Pakistan policy in 1971. Its critics accuse it of supporting mass violence and killing of Bengali freedom-fighters. In the post-1971 period much of the Jamiat leadership had to go underground and some escaped to Pakistan. The 1972 Constitution further barred religious parties from politics. However, Jamiat removal from politics was shortlived. When General Zia embarked on his Islamization drive, he allowed the religious parties to come back into politics and the Jamiat's leaders were allowed back into the country. General Ershad continued the same policy and the role of Khaleda Zia, wife of General Zia, who became prime minister after a general election in February 1991, further helped consolidate the Islamic parties. Sheikh Hasina Wajed's election victory in 1996 temporarily checked this trend, but a four party alliance led by BNP came into power in 2001 and the government for the first time included two ministers from the Jamiat. The Jamiat had emerged as the third-largest party, winning seventeen of the three hundred seats in the parliament. Its youth organization, Islamic Chhatra Shibir (ICS), is also very active and has a stronghold in Chittagong University.

Some authors argue that Jamiat-i-Islami has strong links with Qomi madrasas, although without any convincing evidence (Lintner, 2004). In fact, the Jamiat in Bangladesh has supported Aliya madrasas rather than Qomi madrasas. This issue arose in interviews with officials of the Bangladesh Madrasah Board, as well as with journalists and observers of the madrasa system and the Qomi madrasas themselves. The connection is not formal. As one of the ulema of a Qomi madrasa explained: "It is an ideological support. The teachers of the Aliya madrasa are of the Jamiat-i-Islami mindset." Another added: "Jamiat-i-Islami from the start developed a close association with the Aliya madrasas. They have been able to cultivate the links in the madrasas by cultivating links with the teachers of the Aliya madrasas."

During interviews with officials of Jamait-i-Islami, the Jamiat's support for Aliya madrasas was also very clear. Barrister Abdur Razak, Jamiat-I-Islami's senior official, was critical of the Qomi madrasas:

“Qomi madrasa education is not total Islam. The student coming out of the madrasa is a misfit in society. He is not a person who can compete in society. The person who comes out of the madrasa should be able to go to Oxford. The question is that Islam does not forbid you from learning English, mathematics, etc. Islam is a modern religion.”

He recommended that the researcher visit an Aliya madrasa in Dhaka as an example of a good madrasa.

In interviews, ulema of the Qomi madrasas were also very clear that Jamiat is supportive of the Aliya madrasas. The general perception was that the Qomi madrasas are supportive of other Islamic parties that are more radical. There is a logical connection. The Jamiat's philosophy is that religion has to be a way of life and the state has to be shaped by it. It does not believe in studying Islam just for the sake of becoming mosque imams and religious teachers. Its leadership comes from educated middle class professionals, who believe that Muslim students should take a lead in all professions but also have a good religious understanding. The Aliya madrasas, with their emphasis on combining religious and secular education, thus found their support within a dominant religious force in the country. This gave the programme greater legitimacy among the madrasas that were thinking of benefiting from the state-funded programme.

### 3.4 The nature of incentives

The fourth factor, which was critical in the massive expansion of the Aliya madrasas, was the nature of the incentives provided by the state. The package provided by the state paid the salaries of madrasa teachers of secular as well as religious subjects. This was a big incentive for the madrasa leadership, especially smaller madrasas struggling to survive on small donations. In contrast, the incentives provided by the state in India and Pakistan have been far less attractive. They have only given salaries for the teachers appointed by the state to teach secular subjects. Since the madrasa leadership normally specializes in religious subjects, this means that the reform packages offered in these two countries have little monetary promise for the core madrasa staff and leadership, thus making the programme less appealing.

In the case of Bangladesh, apart from the state meeting the costs of the salaries of the entire teaching staff, another incentive programme seems to have played a key role in the rise of Aliya madrasas. This is the World Bank funded female stipend scheme introduced post-1993. Asadullah and Chaudhury (2007) show that, at the time of the reform, only 4.9 per cent of madrasa students were female. Today, this stands at 47 per cent. This increase mainly occurred in the period 1990 to 2003, when the female stipend scheme was launched and during which the female share of total madrasa enrolment grew by 33 percentage points, i.e. by 209 percent. Under this scheme, girls' tuition fees are waived and they are also provided with a stipend. Unlike the Qomi madrasas and like state-aided private schools, the Aliya madrasas charge fees and were thus eligible to take part in this scheme. Asadullah and Chaudhury (2007) argue that this played an important role in the expansion of Aliya madrasas in rural areas.

### 3.5 Conclusion

The above analysis shows that financial incentives have played a role in the acceptance of the Aliya madrasa system, but equally important has been the political context in which the reforms were undertaken. Unlike Pakistan, where the reform programme suffers from strong distrust on the part of the religious community, the Aliya madrasa model was rolled out under an apparently pro-Islamic regime in Bangladesh. Along with many other measures that it was taking to Islamize the state, the programme had the support of an influential religious party within the country, and the switch to the Bengali language suited the socio-economic realities of the madrasa students in post-1971 Bangladesh. All these factors made this programme look like a genuine opportunity for madrasas rather than appearing as an attempt by the state to control them.

This highlights the importance of trust in the reformer for a reform to have willing followers. However, if the incentives and the context for Aliya madrasas were so appealing, the question is not why the Aliya madrasa system spread, but rather why the Qomi madrasas did not join the reform, i.e. why did the two streams not merge? The next section of the report addresses this question.

## 4 Why resist? Qomi madrasas' position vis-à-vis Aliya madrasas

Why does the Qomi madrasa system continue to exist despite the strong material incentives provided by the state and the historical context in which they did not have explicit reasons to distrust the state, as in the post-September 11 context of Pakistan or the Muslim minority context of India? Is it due to a lack of options or a deliberate choice? This section addresses these questions, based on interviews conducted with the leaders of Qomi and Aliya madrasas in Dhaka and Chittagong and with officials of the Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board. Here the first question that needs to be addressed is what we know about the links between the Qomi and Aliya madrasa traditions. Do Aliya madrasas really represent a group from within the Qomi madrasas, which decided to change in response to economic incentives, a claim put forward by some?

### 4.1 Existing claims

Interviews with government officials as well as the Qomi madrasas show that the common perception is that Aliya madrasas arose mainly in response to the state incentives and were not former Qomi madrasas. As Mawlana Mahfuzul Haque from Jamia Rahmania Arabia noted: "Qomi madrasas were from the start different than Aliya madrasas and even today the ulema argue them to be very different." A recent paper by Asadullah and Chaudhury (2007), however, argues against this that around 75 per cent of the Aliya madrasas consist of madrasas that converted from the Qomi to the Aliya model. The data used to support this claim is weak: it bases its estimates primarily on the record of how many Aliya madrasas existed prior to introduction of the state's incentives for Aliya madrasas. The conclusion they draw is that, given strong material incentives, it is possible to reform a tradition as conservative or puritanical as Deoband. This study shows that there are serious limitations to these claims. It argues that what matters is not just whether some Qomi madrasas converted to the Aliya system but, more importantly, who converted from within the Qomi madrasa system and which madrasa tradition today leads the religious establishment in Bangladesh.

### 4.2 Qomi Madrasas' approach to Aliya madrasas

In the previous sections, the system of the Qomi madrasas and their collective platforms have been analysed in some detail. What becomes very clear, after exploring the madrasa landscape in Bangladesh, is that the Qomi madrasas still dominate the religious establishment. Interviews with government officials in the Aliya madrasa board, as well as with the ulema of the Qomi madrasas, show that it is the Qomi madrasa students who still command the mosques and the traditional role of

clergy in the society. Aliya madrasa graduates have not displaced Qomi graduates from the religious establishment.

#### **4.2.1 Differing orientations**

The first evidence to support the above claim comes from the main criticism of the Qomi madrasas, which is that they only produce graduates for religious jobs, children who can be absorbed only into positions as the heads of mosques, khateebis and future madrasa teachers. Having studied secular subjects only to eighth grade and in some cases for an even shorter period, they are of limited use in the commercial sector and the government's refusal to recognize Qomi madrasa degrees means that their graduates are not eligible for government positions. In this scenario, the most natural source of employment for them is the religious hierarchy, represented through the dense mosque network across the country.

As Mawlana Mahfuzul Haque from Jamia Rahmania Arabia stated in an interview:

“The real purpose of the madrasas is to teach the Quran and Hadith and keep the foundation of Islamic education. The real emphasis is on the Arabic language so that the child can understand the text better. Many people want to get the degree so that they can get a job. If they want this then they will send their children to Aliya madrasas. But, those who only want Islam, they come to Qomi madrasas.”

On the other hand, the Aliya madrasa students are, by their very orientation, encouraged to take up regular jobs, join secular professions and compete with non-madrassa school children. The whole philosophy of the Aliya madrasa is that religious studies should not mean religious employment; children from madrasas should be able to enter the regular economy. The number of Aliya madrasa students goes down dramatically at the post-secondary level when the emphasis shifts mainly to religious studies. Also, as noted above, a high percentage of the Aliya students completing the fazil degree get absorbed as teachers within the Aliya madrasas themselves. Thus there are few claims and little evidence of Aliya madrasa students entering the traditional religious hierarchy in Bangladesh and populating the mosques spread across the country.

Commenting on this, Dr Ahmed noted,

“The emphasis within Aliya madrasas has been on commercialization of madrasas and not on coming up with a more enlightened version of Islam. The reformed madrasa curriculum is not teaching Al-Arabia and the Muslim philosophers who can provide for a more liberal interpretation of Islam. It is just teaching students to get ordinary jobs.”

#### **4.2.2 Differing command of religious texts**

Both Aliya and Qomi madrasas belong to the Deobandi school of thought, which is the strongest madrasa tradition in South Asia. Whereas in Pakistan and India, the other four schools - Brelvis, Shia, Jamiat-I-Islami and Al-Hadis - also command a significant number of madrasas, in Bangladesh the madrasas of these other sects seems to be completely absent. In terms of their religious texts, there is thus not much difference between the Aliya and Qomi madrasas, which use the same religious textbooks. The difference is in the ratio of religious to secular texts and the extent to which the religious books are covered.

According to the present syllabus of the Aliya madrasas, in classes 1 and 2, 300 marks are allotted for Arabic and 200 for Bengali and mathematics. In classes 3 and 4, 300 marks are for religious studies and 500 for general studies. From classes 5 to 8, each class has 400 marks for religious studies, and in class 5 only, 500 marks for general studies. In the other classes, 600 marks are allotted for general education. At the dakhil level, classes 9 and 10, there are 500 marks for religious studies and 500 for general education. At this level, a student who wants to study science has to take chemistry and physics instead of Islamic history and social science. There are also 100 marks for additional studies, which include agriculture, biology, higher mathematics, etc. At the alim level, equivalent to higher secondary education, out of the 1,000 compulsory marks, 700 are allocated for religious studies and 300 for general education, which includes Bengali and English etc. At the fazil level, equivalent to a bachelor's degree, of 1,100 marks, 600 are allotted to religious studies, 200 for Bengali and English and the remaining 300 for any one subject chosen from economics, political science, Islamic history, philosophy, English, sociology or social welfare. Then at the Kamil level, the distribution of the 1,000 allotted marks is such that 800 marks are for subjects related to religion and 200 for Islamic history. Thus, even within Aliya madrasas, the secular content is reduced at the fazil (BA) and kamil (MA)

levels due to the need to specialize. However, unlike Qomi madrasas, secular subjects still remain part of the curriculum (Rahman, 2005).

The subjects of religious education in Aliya madrasas are the Quran, Hadith, Arabic literature, fikkah, etc. The general education subjects are Bengali, English, mathematics, social science, general science, Islamic history, geography, physics, chemistry, biology, higher mathematics, agricultural science, etc. The curriculum in Qomi madrasas follows the Deoband model. Under the Wafaq ul Madaris Board, general education is imparted, along with religious education, from classes 1 to 8. These subjects include: Bengali and grammar, mathematics and geometry, English and grammar, history, geography, Persian and grammar, and Urdu and grammar. From classes 9 to 16, higher religious education is imparted, including 24 subjects: teaching of the Quran, rules for pure Quran teachings, Arabic language and literature, Arabic grammar, Balagat, Ilmul Aruj, Fiqh (Islamic law), Usul-e-Fiqh, Tafsir (interpretation of the Quran), Usul-e-Tafsir (rules for the Quran's interpretation), Hadith, Usul-e-Hadith, Aqaid and Kalam, Akhlaq and Tasuf, Faraiz (distribution of wealth), Islamic history, Islamic civic studies, Islamic political science, Islamic philosophy, Ilmul Hayat, Greek philosophy and Mantiq (Rahman, 2005).

When Qomi madrasas were asked to compare the systems of education in the two types of madrasa, the standard argument was that in Aliya madrasas only parts of the religious texts are taught, while in the Qomi madrasas the entire text is studied. This issue was highlighted by almost all the ulema within the Qomi madrasas: “They only read part of the subject; we read the whole book from A to Z. In Aliya there is selection. Those who study in Aliya madrasas cannot teach in a madrasa. Our children teach the Islamic students in the Aliya madrasa,” argued one senior Alim at a Qomi madrasa. Another added: “They study only for the degree; they study for the government job.” The religiously intensive approach of the Qomi madrasas is made possible by the fact that they are mainly residential facilities and students' study hours start at sunrise and continue until after dinner. In Aliya madrasas, on the other hand, the students attend as in regular schools (9am – 2pm) and along with secular subjects can only cover limited chapters in the religious textbooks. Thus there is a key difference in the basic outlook of the two types of madrasa. The state-supported Aliya madrasa is mainly preparing its students for modern-day jobs, while the focus of the Qomi madrasas is on establishing personal piety and preparing the student to be the leader of a mosque, running the mosque and fulfilling an important

religious role in society, or a scholar of Islamic texts. What even this brief comparison of the curriculum shows is that the Qomi madrasa student is more specialized in religious education; so that for all communities, he is in higher demand when it comes to filling a position within the neighbourhood mosque.

Here it is also important to understand the role the ulema have to play. For believers, ulema not only lead the Friday prayers but are also the reference point for clarifying Islamic principles and for asking for guidance on issues to do with modern life that are not explicitly addressed in the Quran and Sunnah. These justifications (fatwas) have to be provided in the light of religious texts. For the believer, an Alim who is known for his religious specialization is thus more important than the one who has had a split education. The importance attached to the ulema is due to their authority to issue fatwas and in turn which explains communities' support for Qomi madrasa.

### ***4.2.3 Differing levels of community embeddedness***

During the interviews, it was clear that Aliya madrasas do not draw on public donations. Partly they do not need to, but partly they also fail to - the Aliya madrasas interviewed were open to the idea of mobilizing public donations, but their attempts to do so had not been very successful. They also differ in their links with surrounding communities. Traditionally a madrasa not only teaches its regular students, it also provides religious education to the attached mosque through evening classes. The mosque-madrasa link is integral to the working of the religious establishment. The mosque is where Friday prayers, led by the head of the mosque, take place. This link is not necessarily present in the case of Aliya madrasas, as many of them lack a mosque and are not designed to provide afternoon Quran classes to students from the surrounding community.

This difference is critical in determining the relationships between the two types of madrasas and their links with their surrounding communities. Also, it means that the regular mosque remains in the domain of the Qomi madrasas and when there is an opening within a mosque, the students of the Qomi madrasa attached to that mosque have the strongest chance of getting the position. This was also interestingly acknowledged by one of the officials at the Bangladesh Madrasah Board: "The Aliya madrasa has no connection with the public. In the Qomi madrasa, children of the community also come to study and there is a link with the community. In the madrasas and masjid, the Imam is from

the Qomi madrasa.” He further added: “If you look at the Qomi madrasa students they are very well-fed. The community provides much support to these madrasas.” An alim at one of the Qomi madrasas further claimed: “The public knows that there is more religion in these Qomi madrasas. Even the government officers are convinced that the training here is better.”

#### **4.2.4 Attitudinal changes**

There is also a cultural and attitudinal change that has affected Aliya madrasa students. All except the three state-managed Aliya madrasas are co-educational. This has resulted in changes to the strict gender segregation of Qomi madrasas. According to the ulema of the Qomi madrasas, attitudes within the Aliya madrasas have changed. Mawlana Mahfuzul Haque from Jamia Rahmania Arabia elaborated:

“The Aliya madrasas have become just like schools. The dressing of the students, their mannerisms and their way of speaking is no different than the school children. If you look at the children from Aliya madrasas you won’t be able to differentiate between school and Aliya madrasa students.”

Although the Aliya madrasa students seem to have become relatively secular in the eyes of the Qomi madrasa leadership, they have not become entirely free of religion either. Comparing the attitudes of students of Aliya madrasas with students from regular schools, in another study Asadullah and Chaudhury (2006) argue that Aliya madrasa graduates have conservative views compared with the children of regular schools. They are less favourable to higher education for girls, less accepting of working mothers and have a preference for large families. Also, they ask for an Islamic democratic political system. Thus, while they are different in their professional orientations from the Qomi madrasa students, in terms of their mindset they are not far removed from the basic Islamic principles that Aliya madrasas share with Qomi madrasas. Seen this way, a different interpretation of the growth of Aliya madrasas is suggested from that given to it by some. Rather than displacing the Qomi madrasa establishment, the Aliya madrasa system has created a platform for parents who want to give their children a regular education but with more religious exposure than provided in secular schools. The Aliya madrasa thus provides competition for the secular schooling system in Bangladesh; it is not only competing with the Qomi madrasas.

This was also explicitly stated by Moulana Mohammad Abdul Jabbar, Secretary General of Wafaq ul Madris Al Arabia, in a recent media interview. When asked whether there was a possibility of merging the Aliya madrasa system with the Qomi madrasa system to create a single madrasa education system, Moulana Abdul Jabbar's answer was revealing:

“There is a big difference between the views and thoughts of the Aliya Madrasa and the Qomi Madrasa. Aliya Madrasa wants an education system parallel to the existing general system of education in the country. But, we want higher studies in religious education, specialization in religious matters. So for the moment we can't have a merger.....We want all general subjects to be included in the syllabus alongside religious studies up to Class VII. Then up till Class X religious studies will be accompanied by Bengali as a subject. Then in higher studies we want to specialize.”

Thus, the claim that the Aliya system represents a shift within the madrasa tradition in Bangladesh is weak. The hierarchy of Qomi madrasas remains intact, as reflected in the leadership of the Wafaq-ul-Madaris Arabia and other Qomi madrasa platforms. These madrasas are also linked with the religious establishments in India and Pakistan. Some of their students have studied in both Pakistan and India. Thus, even in the international and regional Islamic networks, it is the Qomi madrasas that continue to dominate the religious establishment of the Bangladeshi madrasas; the Aliya madrasas have not displaced them. Where the latter are part of any international Islamic networks this is mainly due to their support base within the Jamiat-I-Islami.

Thus, for any attempt to 'convert' Qomi madrasas, the type of Qomi madrasas that have moved to the Aliya system must be considered. They were all from the lower grades of the Qomi madrasas. There is no evidence that mainstream Qomi madrasas made this shift. Given that Qomi madrasas continue to grow in Bangladesh, with donations from the public, there is a clear ideological resistance to Aliya madrasas within the Qomi madrasa establishment. What Bangladesh has been able to achieve is the rise of an alternative madrasa tradition; it has not succeeded in reforming traditional madrasas. This leads us to the final issue of how to judge the success of a madrasa reform programme.

### 4.3 Notions of reform

The key issue from the above analysis is that before calling a reform successful and recommending it as a possible route for other countries to replicate, it is important to be clear about the desired purpose

of a reform and its impact. Before we look at the intention of the state in initiating reform in Bangladesh, it is important to look at the history of reform within the madrasa tradition, in order to understand its complexity.

### **4.3.1 Attempts at reform: two traditions**

In attempting to understand madrasa reforms, what is clear is the difference between the objectives of a reform as viewed by the ulema and the objectives as seen by colonial and post-colonial states. It is first of all important to recognize that there has been a strong tradition of reform within the ulema community (Malik, 1997). The birth of the Deoband tradition itself was an attempt to reform Muslim education in response to the changing political and economic situation of Muslims in the colonial period. Nadwat-ul-Ulema was another attempt at reform within the Deoband tradition. And even today, the ulema within the leading Deoband tradition across India, Pakistan and Bangladesh argue that they are constantly reviewing their texts so as to improve the education they offer. There are also many voices within the religious tradition that are asking for even greater reform. However, this internal reform debate has been very different from the state-led conception of reform.

The evidence of the state having a different vision of madrasa reform from that of the ulema starts from the colonial period. The establishment of the Calcutta Aliya Madrasa by Warren Hastings was one of the first attempts to reform a madrasa in the light of contemporary demands. Attempts at madrasa reform continued in the twentieth century, when several state madrasa boards came into being, like the one in Bihar established in 1922, which presently controls more than 900 madrasas with over 80,000 students. In the post-independence period, the same vision continued. The Pakistani president Ayub Khan (1958-1969) nationalized religious endowments and schools during the sixties with the aims of harnessing their traditional autonomy to the nation-building process and attaching them to the state-run infrastructure.

State-led reforms of madrasas had a very different vision of both the purpose of madrasa education and the aim of reform from those of the ulema discussed above. For the post-colonial state, the purpose of madrasa reform was to move madrasas away from more purist interpretations of the text and allow for interpretations, which would enable easier engagement with the demands of modernity. Reform was viewed as important because madrasas were seen as playing a decisive role in the dissemination of knowledge and as having considerable moral impact on local culture. They were

viewed as a potential nucleus for Muslim reform, development and mobilization, due to the ulema's influence on the public (Malik, 1997).

The current international interest in madrasa reforms is embedded in the same psyche. The focus is on displacing extremist religious tendencies within madrasas. As the Japanese ambassador to Bangladesh noted:

“Of late foreign missions stationed in Dhaka from time to time discuss whether Bangladesh is heading towards Islamic fundamentalism or not. Those who argue for the prospect cite three reasons. First, fundamentalism is nurtured by poverty, which is a prolonged and chronic issue in Bangladesh. Second, Jamaat-e-Islami, which is a religion-based party and close to being fundamentalist, has been increasing its influence under the alliance with BNP. Third, there is a sharp increase in number of ‘Madrasas’ (Islamic religious schools) with assistance from Islamic countries and accordingly, more young Bangladeshi people are getting education influenced by Islamic fundamentalist values. They argue that, if not within a few years, it is highly likely for Bangladesh to become a fundamentalist Islamic country in about 20 years,” (Embassy of Japan, 2005).

The USA's current interest in madrasas is also embedded in the same reasons:

“Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the Islamic schools known as madrasas have been of increasing interest to analysts and to officials involved in formulating US foreign policy towards the Middle East, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia.... On the global front, concern has been expressed over the spread of radical Islamic through Saudi-funded schools, universities, and mosques, which exist in many countries including Bangladesh, Bosnia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and the United States.” (Blanchard, 2005)

Referring to madrasas' growing role in the rural areas of Bangladesh and Pakistan, Mercer (2006), in a study commissioned by the European Commission, notes: “Such madrasas are viewed with concern by the US State Department, the UK Foreign Office and the European Commission.”

In this view, the success of a reform programme requires that madrasas move towards more tolerant values. Studied against this objective, the growth of Aliya madrasas cannot be seen as a successful case of reform, as proposed by Asadullah and Chaudhury (2007), because it has failed to displace Qomi madrasas from their hold over the religious establishment and thus on the version of Islam that

is influential among the masses. On the other hand, it has given opportunities for an Islamic-influenced education. In this continuing struggle between reformed Islam, as perceived on the one hand by the state authorities and on the other by the traditional scholars, who are the targets of change, the reformer has lost. The Qomi madrasa tradition is still fully intact, with a clear leadership, despite the expansion of state-sponsored Aliya madrasas.

The Aliya model, however, is a powerful example of parental preference within Muslim countries for schools with curricula with a higher content of religious education. It is also a good example of how literacy can spread among women in conservative Muslim societies if education is provided under a religious umbrella. Therefore, while highlighting the failure of the Bangladesh madrasa reform programme to reorient the Qomi madrasas, this study also warns against reading these findings as a proof of failure of Aliya madrasa reform, which some critics of madrasas might be inclined to do. While Aliya madrasas have not displaced Qomi madrasas, they have become a very popular way of imparting literacy among females in rural areas in Bangladesh. Given the current emphasis on engaging FBOs in development, they provide a good example of how FBOs can become important partners in development. The donor push for engaging with FBOs is now well-documented. As Clarke (2007) notes that the agenda of engaging FBOs in the fight against poverty emerged in part from the findings of “Voices of the Poor”, a World Bank study that documented the views and experiences of more than 60,000 men and women from 60 countries. FBOs, it noted:

“Emerge frequently in poor people’s list of important institutions. They appear more frequently as the most important institution in rural rather than in urban ones. Spiritually, faith in God and connecting to the sacred in nature are an integral part of poor people’s lives in many parts of the world. Religious organizations are also valued for the assistance they provide to the poor people,” (*Voices of the Poor*, as quoted in Clarke, 2007, p. 80).

Clarke (2007) further notes that case studies from the recent literature reveal a similar pattern: the World Bank and other donors have made significant progress in engaging with FBOs and faith leaders in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and East Asia but comparatively little progress in South Asia (including India, Pakistan and Bangladesh).

In order to reform the madrasas, the state and donor agencies need to first understand the role madrasas play for their surrounding communities before trying to reform them. As an official at the Bangladesh Madrasah Board added, when asked the reasons for the government's high investment in the Aliya madrasa system: "Religious feeling is very strong so the public demands these madrasas. If you worked against the madrasa, people would come forward and kill you." It is the basis of this strong demand for religious education that needs to be understood if meaningful reforms are to be brought about in madrasas.

## 5 Conclusion

In studying the madrasa modernization programme of the Government of Bangladesh, this study has argued that the reform programme has failed to reform the orthodox madrasas or break their hold over the religious establishment. Rather it has fulfilled the unmet need of Muslim parents with conservative values to get a higher ratio of religious education for their children while following mainstream secular education. Thus state incentives to create Aliya madrasas have produced a parallel hierarchy to the secular schooling system; they have not displaced the traditional madrasas. The lessons from expansion of Aliya madrasas in Bangladesh, where they are the fastest growing education sector, is not about how to introduce liberal Islam within the Bangladeshi religious tradition. Rather the lessons are about how educational initiatives by religious organizations can have greater reach within conservative households. At the same time, it is an indication of the high importance placed on religious education by Muslim families in rural areas.

These findings have important implications for any policy interventions attempting to secularize education in Muslim countries, as they show that religious education is not a one-way process imposed by the clergy through indoctrination. Rather there is an active preference for religious education. It is therefore important to understand why religious education has this significance for some families before developing any policy intervention that may cause parents to choose a reformed madrasa. Also, the study shows that madrasa reform based entirely on economic incentives is unlikely to succeed. The success of the Aliya madrasas in Bangladesh has much to do with the religious credentials of those leading the reform and the context of the reform, which made the state trustworthy. The role of Islam in East Pakistan resistance, the unique position of Jamiat-i-Islami in backing the Aliya madrasas and the significance of the Bengali language contributed much to the rise of the Aliya madrasa tradition. The bottom line is that religious reform is a complex process and without understanding the reasons for the demand for religion and the power of the ulema over the public, it is difficult to design a policy that can actually reform the madrasas or advance liberal Islam in South Asia.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This study does not aim to provide specific guidelines for future madrasa reforms in Bangladesh. Instead, the focus here is on understanding historical trends and present day socio-economic and political factors that have shaped the current nature of state-madrasa relationships. It has been produced as part of a comparative research project in which similar studies have been conducted in India and Pakistan. Findings will be shared with policy makers and madrasa leaders in the countries concerned and the final comparative report will attempt to draw out policy recommendations for the future of madrasa reform programmes in the three countries.
- <sup>2</sup> College education does not include cadet college and other vocational, technical and professional colleges.
- <sup>3</sup> Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs (1979)
- <sup>4</sup> Extract from Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) report quoted in UK Home Office (2007) *Country of Origin Information Report: Bangladesh*.
- <sup>5</sup> How various political parties in Bangladesh have used religion as part of their political strategy is of course a complex subject; the focus here is mainly on highlighting the broader trends visible among the dominant parties.

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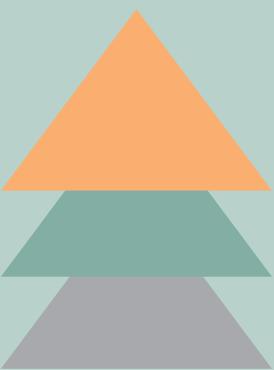
Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board: [www.bmeb.gov.bd/](http://www.bmeb.gov.bd/)

## Annex 1 List of Respondents

1	Mohammad Zainul Abedin	Principal Tamirul Millat Kamil Madrasa
2	Mohammad Abdullah Al-Asir	Inspector of Madrasas, Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board
3	Prof Imtiaz Ahmed	University of Dhaka
4	Mohammad Hosain Ali	Deputy Inspector Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board
5	Irtiza Nasim Ali	Editor-in-Chief Probe News Magazine
6	Afsan Chaudhry	BRAC
7	Prof Muhammad Islam Ghani	Principal Govt. Madrasah-e-Aliyah Dhaka
8	Mawlana Mahfuzul Haque	Jamia Rahmania Arabia
9	Prof Md. Monirul Islam	Chairman, Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board
10	Hafiz Mohammad Ismail	Darul Uloom Moniul Islam Hathazari
11	Ahmed Badruddin Khan	Assistant Editor The Monthly Madina
12	Muhammad Sultan Zauq Nadwi	Jamiah Darul Ma'arif Al-Islamiah
13	Farhad Mazar	Public intellectual Managing Director UBINIG Policy Research for Development Alternative
14	Shafiq Rahman	Staff Correspondent Probe News Magazine
15	Barrister Abdul Razzak	Jamiat-I-Islami
16	Mahfuz ullah Rehman	Pattia
17	Rafeeq Ullah	Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board

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