

Religions and Development Research Programme

The State and madrasas in India

Padmaja Nair
Independent Consultant



Working Paper 15 - 2009

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 15

The State and madrasas in India

Padmaja Nair

Independent Consultant

ISBN: 0 7044 2775 3

978 0 7044 2775 4

© International Development Department, University of Birmingham

DFID Department for
International
Development

This document is an output from a project funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID.

Rad

Contents

Acknowledgements

List of tables

List of boxes

Summary	1
Acronyms	4
Glossary	5
1 Introduction	6
2 Methodology	7
3 Evolution of the madrasas vis-à-vis the state	10
3.1 The early years: Muslim and Mughal rulers as benefactors	10
3.2 British colonial rule: the religious orientation of madrasas	10
3.3 Post-Independence: the emergence of madrasas as Muslim minority institutions in a Hindu majority state	13
4 The post-Independence agenda of the state	21
4.1 Support for madrasas as a Muslim minority educational institution	21
4.2 State-led attempts to 'modernize' Madrasas	24
4.3 Responses of madrasas to the state agenda: 'yes', but on our own terms	29
4.4 Madrasas and terrorism	33
5 State-madrassa relations in two states with different political environments	36
5.1 Uttar Pradesh (UP)	36
5.1.1 Locating madrasas in the State	36
5.1.2 State engagement and provisions for madrasas	46
5.1.3 The state-madrassa engagement in reality: influencing factors	51
5.1.4 Associations of madrasas	57
5.2 West Bengal (WB)	61
5.2.1 Locating the madrasas in the State	61
5.2.2 The State agenda	65
5.2.3 Response of the kharzi madrasas to State interventions: Rabeta-e-Madarise	70
6 Conclusions	76
Notes	80
References	83

Key words: India, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, education, madrasa

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Nirmala Pandey, who assisted me in the field work, and Dr. Masooda Bano who was a tremendous support in conceptualizing the whole study and devising the methodology. I would also like to thank Professor Richard Batley for his support and patience and an anonymous reviewer for valuable comments and corrections.

List of tables

1	Mean years of schooling (7-16 years of age) in selected states (2001)	37
2	Recognized and aided madrasas in Uttar Pradesh	47

List of boxes

1	A State-supported madrasa in Uttar Pradesh	38
2	An independent <i>jamia</i> in Uttar Pradesh	39
3	Sitapur madrasa's voluntary engagement with the state	55
4	A state-supported girls' madrasa near Kolkata	62
5	A kharzi jamia in West Bengal	71

Summary

Madrasas in India appear to be caught between the need to maintain their identity as centres of Islamic studies and culture and to remain relevant to the present-day needs of the communities they serve. This research focuses on the relationships between madrasas and the state, as the former attempt to negotiate between these competing pressures and the latter seeks to support and 'modernize' them. It throws light on the motives and strategies of madrasas and their associations, the central government and two State governments (Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal), and assesses selected aspects of madrasa modernization.

The research in India was undertaken as part of an international comparative study that sought to develop a better understanding of state-madrasa relationships and the ways in which they influence and affect attempts to reform madrasa education. Based on a review of secondary materials, interviews with government officials and religious leaders at both central and State levels, and visits to selected madrasas in the two case study states, it provides a balanced and empirically based analysis of a complex and sensitive issue.

About 13 per cent of the population of India is Muslim, although the proportion varies at State and local levels. Overall, Muslims are a disadvantaged group, with educational levels lower than the population as a whole. Although fewer than four per cent of Muslim children attend madrasas, both central and State governments have developed programmes designed to 'modernize' their curriculum. However, their real motives for doing so are not clear and the interventions are regarded with suspicion by many Muslims.

From being the main education system during the Mughal period, producing administrators as well as religious scholars and teachers, madrasas' response to the establishment of a schooling system on the British model to produce local staff for the colonial administration was to retreat from their close relationship with the state to the provision of religious education.

State-madrasa relationships are shaped by constitutional, political and educational factors:

- Muslims in India have official minority status: their right to practise their religion and establish institutions (including educational institutions) is safeguarded in the constitution, enabling them to resist excessive state interference.

- The nature and extent of state engagement with madrasas is influenced by the political ideology and electoral interests of national and regional political parties. When madrasas feel threatened, they may seek to protect themselves by organizing and seeking political backing.
- Data on the numbers of madrasas and makhtabs (part-time schools for religious education linked to local mosques) and student enrolment are poor, although it is asserted that numbers have increased in some parts of the country in recent years.
- In addition to their primary purpose of providing religious education, many madrasas have long included a few other academic and vocational subjects in their curriculum, although the coverage and quality was generally very limited.
- At present 'modernization' of the content and quality of madrasa education is the stated objective of state interventions in the affairs of madrasas, but several critics expressed a belief that the government may be intending to make more extensive 'reforms' in the near future.
- Although participation in the 'modernization' process is voluntary, in some States, such as West Bengal, extensive secularization of the curriculum of state-supported madrasas offering primary and secondary education, control over the recruitment of teachers and increased government monitoring in some states confirm critics' fear that the state intends to increase its control over madrasas.
- Madrasas as a whole are not organized to negotiate with the state for support on their own terms. Therefore, while the better-resourced madrasas choose to stay out of state-funded programmes, a significant proportion of the poorly funded are happy to engage and to comply with the conditions imposed in return for the financial and other support provided.
- A variety of support programmes are on offer (often centrally funded but delivered by State governments), but a variety of implementation problems were identified, especially in Uttar Pradesh.

Given the general environment of mutual suspicion and opposition from some quarters to the state-led process of modernization, both the state and the madrasas are treading cautiously. Some possible policy implications of the findings of this study are:

- Serious attempts to improve the educational levels of the Muslim minority in India must focus on the vast majority of Muslim children who attend government schools. In addition, measures to achieve equivalence between madrasas and government schools to enable Muslim students to progress to higher levels of education are desirable.
- Madrasas' and makhtabs' constitutional right to provide religious education must be upheld.
- Improvements to the range of subjects and quality of teaching in madrasas providing primary and secondary education are needed.

- Where madrasas themselves lack the resources for improvements, there is a role for government to contribute through funding, quality control etc, but problems in the design and implementation of the current programmes need to be addressed.
- Madrasas seeking to modernize and obtain government support appear to have more positive and constructive relationships with the government if they form an association that can interact with a government equivalent such as the West Bengal Board for Madrasa Education.
- Further research is needed to identify the motives and socio-economic characteristics of parents who send their children to madrasas, and to evaluate the outcomes of madrasa modernization policies for madrasas and their associations, as well as students and their wider communities.

List of acronyms

CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria
AIMPLB	All India Muslim Personal Law Board
A&IE	Alternate and Innovative Education
BJP	Bharitiya Janata Party
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
DMWO	District Minorities Welfare Officer
FCRA	Foreign Currency Regulation Act
ISI	Inter Service Intelligence
ITI	Industrial Technology Institute
MM	Mumtazul Muhaddelin
MPLAD	Member of Parliament Local Area Development Fund
MW&WD	Minorities Welfare and Waqf Board
NCHP	National Common Minimum Programme
NFE	Non-formal education
NGO	Non-government organization
OBC	Other Backward Castes
SP	Samajwadi Party
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
UEE	Universal Elementary Education
UP	Uttar Pradesh
WBBME	West Bengal Board for Madrasa Education
WBCHSE	West Bengal Council of Higher and Secondary Education

Glossary

Alim	Higher secondary level of Muslim education
<i>Aqli ulum</i>	The rational sciences
<i>Ajlaf</i>	Base-born, lower class Muslims
<i>Biradari</i>	Network of extended kin relations/clan
<i>Charm-e qurbani</i>	Skin of an animal that has been sacrificed
Dalit	The lowest social group in the caste hierarchy
<i>Dini talim</i>	Religious education
<i>Duniyavi talim</i>	Worldly education
Fazil	Postgraduate level of Muslim education
<i>Fiqh</i>	Islamic jurisprudence
<i>Fitr</i>	Charitable giving
Foqania	Education in Muslim schools equivalent to middle/upper primary
<i>Hadith</i>	A report of a saying or action of the Prophet Mohammed
Hindutva	Right-wing Hindu identity and politics
<i>Imam, Maulvi</i>	Muslim priest and religious teacher
<i>Jagir</i>	Landed property
Jamia	Muslim school offering higher (generally university) level of education
<i>Jihad</i>	Struggle. May refer to holy war waged solely for purposes sanctioned by Islam.
Kamil	Undergraduate level of Muslim education
Madrasa	Muslim school (also commonly spelt madarsa)
Maktab	Neighbourhood school, often attached to a mosque, that provides religious education to children who attend other schools to get 'mainstream' education
<i>Maslik</i>	Sect/school of thought
Munshi/Maulvi	Primary level of Muslim education
Niswan	Girls' madrasa
Purdah	The practice of preventing women being seen by men (lit. curtain)
<i>Pundit</i>	Hindu priest
<i>Quazi/Qazi/mufti</i>	Judge
<i>Safeel</i>	Tax collector
Tahtania	Education in Muslim schools equivalent to lower primary
<i>Tafsir</i>	Qur'anic commentary
<i>Ulema</i>	Islamic clerical scholars
<i>Waqf (pl. awqaf)</i>	Religious endowment
<i>Wafaq</i>	Umbrella organization of madrasas
<i>Zakat</i>	Donation for charity

1 Introduction

Madrasas as seen in India today are the outcome of beliefs and practices that took root in the country several centuries ago. Over time, they have been shaped in significant ways by the nature of the state, as well as the changing relationships between the state and the ulema and religious leaders. Historically three distinct stages of evolution vis-à-vis the state are evident, during which madrasas were transformed from mainstream to minority religious educational institutions. At present the relationship between madrasas and the state, as well as the institution itself, appear to be at a crossroads, pulled between a state that is focused on 'modernizing' madrasas and debate within the madrasa system itself on the nature of contemporary education and the extent and nature of necessary reforms. Of late, state-madrassa relationships have also been coloured by the larger global political context, which has polarized sentiments about Muslims as a community. This study attempts to understand the current relationships between the state and madrasas in India in this context. It forms part of a wider comparative study of state-madrassa relationships in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kano State, Nigeria.

2 Methodology

The study looks at relationships between the state and madrasas in two different but related contexts; it compares them in the context of socio-political circumstances that differ between States and also over time, given the changing nature of the state's formal engagement with madrasas. The 'secular' nature of the Indian state, which has no official religion, but in which all religions are recognized and in which the Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the equality of all citizens (see Section 4), is an overarching point of reference.

The first part of the study outlines the historical evolution of madrasas in India, focusing largely on developments just prior to and during British rule. This section is based on a wide-ranging literature review and on discussions with selected academicians and Islamic scholars of national universities, as well as with veteran writers and journalists.

Continuing the historical analysis, the study next looks at the post-Independence agenda of the secular state and its gradually increasing focus on the madrasa as an institution that apparently requires 'modernization' in terms of its curriculum. Independence gave a new twist to state-madrasa relationships, as the former was bound by the Constitution of the country to accord Muslims the status of a minority community and to ensure the fulfilment of their rights and duties. It also brought with it a vibrant democratic political environment. This section takes a critical look at the Constitutional provisions, as well as various state policies and support programmes that have emerged since Independence. It also attempts to capture the response of the madrasas to state interventions and the discourse that has emerged within the madrasa community itself around the nature and extent of 'modernization'. The analysis is based on a review of policy and programme documents, as well as existing literature and interviews with academicians, scholars and government officials at the federal level. Discussions were also held with national heads of organizations like the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind and the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, which helped to bring out the political nuances of the relationships.

The analysis then moves down to the sub-national level. In India education is a State (sub-national level) subject, with the result that implementation and outcomes largely depend on the nature and capacity of individual State governments. However, the federal government influences and to some extent controls the sector at the sub-national level through federal policies and the allocation of resources. In addition, during the two decades prior to this study, critical changes had occurred in the country's socio-political framework, which have been reflected in the gradual decline of Congress as

the dominant political party, the emergence of regional parties, an era of coalition governments and the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party on a Hindutva wave of right-wing Hindu identity and politics. To understand the impact of different socio-political situations on state-madrassa relationships, the two states of Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal were selected for more in-depth study. Both have relatively large Muslim populations, but different socio-political environments and different levels of engagement with madrasas. A range of political parties has governed Uttar Pradesh (UP) over the last few years, while West Bengal has been under a predominantly communist regime for the last three decades. It was envisaged that the differing ideologies of the party in power, as well as its length of rule in the State, would have some impact on its relationships with madrasas.

Two other dimensions are introduced into the sub-national analysis. First is the influence of the level of education offered by madrasas on their relationships with the state. The comparative study thus defined 'madrasas' as those schools that impart education up to a level equivalent to the secondary level in mainstream schools and 'jamiyas' as those that teach higher levels (equivalent to university undergraduate and postgraduate education), enabling students to specialise in various areas of Islamic studies.¹ In practice, in the Indian context, 'jamia' appears to be used more generically and the education offered in them is not necessarily equivalent to a degree in mainstream education. Madrasas themselves sometimes use the word jamia or Darul Uloom to refer to primary and secondary levels of education. Secondly, the study also looks at the difference in the relationships between the state and those madrasas and jamiyas that have engaged with it through a formal support programme and those that have chosen to avoid such a relationship.

The observations and analysis of madrasa-state relationships in the two States are based on extensive interviews with a range of respondents, including socio-political organizations like the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind and Jamaat-e-Islami Hind at the State level, Islamic scholars and academics, writers and veteran journalists, and NGOs working with madrasas. Multiple rounds of discussions were held with the Madrasa Boards, as well as the Minister in charge of madrasa education in West Bengal.

Visits were also made to six jamiyas and madrasas in West Bengal and five in Uttar Pradesh between January and June 2007. Although these were not a representative sample, efforts were made to include both rural and urban madrasas and examples of madrasas located in Muslim-dominated and multi-religious settlements. Most of the madrasas, with the exception of the Jamia in Lucknow, are

located in semi-urban or rural settlements, where the proportion of Muslims in the population ranged from 'significant' to 'minority'. Discussions were held with the managers, principals and teachers in each of the madrasas visited. In India, the state's formal engagement with madrasas under the madrasa support and modernization programme is technically limited to those providing secondary or higher secondary levels of education. While in UP, recognition and aid are provided up to the Junior High (class 8) level, in West Bengal support is given up to the higher secondary level. Some of the madrasas visited had received state support and some had not, but none of the jamias visited in the course of the study have formally engaged with the state. While observations and conclusions are based on the collective analysis of the interviews, a state-supported madrasa in each of the two states and an independent jamia from each state have been used to illustrate some key observations.

Gaining access to the madrasas proved to be relatively easy in most cases because the researcher was introduced (and sometimes accompanied) by the association or body to which the concerned madrasa was affiliated or by a person in whom the madrasa managers had sufficient trust. Most, including both the smaller and the state-supported madrasas, had no hesitation in allowing the researcher to move around their campuses. However, in a couple of cases the researcher's movements were restricted, either because of the traditional taboos on a woman's presence in male-dominated madrasas or, in the case of a madrasa in West Bengal that had been a victim of local communal (inter-religious) politics, an understandable distrust of any outsider.

The report is organized in the following sections: Section 3 provides a perspective on the historical evolution of state-madrasa relationships over three periods in history; Section 4 analyses the agenda of the post-Independence state and the response of madrasas to state overtures; while Section 5 focuses on the specific cases of Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal to understand the effects of socio-political context on state-madrasa relationships.

3 The evolution of madrasas vis-à-vis the state

The evolution of relationships between madrasas and the state can be divided into three periods: Mughal rule, the colonial period and the post-Independence period.

3.1 The early years: Muslim and Mughal rulers as benefactors

Madrasas came into existence in India with the advent of Muslim rulers in the sub-continent. They were established by the rulers and nobles of the Muslim states or were the result of collective community endeavours (Alam, 2007). They are believed to have first appeared in the region of Sind and Multan (Arshad, 2005) and from where they spread to the northern parts of the country. Thereafter, from the latter half of the 12th to almost the end of the 16th centuries, the number of madrasas grew rapidly under the patronage of the early Muslim and Mughal rulers. The first Mughal conqueror, Babar, is credited with establishing a separate department for the promotion and administration of madrasas between 1526 and 1530. Emperors Jahangir (1605-1658) and Aurangzeb (1658-1707) made financial provisions for the upkeep and maintenance of madrasas and for scholarships for poor students. They are also believed to have granted large amounts of land (*jagir*) to the madrasas. Even during the last days of the Mughal Empire in the early 18th century, under Bahadur Shah Zafar, madrasas continued to be established in Delhi with state patronage (Siddiqui, 1997). Thus more than a thousand madrasas funded by the state are reported to have been in existence during the period of the pre-Mughal Tughlaqs and to have spread across the country during the period of Mughal rule.

These madrasas produced great scholars and religious leaders, who contributed to satisfying the administrative, religious and cultural needs of both local communities and the rulers of the time. Also during this period, although the madrasas are said to have been apolitical entities, the patronage of rulers gave them great scope to influence policy making, albeit perhaps only unofficially. A significant attribute of madrasas during this period was their ability to prepare students for sought after jobs in administration, in addition to religion and Islamic culture. It can thus be assumed that madrasa education had great economic value for individuals.

3.2 British colonial rule: the religious orientation of madrasas

In this section, the attitudes and actions of both the British colonial rulers and those involved in the existing madrasa educational system during the colonial period are described.

3.2.1 *The British agenda*

Historians and scholars of the madrasa system in the sub-continent generally agree that the advent of colonial rule and the downfall of the Mughal Empire was a critical turning point for the madrasas. The British introduced new systems of administration and, although initially averse to changing the system of education per se, eventually greatly influenced its profile. Their view of education was governed by their understanding of religion not only as being subordinate to the state but also as an aspect of life to be relegated to the 'private' sphere (Asad, 1993). Hence the British adopted a policy of 'religious neutrality' in government schools, to the total exclusion of religious teaching in the curriculum (Alam, 2007). By virtue of this logic, madrasas, regarded as religious educational institutions, came under the scrutiny of the ruling power, especially after the first war of Indian Independence in 1857. According to Alam (2007), the *ulema* subsequently used this very attitude to religion "to engage in the hegemonic representation of [the] Muslim masses". In fact, some scholars propounded the importance of madrasa education as a tool for regaining the lost glory of Muslims. Under re-established Muslim rule, it was asserted, the British would be replaced and the *ulema* would play an important role, leading to the supposedly ideal situation of an "...enlightened Muslim leadership guided by responsible ulema" (Alam, 2007)

In the initial years, however, the British needed to understand the existing law and culture of the country and for this they had to depend on the Hindu *pundits* and the Muslim *Qazis* for law and administration. Because of this and also because of pressures from a section of the community, Warren Hastings, as governor-general, established the Calcutta Madrasa College (Alia Madrasa) in 1781 for the study of "Muhammedan law and such other sciences as were taught in Muhammedan schools" (as quoted by Khan et al, 2003).² Subsequently, however, as the British began to consolidate their position in the Indian sub-continent, English was introduced as the language of the courts and Christian missionaries were encouraged to set up educational institutions, reducing the relative importance of the madrasas as places of learning. A further blow was struck when, in 1828, the East India Company passed orders to acquire all the *waqf* property of madrasas. In 1844 the situation worsened when Lord Harding passed orders forbidding graduates of Persian and Arabic madrasas to be given employment in government. The *Qazis'* jobs with the government were also under threat, as they were replaced with judges trained in British law. In addition, most of the madrasas saw a substantial reduction in their funds as their patrons began to lose much of their social, political and economic power.

3.2.2 *The response of the Muslim clergy: a process of distancing from the state*

Threatened by the onslaught on the religious identity and existence of the madrasa as an institution, the *ulema* and a number of other thinkers responded by setting up several large madrasas. Many of these were established in the northern parts of the country, especially in the area that came to be known as Uttar Pradesh, then home to a Muslim élite who saw education as a means of regaining social and political power (Bandhopadhyaya, 2002). The relationship with the government reached a watershed when many of the *ulema* who spearheaded the new madrasa movement adopted a hostile attitude towards the western system of education brought in by the British rulers. As Sikand (2002) notes, the “physical *jihad*” (holy war), which had been unsuccessful in resisting British rule, was replaced by an “educational *jihad*”. According to Sikand, the educational *jihad* was meant to preserve traditional Islamic learning by isolating *dini talim* (religious education) from *duniyavi talim* (worldly education), in the process closing the door to modern knowledge. This, he and many other scholars concluded, was not only the beginning of the divide between religious and mainstream education, but also the time from which the madrasa curriculum came to be seen as rigid, unchanging and somewhat closed to outside influence.

One of the new madrasas established in response to the call for exclusively religious institutions was the Darul Uloom Deoband, which was set up in 1866 in Uttar Pradesh and quickly grew to become the most respected and traditional school of thought in the sub-continent. Subsequently, to moderate the rigid and exclusive *dini* philosophy and strike a balance between the ‘modern’ and ‘orthodox’ schools of thought, several other schools emerged, such as the Madrassatul Uloom or Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh (later known as the Aligarh Muslim University) in 1875 and Nadwat-UI-Ulema in Lucknow in 1892. These institutions are said to have propounded a relatively moderate path and tried to introduce English, social and natural science into the madrasa curriculum, arguing that Islam is an ‘eternal’ religion “open to new developments in the realm of the *aqli ulum*” (rational sciences)(Sikand, 2002).

A significant departure from the earlier madrasas was that these newly founded schools of religious education rejected state patronage and support, as it was thought that this would make them vulnerable to interference. Instead, they looked towards the Muslim community for support and funds. Thus the constitution of Darul Uloom Deoband unequivocally states:

The first fundamental is that the functionaries of the Madrasah, as far as possible, always have an eye to the augmentation of the donation ... So long as there are no regular means of income for this Madrasah, it will go on like this, if it please Allah, provided we pin our faith in Him. But if some assured income is obtained, e.g., a fief or a commercial establishment or the promise of a staunch man of means, then it seems that this state of fear and hope which is the source of our appealing to Allah will slip off our fingers, divine succour will cease and mutual disputes will ensue among the functionaries.

In fact, the Deoband constitution strongly advocates “destitution of sorts” and warns that the participation of the state would be harmful.

Thus two significant changes took place with the advent of the British and were consolidated in the years after Independence. Firstly, the madrasas, which initially offered secular as well as religious education, became more religion-oriented after the British policies, directly or indirectly, threatened their very existence. It was also during this period that a feeling of mutual suspicion and tensions between the state and the madrasas also began to grow. Secondly, as Sikand (2002) observes, the social composition of the madrasas also began to change at this time, with more of the students coming from *ajlaf* (lower class) families and also financially poor households. The opportunities for upward social mobility, the attraction of free board and lodging, education and the prospect of a livelihood as an *imam*, *maulvi* or madrasa teacher encouraged many poorer households to send their sons to madrasas. In contrast, better off families began to send their children to English medium schools, because a madrasa education no longer offered access to the elite jobs in the British-run government offices, especially in administration and law. Thus, the socio-economic profile of madrasa students, their resource status and their potential to ensure access to employment underwent significant changes.

3.3 Post-Independence: the emergence of madrasas as Muslim minority institutions in a Hindu majority state

Independence and the partition of the subcontinent brought more changes. First, they brought large-scale emigration to Pakistan of the intellectual Muslim middle class, including many of those who had been active in the fight for freedom and were against the two-nation theory.³ Secondly, in the aftermath of partition, minority status appears to have brought with it a sense of threat to Muslim religious education, which over the years had to cope with a tendency in some state-run schools to impart

Hindu-based education. The newly formed government, on the other hand, bound by the Constitution to protect the interests of minority communities like the Muslims, accorded them several privileges, including the right to set up their own educational institutions. Although state-specific actions - particularly at the local level - occurred in some parts of the country, there is no documented evidence of significant state interference in the madrasas on a larger scale until the early 1990s, when formal, structured support was first initiated.⁴ Various trends and characteristics are relevant to understanding the evolution of madrasa-state relationships in the post-Independence period, and will be discussed in turn in the following sub-sections: the polarization of different Islamic schools of thought, the formation of madrasa associations, growth in the numbers of madrasas and their legal status and resources.

3.3.1 Polarization under different schools of thought (*masaliks*)

The years after partition and Independence saw a mix of reactions to the education of the Muslim community in India. The tolerance of religion in private space was carried forward into the new era by both the state and the *ulema*. A large number of madrasas emerged across the country. At the same time, the debate between traditional religious education, as personified by pure *dini talim*, and 'modernism', defined as the introduction of mainstream subjects, began to intensify, with various schools, *jamias* and *masaliks* taking their own position. An ideological battle within the community of Muslim religious educationalists emerged. Many madrasas grouped - mostly formally but also informally - under the different schools of thought (*masaliks*) like the Deoband, Nadwatula, Ahl-e Hadees and Bareilwi schools, or became associated with organizations like the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind.⁵

The differentiation between the various schools of thought is reflected in the differences that prevail in the madrasa curriculum today. Most of the madrasas follow their own syllabus, which is a variation of that followed by Darul Uloom Deoband, Nadwat or Jamaitul-Hidaya. There is no uniformity in their curriculum or textbooks, or even in the number of years required to obtain various degrees or levels of learning. There are also madrasas set up by "socially inspired" *ulema* that promote mainstream subjects, use textbooks developed by government-sponsored research and training institutes like the NCERT (National Council of Education Research and Training) and hence are regarded to be more 'modern' in their approach (Sikand, 2007). They are also said to promote Islamic studies using innovative methods. Some of them have even set up mini-Industrial Training Institutes or training institutes for technology. What is of concern, however, is that none of the degrees from these institutions guarantees admission to mainstream colleges and universities. The only exceptions are

universities like Jamia Millia, Aligarh Muslim University, Hamdard University and, until recently Jawaharlal Nehru University, which give admission to students from madrasas in limited streams, for example for Arabic and Islamic studies.

The differences between the various schools of thought and sects are obvious and believed by critics to be not very conducive to the gaining of knowledge (Ahmed, 1990; Khan et al, 2003). Naheed (2007) laments that the differences have led to a lack of integration and sectarian differences in the syllabus, which prevent students belonging to madrasas from one school of thought from reading the books of madrasas from other schools of thought. The modernization of both the curriculum and the pedagogy thus became a much-debated issue both within and outside the madrasa system and also became the stated reason for the state to focus on improving teaching in the madrasas. It is also the reason for a number of Muslim religious educationists advocating a process of rationalizing madrasa teaching and supporting the state on this issue, although with some qualifications and cautions.

3.3.2 Associations of madrasas

Unlike in Pakistan, the various schools of thought have not organized themselves into structured umbrella organizations or boards and there are no recognised *wafaqs* in India. Instead, a large majority of madrasas function independently, while some are informally associated with larger madrasas or leading schools of thought. Even in the case of those who follow a particular school of thought the affiliation is not always formalized. There are only few examples of madrasas being organized as an association or a semblance of an association, like the Rabata-e-Madarise of Darul Uloom Deoband, the Dini Talim Council in Uttar Pradesh and the federations of madrasas in Kerala. All of these are independent of the state and have been established to protect the specific religious character of the madrasas, while at the same time ensuring quality education.

The Rabata-e-Madarise was established towards the end of the 1980s under the Darul Uloom Deoband (All India Committee). It not only became the nodal agency for a number of non-government madrasas, with separate chapters in several states, but also a collective symbol and forum to sustain religious education beyond the influence of the state. The Dini Talim Council, established in 1959, is, in contrast, restricted to maktabas (lower level madrasas) in Uttar Pradesh. It advocates on behalf of madrasas to the State government and conducts exams, although it now appears to have lost much of its earlier glory. In Kerala, unlike the rest of the country, madrasas are affiliated to centralized

organizations like the Kerala Nadwatula Mujhadin, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Samastha Kerala Sunni Jamaitul Ulama. Each of these has established independent boards to manage their affiliated madrasas. Thus, the Nadwatula Mujhadin's Vidhya Bhasha Board has over 500 madrasas as members, Jamaat-e-Islami's Majil ut-Talim al-islami has 200 madrasas on its roll and the Sunni Samasthaa Kerala Islam Matha Vidhyabasha Board has as many as 6,000 madrasas on its roll (Rahman, 2005).

However, there is no evidence of coordination and interaction between these associations for common causes. The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) is the only common platform through which the various schools of thought have some scope for negotiating with the state on specific issues. Established in 1973, the Board exists to protect and maintain the sanctity of the Sharia law and to ensure that no parallel civil laws and codes are applied that subvert its authority. However, the Board, which is dominated by Deobandi Sunnis, also suffered splits when the Shias, as well as Muslim feminists, set up boards of their own.

However, there is no evidence of coordination and interaction between these associations for common causes. The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) is the only common platform through which the various schools of thought have some scope for negotiating with the state on specific issues. Established in 1973, the Board exists to protect and maintain the sanctity of the Sharia law and to ensure that no parallel civil laws and codes are applied that subvert its authority. However, the Board, which is dominated by Deobandi Sunnis, also suffered splits when the Shias, as well as Muslim feminists, set up boards of their own.

The involvement of any *ulema* in State or national level politics has so far been outside the madrasa system, in an individual capacity or by virtue of heading an influential body like the AIMPLB. Similarly, for its part the state has no choice but to refer back to eminent scholars and individuals of repute within the madrasa system, as individuals or as representatives of groups like the AIMPLB or the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, rather than as the head of a madrasa.

3.3.3 *The growth of madrasas*

The existence of madrasas and their growth after Independence is generally attributed to a lack of government schools in the vicinity, a situation that could be termed a 'supply side failure'. In addition, many Muslim educationists believe that given a choice between a good government school and a madrasa, parents are likely to choose the former, although there is insufficient empirical evidence to validate this belief.⁶ Especially since '9/11', an increasing orientation of the Muslim community towards their religious beliefs and practices is believed to be one of the reasons for an apparent growth in the number of madrasas. Some educationists also believe that, although the primary motive for establishing madrasas is to teach religion, another less obvious reason is to promote the hegemony of particular schools of thought. Individual *ulema* have control over particular madrasas and they do not want to give this up, as the madrasas are their only remaining domain of power in a country which is defined as secular but where Muslims are in a minority. However, there is also a growing perception that a madrasa education now has little to offer as a means of accessing a livelihood, even in the informal or trading sectors in which many Muslims work, which may constrain future growth in the numbers of madrasas, although again there does not appear to be adequate empirical evidence.

There is no accurate documented account of the number of madrasas currently existing in India. Although they are widely spread across the country, they exist in larger numbers in the northern and western parts; various estimates place their number anywhere between 8,000 and 30,000. The most quoted figure is that of the Home Ministry, Government of India, according to which Uttar Pradesh, with over 10,000 madrasas, accounts for the largest number of religious schools, closely followed by Kerala (9,975), Madhya Pradesh (6,000), Bihar (3,500) Gujarat (1,825), Rajasthan (1,780), Karnataka (961) and Assam (721). This list includes two types of madrasa: the first works within the government system by virtue of being 'recognized', at times also receiving grant-in-aid, and the second are madrasas that are outside the system and may or may not have introduced mainstream subjects into their curriculum. Bihar is said to have the largest number of recognized and assisted madrasas (1,100). On the other hand, in Maharashtra, there were very few madrasas until about the early 1990s, with the result that it is believed that *maulvis* were imported from other states like UP and Bihar during religious festivals. However, since then the number of madrasas in Maharashtra is reported to have grown at a very fast pace, to the extent that, in a predominantly Muslim-dominated district like Malegaon, there are a number of co-educational or female only madrasas.

In fact, an interesting addition to the profile of madrasa education in India since Independence has been the gradual growth of girls' madrasas or niswans, attributed to increasing awareness of the need to educate girls. A significant number of these are reported to be higher level madrasas, separate from the mosques and also at times providing hostel facilities. One of the objectives seems to be to encourage girls to train as Alims (scholars/teachers). According to some scholars, the growth in numbers of niswan could have also been prompted by the need to isolate the girls from the perceived Hindu leanings, as well as the co-educational structure, of many government schools.⁷

While Nadwatul Ulama⁸ is credited with encouraging the setting up of girls' madrasas, even an avowedly conservative school of thought like the Deoband has set them up.⁹ Although the Deobandi niswan, teaching up to the Fazil (postgraduate) level, primarily adhere to the traditional curriculum and culture (observing *purdah*, etc.), they have introduced some 'modern' subjects like English and some more functional ones like stitching, knitting and embroidery. The niswan inspired by Nadwat Ulama teach both religious and modern subjects. While Urdu is the medium of instruction, English is a compulsory subject and computers are introduced after the primary class. Interestingly, some of these madrasas follow the syllabus of the National Council of Education Research and Training. Some of them have also been recognized by the Uttar Pradesh State Arabi and Farsi Education Board and provide general education up to the fifth grade, following the government-prescribed syllabus along with basic Islamic studies.¹⁰

Most of the madrasas teach up to the primary (class v) or at the most to the secondary (Alim) level. A small percentage of these also teach up to higher levels, although most have only a few students on their roll. It is reported that most students drop out after the Alim level (or move to one of the few larger madrasas or jamias). This was primarily attributed to the fact that the madrasa and jamias cater to a very poor section of the community, in which children are required to work at an early age and hence higher education is not greatly valued, especially when it does not ensure a salaried job outside the religious institutional system. According to the Sachar Committee Report (2006), fewer than 4 per cent of Muslim children of school-going age (7-19) go to madrasas.¹¹ This high level Committee, constituted by the United Progressive Alliance government in early 2005 to look into the social, economic and educational conditions of Muslims in India, argues that the general 'misconception' that a large majority of children from Muslim families are enrolled in madrasas is in part because of the tendency of the general population to regard madrasas and makhtabs as being one and the same. A

large proportion of the children who go to makhtabs to learn to read and recite the Qur'an are also enrolled full time in regular mainstream schools. Importantly, the Report supports the view that madrasas are now almost exclusively populated by children from low income families: "Aided madrasas are often the last recourse of Muslims especially those who lack the economic resources to bear the costs of schooling, or households located in areas where 'mainstream' educational institutions are inaccessible." (2006, p. 78). It adds that 'modernization' of madrasas cannot be a substitute for good quality mainstream education.

3.3.4 Legal status and resources

While some of the madrasas are registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860, or similar State-specific Acts, many of them are *waqfs* (endowments)(see Section 4.1) and hence are governed by the laws on the management of *waqfs*. At the same time, a large number of them are believed to be neither *waqfs* nor registered societies. The management is often in private hands and family centred and a system of *biradari* or a network of extended kin relations is said to exist. Madrasas, like any other non-government organization that seeks to acquire funds from outside the country, are also required to register with the Home Ministry of the Government of India, under the Foreign Currency Regulation Act (FCRA). Both the Societies Act and the FCRA entail verification of credentials by the police and endorsement by the local administration for all applicants, irrespective of their religious or political allegiance. The process is often fraught with bureaucratic delays and at times also reportedly involves the payment of 'speed money'. Thus, in this respect, except perhaps in the frontier districts, any harassment of madrasas is likely to be only marginally more or less than that faced by other agencies. Apart from this, any madrasa that seeks to access government funds or recognition by a State school board also needs to register with the concerned board.

By and large the madrasas depend on charity, with funds coming from the Muslim community in the form of *zakat*, *fitr*, *charm-e qurbani* (sale of the skins of animals that are sacrificed during Id-ul-Azaha), as well as other donations. Often a *Safeer* (charity collector) is responsible for the donations and organizations like the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind and Rabeta-i-Madrise issue certificates to madrasas associated with them to endorse their authenticity and charitable work. A few madrasas also have land, buildings and other properties from which they raise income. Some madrasas also receive funds from outside the country, mainly the Middle East, although they are believed to be relatively few in

numbers. Although no accurate figures are available, a statement made by the Union Minister of State for the Home Ministry in 2001 indicated that a total of around Rs.40,000 million¹² (US\$1,000 million) was being channelled annually to religious institutions, including madrasas, through the Foreign Currency Regulation Act.¹³

In some states, such as Bihar, West Bengal, U.P, Madhya Pradesh and Assam, where State madrasa boards have been constituted, the State government allocates tied funds to those madrasas that are registered with the board (see Section 5). However, as yet such madrasas constitute a small percentage of the total. In fact, a number of them, like the Darul Uloom, Deoband, Nadwatul Ulama Lucknow, etc., have since 1947 consistently refused government aid, perhaps because they suspect it would be accompanied by undue interference or because it is considered to be in line with their tenets, which strictly forbid them to access government funds. In contrast, some madrasas, although wanting access to government funds, have reportedly failed to achieve this because of difficult bureaucratic processes and demands. The annual budgets of madrasas range from a few hundred thousand to a few tens of million rupees, with madrasas like Darul Uloom Deoband and Jamia Salafia having a turnover of between Rs. 15 million and Rs. 30 million a year.

In conclusion, while some of the leading madrasas and schools of thought had their origin in the Indian sub-continent, they felt threatened by changes in the system of education introduced by the British and their graduates' loss of access to coveted government jobs. Post-Independence, madrasas appear to have lost much of their status as a sought after mainstream educational institution. Their subsequent course of development has been based on a perceived need to protect their image as 'religious' educational institutions, as well as to establish their relevance in contemporary society. Moreover, their status as a minority institution in a Hindu majority state appears to have intensified the debate around their role and function.

4 The post-Independence agenda of the state

After independence, for almost four decades there was little interaction between the state and madrasas. Subsequently the state's engagement with the madrasas has become more formal, structured and project-based, with the objective of bringing about changes in the curriculum to align it with mainstream education, rather than making overall reforms. Support based on the recognized minority status of Muslims is reviewed in Section 4.1, the modernization programme in Section 4.2 and the response of madrasas to government reform attempts in Section 4.3. In recent times, madrasas have been caught up in a discourse about security and terrorism, leading not only to renewed interest in reform but also to increasing state surveillance. This research did not attempt to investigate whether madrasas foster militancy and violence or have been subject to increased surveillance, but because this infuses the everyday experience of those concerned with madrasa education, it is briefly discussed in Section 4.4.

4.1 Support for madrasas as a Muslim minority educational institution

As noted above, Muslims' recognized minority status is accompanied by rights to establish and operate their own institutions, including educational institutions. In this section, the Constitutional provisions for establishing and resourcing madrasas are outlined.

4.1.1 *Constitutional provisions: securing the existence and propagation of madrasas*

The madrasas, post-Independence, have been influenced by the guarantees given by the Constitution of India to the minority communities in the country. In terms of education, the state seems to have adopted - consciously or otherwise - the British concept of religion as belonging in the private sphere, thus attempting to keep religion out of the sphere of state education. However, as stated earlier, there have been attempts from time to time by Hindutva-oriented political parties to give a 'Hindu' colour to public education in some states. The Constitution does, however, permit religions other than Hinduism to set up and manage their own institutions.

The Muslim community, by virtue of being 'notified' as one of the five religious minority communities, qualifies for guarantees under the Constitution, under which equality before the law and equality of opportunity for employment are defined as 'Fundamental Rights', while discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth is prohibited.¹⁴

A series of Fundamental Rights are specified under the Right to Freedom of Religion (Articles 25 to 28) and Cultural and Educational Rights (Articles 29 and 30). They guarantee freedom to practise and propagate religion and manage religious affairs, and protect the interests of the minorities in this regard, while permitting them to establish and administer educational institutions.

Thus, while Article 28 states that “No religious instructions shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State funds...”, Clause (2) of the same Article adds that “...Nothing in clause (1) shall apply to an educational institution which is administered by the State but has been established under any endowment or trust which requires that religious instructions shall be imparted in such institutions.”

Similarly, the Constitution also states that no person attending an educational institution that is recognized by the state or receives state funds should be forced to take part in any religious instructions unless permission has been obtained from the person, or the guardian in the case of minors. However, as noted above, Articles 29 and 30 allow linguistic and religious minorities to establish their own educational institutions. Thus, Article 29 states that “Any section of citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same” and Article 30 emphasizes that “All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice..... The State shall not in granting aid to educational institutions discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.”

With subsequent amendments to the Constitution in 1956 (Seventh Amendment, Article 350 a) and b), facilities for instruction in a student’s mother tongue at primary level were ensured and the Urdu language, amongst others, gained legitimacy as a medium of instruction, while a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities was also provided for. The 44th constitutional amendment in 1978 ensured that, in the event of acquisition of land belonging to a minority educational institution, the “...amount fixed by or determined under such law for the acquisition of such property is such as would not restrict or abrogate the right guaranteed...” to establish and manage such institutions.¹⁵

In order to operationalize the constitutional rights of minorities, various governments have set up commissions and initiated specific support programmes, some of which have focused on the Muslim community and the madrasas. A major initiative was the setting up of a National Minorities Commission in 1978 to look into the rights of minorities; this was subsequently given a statutory status in 1992. In 2004, following an electoral promise, the coalition United Progressive Alliance government, under its National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP), constituted a National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions through an Act of Parliament. The Act provides, *inter alia*, for the right of minority educational institutions to seek affiliation to any university of their choice and also addresses the problems faced by minorities in obtaining 'no objection certificates' to establish educational institutions. The Commission is also empowered to resolve disputes relating to the minority status of educational institutions. With the setting up of the Commission, it appeared that for the first time Article 30(1) of the Constitution would be effectively implemented, and minority institutions like the madrasas would have increased scope to seek affiliation to mainstream universities. However, a recent legal battle questioning the minority status of the Aligarh Muslim University and a High Court ruling that only the courts can determine the minority status of educational institutions called the effectiveness of Article 30(1) into question. In fact, the provisions of Article 30(1) have been the subject of several court cases, although mostly filed by Christian missionary institutions rather than Muslim institutions (Mahmood, 2007).

In spite of these lacunas - probably mainly due to a lack of commitment and poor implementation - the Constitution appears to provide security for the madrasas. In the course of this study, it was found that most people associated with the madrasas - Muslim religious educationists and community leaders - stated that the provisions of the Constitution to practise and propagate their religion, as well as set up institutions to teach religion, was the source of their strength. The Constitution was upheld as a sound commitment of the state to provide equality to all citizens, irrespective of religion and irrespective of any contrary moves by various political parties and individual governments. Their view was that religious freedoms may best be guaranteed by a commitment to secularism.

4.1.2 The Waqf Council: providing resources under government control and oversight

A *waqf* is an endowment of immovable or movable property permanently dedicated to religious, pious or charitable purposes, as defined by Muslim personal law.¹⁶ The central government has put in place arrangements to administer *waqf* properties and use the earnings to support educational initiatives for poor Muslim children. Thus, the administration of *waqfs* is the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, which enacted the Waqf Act in 1954 (amended in 1995) and also set up a Central Waqf Council (1964) for its administration (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2004). One of the primary responsibilities of the Council is educational advancement for the community. The Union Minister in charge of *waqfs* is the chairperson of the Central Waqf Council.

The Council receives grant-in-aid from the central government and disburses it as loans to *waqf* institutions for the commercial development of urban *waqf* properties, on the condition that borrowers donate 6 per cent of the outstanding loan to the Educational Fund of the *waqf*. The donations and the interest accrued on bank deposits together form a Revolving Fund for the 'Educational Scheme' of the Council, which is utilized to provide scholarships to poor students pursuing technical and professional degree courses. This provides ad hoc grants to poor and needy students and matching grants to the State Waqf Boards for scholarships in their respective states for school and madrasa students. The loans are given with the additional condition that the borrower spends 40 per cent of the enhanced income on the education of Muslims.

4.2 State-led attempts to 'modernize' madrasas

The Government of India has sought to operationalize its Constitutional mandate and its commitment to Universal Elementary Education (UEE) through structured interventions in the madrasa system. A centrally sponsored programme had been in existence for over a decade at the time of the study and is in the nature of grant-in-aid, almost wholly focusing on 'modernizing' the curriculum by bringing in mainstream subjects and, in some rare cases, improving teaching methods (Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2). In addition, some of the State governments have set up dedicated Madrasa Education Boards and are channelling grants-in-aid to recognized madrasas, again with support from the central government but on an equal shares basis (Section 4.2.3). While the support is similar to that provided to regular recognized and aided schools, the boards and their functioning are influenced by the socio-

political context of the state concerned, reflecting local political considerations. Before examining madrasas' responses to these government programmes in Section 4.3, some evident operational gaps are identified (Section 4.2.4).

4.2.1 The Area Intensive and Madrasa Modernization Programme

An *Area Intensive and Madrasa Modernization Programme* sponsored by the Ministry of Human Resource Development was the first major planned intervention by the central government. It continues, in a modified version, to be the only significant programme of structured and formal engagement with the madrasas. The idea was mooted in 1983 by the then Congress government in a '15 Point Programme' for the educational, economic and social upliftment of the minority communities. However, it did not become a tangible programme until 1993-94, when the revised Plan of Action (1992) of the National Educational Policy (1986) suggested short, medium and long term measures for the education of minorities. Originally two separate programmes focusing on infrastructure development and modernization of the curriculum respectively, they were merged in the Tenth Five Year Plan. The programme has now been brought into the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Government of India's version of Universal Elementary Education, as a separate component. It is a voluntary scheme and madrasas are expected to apply for assistance. However, only registered madrasas that have been in existence for three years are considered for assistance.

The objective of the programme is to encourage traditional institutions like maktabas and madrasas to introduce the teaching of science, maths, social studies, Hindi and English, in order to provide opportunities for students to acquire education comparable to that available in the national system. While in the first phase of the programme (under the Eighth Five Year Plan, 1992-97) primary classes were covered, in the second phase (since the Ninth Five Year Plan period, 1997-2002), the coverage has been extended to institutions providing education equivalent to the secondary stage. During the first phase, 100 per cent assistance for appointment of qualified teachers was given to madrasas, together with assistance for the establishment of a book bank and to strengthen their libraries. Provision of science and maths kits and essential equipment were also included. The scheme was then reviewed and continues in the current (Tenth) Plan, which proposes to cover 5,000 madrasas (less than 15 per cent of the total in the eight states where relatively large numbers of madrasas are found), with textbooks being provided by the National Council for the Promotion of Urdu Language, an autonomous Council set up by the central government.

So far 4,694 madrasa have been provided with assistance under the scheme, but the total allocation between 2002 and 2006 was only Rs.1060 million (approximately \$27 million), almost three quarters of which was for infrastructure development (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2006). Such a limited financial disbursement was attributed by informants, on the one hand, to inadequate dissemination of information by the government, perhaps reflecting a lack of serious intent, and on the other to lack of interest in participating in the programme on the part of some of the *ulema*, for fear that their authority might be diluted (Sachar Committee, 2006). The evidence to substantiate these assertions is, however lacking at present.

4.2.2 Unrecognized madrasas covered under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

State governments can also set up centres under the Education Guarantee Scheme or initiate interventions under the Alternative and Innovative Education component in unrecognized madrasas, especially girls' madrasas, where free textbooks and an additional teacher can be provided. Both these schemes are components of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), which aims at the universalization of elementary education through a community-owned quality education system. It also aims to bridge social, regional and gender gaps in literacy and access to education. Based on the 1981 Census, madrasas in 99 districts in 16 states have been identified for focused attention. Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Assam are the major target States for this programme. In the year 2005-06 about 3,500 unrecognized madrasas received support under the A&IE component. Information on the numbers and motives of unrecognized madrasas that have rejected state assistance is limited. With their rejection of state support and possible tendency to view mainstream society and institutions critically, they could be the subject of more research that would provide an additional dimension to the question of state-madrasa relationships.

4.2.3 Madrasa education boards created to parallel mainstream education boards

In order to structure and streamline support to the madrasas in line with the Area Intensive and Madrasa Modernization Programme, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Assam, all states with a substantial Muslim population, have recently constituted or reconstituted State madrasa boards especially to manage the modernization process. In Bihar, a madrasa board has been set up and all madrasas have been brought under a common centralized system of

education. In UP, although the governor of the State has issued an order to constitute a dedicated board, it is yet to be formally constituted, although activities continue under a virtual board and the already existing UP Arabi and Farsi Board. In Madhya Pradesh, the modernization process is said to have fared better at the primary level, but a number of madrasa leaders and religious teachers do not consider the board-managed madrasas to be genuine, as the curriculum is structured to include all mainstream subjects, with religious teaching included as just one subject. In West Bengal, while State government support to madrasas has been available for some time, the madrasa board itself has become structured and active only in the last few years, with over 500 madrasas currently registered.

Similar bodies had existed in West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh even prior to the start of the central government supported programme. In West Bengal, a board was set up in 1973 under a State government notification, until the Calcutta High Court struck it down in 1994, saying that this system had no foundation. The State government was instead directed to place the madrasas under a proper statutory system. Similarly, Bihar had enacted the Bihar State Madrasa Education Board Act in 1982, by virtue of which a statutory body was set up with powers of supervision and control over the madrasas, including powers to dissolve and reconstitute their management committees. The power to reconstitute the management committees was, however, struck down by a court in 1991, which stated that this was in violation of Article 30 of the Constitution. The newly reconstituted Bihar Board, with its standardized examination system, is currently rated by the central government to have one of the best systems for madrasa modernization in place. In Uttar Pradesh, the Arabi and Farsi Board has been functioning like a State board over the last few decades.

Towards the end of 2006, the national Ministry of Human Resource Development, presently headed by a minister reported to be one of the most secular and pro-Muslim ministers in the cabinet, proposed the setting up of a Central Madrasa Education Board, a concept which had been proposed in various review forums in previous years. The board was actually mooted by the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, based on documented evidence of the educational backwardness of Muslim communities. The Commission recommended that remedial initiatives should be taken by the State governments on an urgent basis, with the most critical tasks being “modernizing and upgrading madrasa education, besides prioritising Muslim majority areas for educational development”. The proposed board, which was to function on the lines of the regular education boards, was to coordinate and standardize the madrasa system while mainstreaming it into the regular system. The central

government entrusted the task of consultation and negotiation to the autonomous National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions headed by Justice M.S.A.Siddique and added the rider that association with the Central Board would be entirely voluntary. However, the proposal has met with severe criticism and suspicion. While some spiritual leaders suspect that it may be too interventionist, others (for example community leaders like Syed Sahabuddin) question the relevance of modernization, given that only a small percentage of children from Muslim communities go to the madrasas.

4.2.4 Operational gaps

The modernization programme has been criticized as being a "...half baked programme ... conceptualized and implemented in a hurry" (interview with a senior Muslim educationist), even by those Muslim educationists who otherwise view state intervention as having "good intentions". Moreover, since its focus is largely limited to introducing new subjects and not to bringing about changes in pedagogy, structures and systems, several educationists are of the view that it cannot be termed a comprehensive 'reform' process. Because of the lacunas in its design and administration and because many madrasas chose to stay out of the state-led process, the programme remained almost non-functional for a long time and only developed some momentum in some of the states with the launch of the SSA programme. The fact that the central government has provided broad guidelines and a framework for implementation and release of central funds, while the actual design and implementation is in the hands of the respective State governments, has led to variations in design and processes and consequently in outcomes.

For instance in Delhi, where there are reportedly about 300 maktabas and 200 madrasas, few have shown interest in the scheme. Of the few which had applied, even fewer had been approved for grants by the State government. Most of the teachers selected were women, who were expected to travel to madrasas situated in remote parts of the city. Not only was this a tiresome situation for the women concerned, it also meant that a large part of their meagre remuneration (Rs.1000, i.e. less than \$25) went on travel, while in addition the payment of their salaries was often delayed. Secondly, many of those who were selected did not know Urdu, making communication with the largely Urdu speaking students difficult. As a result, a number of the newly selected teachers soon dropped out. The general apathy of the Delhi State government and its apparent failure to respond to the needs and subtleties of the programme are given as among the key reasons for it being aborted in the early stages.

Similarly, a review of the programme in the state of Uttar Pradesh by the Hamdard University (Hamdard Education Society, 2003) revealed that, while additional subjects had been introduced into madrasas, their timetables had not been adequately rationalized to accommodate these subjects. Moreover, not only was the number of teachers sanctioned found to be inadequate, but also the headmasters of the madrasas were insufficiently equipped to supervise the additional subjects; nor did the teachers have adequate capacity. In addition, facilities and teachers' salaries were inadequate, and disbursement of the latter intermittent. The Hamdard evaluation was the first to recommend that a Central Board for madrasa education should be set up and empowered to monitor not only the implementation of the Modernization Scheme but also the functioning of madrasas that opted for state recognition and aid. Moreover, it suggested that the Board should be empowered to facilitate standardization of the curriculum across the country and also the integration of traditional and modern teaching within madrasas. The evaluation concluded that the complexity of the interventions demanded such a central board. These recommendations from a university founded on Islamic principles of knowledge and keen to ensure that the objectives of the *awqaf* concerned are realized seems to indicate the tacit support of a section of Muslim educationists for the concept of modernization managed by the state.

In spite of such reviews and recommendations, so far the state has not taken any serious initiative to build the capacities of madrasa teachers, as it cannot single them out for such preferential treatment. The state is rigid in its approach, compounded by its political leanings and the need to treat all minorities equally.¹⁷ Besides, as in the case of other programmes, bureaucratic processes are said to be difficult if not impossible for most of the madrasas to handle.

4.3 Responses of madrasas to the state agenda: 'yes', but on our own terms

Most proponents of the madrasa system interviewed during the course of the study, including religious teachers and academics from well known universities and institutions as well as large and small madrasas, observed that they were not averse to changes in the madrasa curriculum per se. However, many of them were uncomfortable with government leading such change, especially because of the recent violent expressions of distrust between Hindus and Muslims in some parts of the country, and because madrasas have also been targeted for allegedly harbouring terrorism.

4.3.1 *The perceived motives of the state*

A number of scholars of Islam, as well as religious leaders, question the actual motive of the state in implementing the modernization programme.¹⁸ According to them, the ‘sudden interest’ in upgradation of madrasas by the state, which had not previously made many efforts to improve educational facilities even at the primary level in Muslim dominated areas, does not appear to be the result of genuine concern for improving the literacy levels of the community. The scepticism is intensified when the programme is seen to originate from a government that has been characterized by some as one that refuses to “divulge available data on Muslim educational backwardness and which, by carefully manipulating the levers of power, changes curricula, particularly related to language, syllabi, school culture and medium of instruction so as to make Muslim parents more and more reluctant to send their children to government schools” (Shahabuddin, 2001, quoted by Khan, et al, 2003).¹⁹ The perception that even education in mainstream schools does not enable Muslims to obtain public sector jobs was a common refrain, further validated by the Sachar Committee Report, which found that the proportion of Muslims in regular salaried jobs (especially in government or large public and private sector enterprises) was lower than of other socio-religious categories (Sachar Committee, 2006).

Community leaders like Syed Shahabuddin of Majlise-Mushawarat, citing the Sachar Committee Report, have objected to the constitution of a Central Madrasa Board. He believes that a focus on madrasas is unnecessary, when fewer than 4 per cent of Muslim children are reported to be going to them. The problem, in his view, is the lack of facilities for regular schools, which the vast majority of Muslim children attend (*Times of India*, April 25, 2007). Instead, critics like Shahabuddin are convinced that the motive behind a centralized system and the government ‘largesse’ is not to benefit madrasa students so that they can become more “employable and more useful to society”, but to penetrate the madrasas in order to monitor their activities as part of the anti-terrorist activities (Shahabuddin, 2001). Other community leaders similarly fear that the role of the proposed Central Board might in due course change from advising on modernization and mainstreaming to regulation and control. Such critics cite the case of Bihar and West Bengal, where the level of government ‘interference’ is said to be such that madrasas in these states are now ‘Islamic’ madrasas in name only. State-led ‘reform’, they feel, is a means of exerting control, with the government making indirect references to the Inter Service Intelligence group of Pakistan and terrorism in order to push madrasas into accepting reform.

At the same time, the 'support' provided is criticized as being a ploy by governments and political parties anxious to garner minority votes. The facts that, although Muslims constitute only 15 per cent of the population, almost 95 per cent participate in the electoral process, that there are fewer caste divisions amongst Muslims makes their support valuable to political parties. The central government, being sensitive to their reaction, is proceeding very cautiously and has relegated the job of advocating the concept of a Central Board to the autonomous National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, with its Muslim chairperson. Following this trend, almost all the State boards are at present headed by a Muslim.

'Modernization' has also apparently been equated with 'westernization' by some *ulema*, who are hence averse to the proposed changes. At the same time many, including the independent madrasa heads interviewed in West Bengal, appear to be willing to concede the case for introducing mainstream subjects, while being averse to any state interference in the teaching of Islamic subjects. They prefer that decisions on the direction and type of reforms should be left to the *ulema*. In fact many critics of the government programme, such as Jamiat-e-Islami, Jamia Hamdard and head teachers of some madrasas, argue that the concept of 'modernization' is not alien to the madrasas system, because the system itself has constantly adapted, in various ways and degrees, to changes in its environment. The state's view of madrasas as purely religious-oriented institutions, they observe, is a misconception; instead, they point out that madrasas traditionally were open to secular and 'modern' education.²⁰ A continuous process of internal reforms, they argue, has occurred over time, albeit at a slower pace than the government now desires. It is another matter that this process has also faced hurdles, ranging from resistance from some quarters of the Muslim community itself - primarily a section of the *ulema* - to a lack of support from the government for improvement of the quality of learning, teaching and teaching materials for modern subjects. Thus within the system, it is argued, the doubts and debate have been around the nature and extent of modernization and who leads it, rather than against modernization per se.

Some religious leaders as well as scholars assert that, previously, the state-madrasa relationship was not characterized by hostility. However, ever since the state set out on its path to increase the educational levels of Muslim children in madrasas, frictions have developed in some quarters. Sikand (2007) argues that, while the state's motives may be questioned, if the state fails to bring the madrasas into the development process, the latter may become vulnerable to activities of terrorism -

the allegation that they are involved in terrorism may, in his view, become a “self fulfilling prophecy”. Ironically, while the madrasas that have opted for the state modernization process have been found to suffer from poor implementation, limited monitoring of outcomes and lack of accountability, those that have not accepted it are not much better off because most lack the finance and training needed for their own development.

The modernization programme has also been called non-Islamic, as it may involve giving bribes to the state machinery for recognition and the release of funds. Bandhopadya (2002) aptly describes the current situation in India as one where vested interests combine to exploit the Muslim community: in his view “illiterate *mullahs*” try to protect their domain and political leaders exploit minorities for electoral gain, with the result that “non-secular” *ulema* and so-called “secular and progressive” political groups reinforce each other’s agenda.

At the same time, some of the Muslim scholars and educationists interviewed look favourably on the state’s aim of modernizing madrasas because they are of the opinion that it would provide Muslim children attending them with mainstream education and give them better livelihood opportunities. They also argue that bringing the *ulema*, who have tremendous influence in the community, into the process would not only increase its effectiveness but also lead to desirable changes in the style in which Islam is propagated.²¹

Most of the scholars and educationists interviewed in some of the leading Muslim universities in Delhi and Aligarh are convinced that the government’s objectives are genuine and the fear of a ‘control agenda’ is unfounded. However, they feel that the state has not been able to gain the confidence of the Muslim community in taking its reform agenda forward - instead from time to time, vested and non-secular interests among political parties and leaders have created suspicion and doubt regarding the state’s true agenda. The scholars and educationists who were interviewed felt that, although some apprehension existed within the madrasa system, there was willingness on the part of a substantial percentage of madrasas to reform by introducing new subjects, although they are reluctant to allow interference in the teaching of Islamic subjects.²²

4.3.2 Alternatives to a state-led process of modernization

Some Muslim academicians, as well as Muslim leaders from organizations like the Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind, are of the opinion that the government should focus on providing good quality education to all children as a matter of right and leave religious instruction to the religious communities. The argument offered is that, in the matter of education, if a community wants to follow a particular path, it should be allowed to do so. The system adopted in Kerala, where all Muslim children receive religious education in maktabas and are also enrolled in mainstream schools for secular or 'modern' education, is often cited as a good example.

Shahabuddin (2001), hence, recommends that instead of modernization the government should provide areas in which Muslims are concentrated with adequate primary and secondary schools, as well as modifying its policy on the medium of instruction and rationalizing the content of teaching and textbooks so that orthodox Muslims do not feel threatened. The Sachar Committee considered the modernization scheme to be a step in the right direction, but with certain faults related to the choice of subjects, striking a workable balance between modern and traditional subjects, etc. In its view, therefore, if the programme is to be expanded, it must first be reviewed and revamped. However, it takes a step further, warning that "...modernized madrasas are unlikely to satisfy the educational demands of the Community ... [and] madrasas should not be looked upon as alternatives to the regular schools" (Sachar Committee, 2006, p. 78). It recommends that madrasas should be linked to a mainstream higher secondary school board and madrasa qualifications be recognized as 'equivalent' to those of mainstream schools for subsequent admission into institutions of higher education, but above all, it emphasizes that the state should make provision for mainstream schools in Muslim concentrated areas.

4.4 Madrasas and terrorism

Since the beginning of this century, there have been reports that the number of madrasas have been growing rapidly in some parts of the country, especially in the states bordering Nepal and Bangladesh. The growth is often attributed to cross-border terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, particularly by politicians belonging to Hindutva groups and some sections of the Indian press. Some of these reports have been generated by agencies and departments of the central and State governments, especially during coalition governments led by parties like the BJP at the federal level with a distinctly Hindutva flavour, which have added to the general feeling of distrust.

In 2001 a ministerial group led by the then Home Minister, L.K. Advani, submitted a report on reforming internal security in the country. The report observed that international funding following the oil boom in the Gulf had led to funds being used for spreading Islam in various parts of the world, including India, with much of the money being managed by extremist Muslim fundamentalist organizations. The findings that 11,500 madrasas exist in twelve of the border states led the then Union Minister of Home to instruct the State governments to be vigilant.²³ In addition, during the same period, the Indian intelligence agencies claimed that madrasas had become training grounds for the activities of the Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) group of Pakistan and were engaged in pro-Pakistan propaganda and terrorism. The report also suggested that "...muftis, maulvis and imams in these religious schools may have been replaced by 'highly fanatic agents of ISI', secretly working for the disintegration of India" (quoted by Khan et al, 2003). Hence, in 2002 the Home Ministry is believed to have issued a circular to all chief secretaries and heads of education departments in the State governments to meticulously review madrasas applying for State grants to clear them from the 'security angle'. This led the opposition parties, especially in Congress-led states, to protest and accuse the central government of being discriminatory in singling out the institutions of the Muslim community as being 'anti-national', thereby harming the secular fabric of the country.

Subsequently, while investigating these allegations, an independent review undertaken by the *Milli Gazzett* (an English language newspaper of and for Indian Muslims, published by a group that claims to be non-political) reported to have found that a similar circular had been issued by a senior superintendent of police in Uttar Pradesh, instructing the police to maintain a list of newly constructed madrasas and mosques and to closely monitor their activities. However, the director general of police in the state, although admitting that ISI infiltrators were active in the Indo-Nepal border area, denied that they were present within the madrasa system (Khan et al, 2003; Hasan, 2003). These contradictory statements by different levels of the same department within the same state raise doubts about the authenticity of the information, and about the role of vested interests within the political and administrative system. Nevertheless, madrasas came to be profiled "...not just as bastions of conservatism and reaction but also as training grounds for Islamic 'terrorists'" (Sikand, 2002).

Muslim groups and madrasas vehemently refute these allegations and quote instances of the *ulema's* patriotic stand and their allegiance to India at the time of the partition of the country (*ulema* are stated to have opposed the 'two nation theory' of the Muslim League). They also refer to their Constitutional rights and emphasize that so far the state has failed to come up with evidence of alleged terrorist activities in the madrasas and hence no legal case has been filed against any madrasa in the country. (Ahmed, 1990; Bandhopadhya, 2002; Sikand, 2002; Sultanat, 2003). However, the events at the World Trade Centre in America have put more pressure on the madrasas, so much so that Darul Uloom Deoband was forced to issue a statement denying any links with the Taliban or other fundamentalist organizations. Deoband stated that anyone 'promoting or abetting' violence could not be a Deobandi and that they were opposed to the violent actions of any groups in or against India. The Deoband *ulema* stated that Deoband stands for harmony and unity amongst the different faiths in the country and continues to support "secularism and a composite nationalism". It asserted that it differed from the Taliban with respect to its "...understanding of the question of jihad against India..." and said that a jihad in India "...was 'against all wisdom' and could only be 'counter-productive'". However, the Deobandi *ulema* made it clear that they were not against the agenda of setting up a Deobandi style Islamic state in Pakistan or Afghanistan and also that they support the Taliban in its opposition to America, objecting only to the methods adopted (Sikand, 2002). Sikand concludes that it would be incorrect to equate the Deobandi madrasas in India with those in Pakistan, as they operate against different backgrounds and in different contexts. While the Deobandi madrasas in Pakistan are well equipped with state support and funds, the madrasas in India are minority institutions and have to depend mainly on their own resources and support within the Muslim community.

Much of the 'terrorist' controversy can be attributed to political opportunism. While the Hindutva fundamentalist political parties use such issues to fuel Hindu emotions and gather votes, others use them to fuel the vested and narrow interests of *ulema*, who see such controversies as an opportunity to promote their hegemony over the Muslim community. What is clear is that such moves by the state or sections within it have not been conducive to strengthening the fragile relationships between the state and the madrasas and have made many of the latter more wary of any state-led attempts to modernize the education they offer. They are also partly responsible for the opposition to the proposal to set up a Central Madrasa Education Board.

5 State-madrassa relations in two states with different political environments

This section analyses state-madrassa relationships in the context of the different socio-political environments of the two states of Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Over the last few years, UP has seen a range of political parties at its helm, ranging from the supposedly secular Congress, the Bharatiya Janta Party with its alleged Hindutva nationalist agenda, the seemingly pro-Muslim Samajwadi Party to the Bahujan Samaj Party, which has a clear Dalit mandate.²⁴ In contrast, West Bengal had been continuously under the Communist Party of India (Marxist) for the three decades prior to the study. This section attempts to reveal the status of madrasas in the two states, by looking first at the nature and extent of state control of the madrasa modernization process, and second, at the response of madrasas to state interventions. It is based on interviews, observation and review of documentation, as indicated in Section 2.

5.1 Uttar Pradesh (UP)

First, some of the key characteristics of madrasas in the State of Uttar Pradesh are analysed, followed in Section 5.1.2 by a discussion of State government policies and programmes. A number of key influences on relationships between madrasas and the state in UP are identified in Section 5.1.3 and the important role played by associations of madrasas and their staff discussed in Section 5.1.4.

5.1.1. *Locating madrasas in the State*

■ Educational profile of the Muslim community of the state

According to the 2001 Census, 22 per cent of the 138 million Muslims in India live in the state of Uttar Pradesh, making it home to the largest number of Muslims. However, in terms of the proportion of Muslims in the population, UP, with a little over 18 per cent, stands fourth after Assam, West Bengal and Kerala. In terms of education levels, while the overall level of literacy in the state at 56.3 per cent is lower than the national average (64.8 per cent), according to the 2001 Census, literacy amongst the Muslim population is even lower at 47.8 per cent. It is therefore unsurprising that not only is the mean number of years of schooling of the Muslims in UP only 2.60 (see Table 1) (the overall figure for the state is 3.43 years) but fewer than 50 per cent of Muslim children are reported to complete the primary level of education.

Table 1: Mean years of schooling (7-16 years of age) in selected states (2001)

State	Total	SC/ST	Muslims	Others
India	3.95	3.35	3.26	4.39
Assam	3.64	3.95	2.64	4.23
West Bengal	3.58	3.12	2.84	4.51
Kerala	5.75	5.53	5.62	5.86
Uttar Pradesh	3.43	3.09	2.60	3.85

Extracted from Sachar Committee (2006)

These figures are dismal, especially given the fact that UP is home to some of the oldest and most renowned madrasas in the country, many of which have evolved into leading 'schools of thought', including the Darul Uloom Deoband and Nadwatul Ulama in Lucknow. Over 15,000 maktabas and 10,000 madrasas are believed to be running in the state, catering to a total of a little over 0.3 million students (a significant proportion of the national total) although no authentic survey or record is available to substantiate this number. It is believed that many of the children studying in Muslim schools may also be enrolled in regular schools, sometimes only to access facilities they offer, such as government scholarships and free midday meals, and also often to obtain access to mainstream education. However, in the context of madrasa education, the low level of literacy amongst the Muslims in the state raises a fundamental question: what is the nature of the average madrasa in the state and what role does it play in the education of a Muslim child today?

Two categories of madrasa are found in UP:

- madrasas recognised by the Uttar Pradesh Arabi and Farsi Board under the Minorities Welfare and Waqf Department (MW&WD), Government of UP. These are themselves of two types: (a) recognised and aided and (b) recognised but unaided. Seeking recognition or grant is an entirely voluntary process.
- unrecognised community-aided madrasas. These are mainly small madrasas of the maktab/Qur'anic school type, but a few offer education up to the jamia level, such as Nadwa and Darul Uloom Deoband. Which level of studies they pursue largely depends on the funds they are able to raise. Some of the larger madrasas also provide financial support to smaller madrasas and maktabas.

Teaching in the madrasas is divided into four levels:

- Tahtania – equivalent to primary (Classes 1-5)
- Faqania - middle or upper primary (Classes 6-8)
- Munshi/Maulvi- secondary or high school (Classes 9 and 10)
- Alim/Alia - senior secondary school or intermediate (Classes 11 and 12).

Further, a few madrasas also have Kamil and Fazil classes equivalent to undergraduate and postgraduate levels, totalling 16 years of learning, similar to mainstream education.

Brief descriptions of two madrasas visited as part of the study are given in Boxes 1 and 2: a typical State-supported madrasa and an independent jamia.²⁵

Box 1: A State-supported madrasa in Uttar Pradesh

This boys' madrasa is located in the eastern district of Sitapur. It was established in 1942 by a local resident and over the last few years has been supported by the State government. It is managed by a Board of Trustees, consisting of the son of the founder and other local residents. The madrasa teaches up to the Alia (class 12) level. In addition to religious subjects, it had introduced modern subjects, including Hindi, geography, history and mathematics, even before it came within the purview of the State grant system. It has a total of 1,100 students, most in the primary section, and including non-Muslims. 150 children from very poor families stay in the madrasa and receive not only free education but also food, clothes, books and medical treatment. The management claimed in an interview that the madrasa had a good reputation in the area and hence children came from a distance of up to 10 kilometres. Though not affiliated to any larger madrasas, a large number of the madrasa's students join Darul Uloom, Deoband for higher studies. The madrasa has a total of 56 teachers, the majority of whom are qualified at Kamil and Fazil levels (undergraduate or postgraduate); some also have postgraduate degrees in Urdu. A girls' madrasa (madrassa-e niswan) and a private English medium school are managed by the same Board of Trustees and located in the same premises. The madrasa receives funds under the State government's Minorities Welfare and Waqf Department's grant-

in-aid scheme, as well as the centrally sponsored Madrasa Modernization programme. Support comes in the form of the full salaries of 17 teachers of non-Islamic modern subjects from State funds and for two additional science teachers from the 'modernization' fund. The state also provides books and scholarships to students and training for the teachers. A small contingency fund is also provided. However, the madrasa has not taken up the midday meal scheme under the SSA, because of the "problem of managing the scheme and the time spent on the preparation and serving of meals." No fee is charged to students and, while dedicated funds from the State government cover the salaries of teachers, donations and *zakat* received from the community are used to meet the needs of poor students. *Zakat* is collected once a year during Ramzan. Sometimes, though not frequently, the Board of Trustees has to cover the funding gap if the *zakat* collection is low or when State government funds are not received on time.

Box 2: An independent jamia in Uttar Pradesh

This jamia is an independent institution established in Lucknow in 1892 as a 'middle-path' response, on the one hand, to the Deoband's urge to follow a relatively rigid traditional Islamic path and, on the other, the attempts of the ruling British to introduce modernity in the form of western thought and systems of education into the madrasas. It provides education from the primary to the postgraduate level in theology and Arabic literature, with the full course covered over a period of 16 years. The five-year primary level course is similar to primary education in secular mainstream schools, but also includes Arabic literature and Islamic studies. At the secondary and higher secondary levels (two and three years respectively), however, the focus is on Arabic literature and Islamic studies, with English as the only mainstream subject. This is followed by a four year graduation or Alim course focusing on *Tafsir* (commentary on the Qur'an), *Hadith* (traditions) and *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), in addition to Arabic literature and other branches of Islamic learning. Finally, the jamia offers a two year postgraduate course at Fazil level specialising in *Tafsir*, *Hadith*, and *Fiqh*, in addition to *Sharia* (Islamic law). However, in spite of the fact that the jamia is well known and respected as representing one of the leading schools of thought, only a few universities (like the Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi and Aligarh Muslim

University) recognize its degrees as equivalent to graduate and postgraduate degrees in mainstream institutions, while some (like the University of Lucknow) equate its Kamil and Fazil degrees with secondary level education. The students come from all over the country, and some from other countries, but are predominantly from Bihar, UP, Kerala and Assam. Most study free of cost and those who cannot afford to meet their own expenses are provided with free lodging, board and clothing. The better-off students, however, pay a subsidized amount per month for food and electricity. Stipends and scholarships are also awarded annually to deserving students. Seven student hostels are located within the well-equipped campus, and 131 teachers and 103 non-teaching persons take care of students' academic and other needs. The jamia has also established several research institutes, recently started a teacher training institute, and maintains a large library and a huge mosque. About 200 smaller madrasas are informally affiliated to it and follow its course. The jamia is managed by a large and distinguished managing committee, under an elected Nazim or Secretary General, while the administration is entrusted to a Mohtamim or Principal. The committee is an elected body with fixed tenure; when the term of a member expires he can seek re-election, or a new member is elected. The jamia has consistently refused any state aid or control, and generates all its money through its own network of sponsors. With the same logic, it has not tried to get its courses recognized by the state, because this would mean accepting the conditions set by the state. It has informed the National Minorities Education Commission that the madrasa will undertake the process of modernization on its own. However, the religious leaders of the jamia said in an interview that they had no objections to affiliated madrasas registering for state grants, especially those with limited resources.

Few madrasas teach up to the jamia level; the large majority teach only up to the primary and secondary levels.²⁶ In fact, the madrasas in which interviews were conducted indicated that a large majority of their students were in the primary and secondary classes, with a significant drop in enrolment after the Alim level. For instance, in a madrasa in Sitapur, while a total of almost 800 students were enrolled in classes 1 to 5, classes 6 to 8 together accounted for only 140 students and Alia for 100 students. Even in a much sought after jamia located in Lucknow, while in a given year, on average around 2,500 students are registered in primary classes, only between 150 to 200 students

graduate each year to the Alimiyat level and even fewer (50) to the Faziliyat level. This heavy concentration of students at the primary level is also reported in the Sachar Committee Report (Sachar Committee, 2006), according to which a little over 0.28 million out of a total of 0.31 million madrasa students in UP were enrolled in their primary sections.

■ Resources

While a large number of the madrasas in UP are run out of buildings attached to a local mosque and have poor facilities, a few are better equipped. Besides, true to their charitable concern and mandate, some of the madrasas and jamias have established hostels for poor students. For instance, while the jamia in Lucknow, with its long history and important position in the community, has large assets in terms of well-equipped classrooms, hostels and libraries, the madrasa in Sitapur takes care of a small but significant number of orphans, with funds generated from *zakat* and donations. The madrasa, including the girls' madrasa and the English medium school, which are located on adjacent plots, is housed in its own buildings. Initially the gram panchayat (village council) and a local benefactor donated some land; subsequently the madrasa began to purchase land with its own resources and also to generate income from renting out some of the property. The land is duly registered with the relevant government authority and the registration process itself was reported to have been routine and simple.

■ Independent management

Most of the madrasas visited in the course of the research were managed by independent elected boards, with smaller management committees that include the principal being responsible for day-to-day operational issues. A well known jamia like the one in Lucknow has eminent educationists and religious leaders on its board and its current Nazim or Secretary General is also the President of the influential All India Muslim Personal Law Board. Significantly, the State-supported madrasa in Sitapur also claims to have managed to retain its independence, with a Board of Trustees, who are mostly from the local community and are elected every five years having an oversight function. Here again, a management committee is responsible for all matters relating to teaching, selection of teachers, administration, etc. Incidentally, the President-cum-manager of the madrasa, who inherited the position from his father (the founder), also happens to be politically active as Chairperson of the Nagar Palika Panchayat (urban local body). It was also observed that the teachers from the State-supported

madrasas had organized themselves into a trade union, separate from that formed by teachers in regular government schools. The union, however, is almost completely focused on issues related to the members' own employment and benefits within the system.

■ Relevance of religious education

The view that the study of Islam and the Qur'an is a non-negotiable part of every Muslim child's education is held by many of the madrasas in UP, irrespective of their formal engagement with the government. They believe that a foundation in Islamic studies is critical to building up the character of a child and instilling a 'sense of respect for humanity'. The jamia in Lucknow, while endorsing this basic purpose, added that the madrasa as an institution is embedded within the Muslim community and meets its need for *ulema*. As such, it is regarded as the madrasas' responsibility to ensure a constant supply of *ulema*. Thus, the need for preachers and *qazis* to sustain the religious tradition and inform the community at large on practices and the interpretation of Islamic tenets is a practical and undisputed requirement that only a madrasa can fulfil. It is this perception that has led some of the institutions to provide for higher levels of learning and specialization focusing on Islamic studies. Further, it is also the value put on maintaining their focus on the study of the Islamic religion and theology that has led some madrasas and jamias, like the one in Lucknow, to consistently avoid state recognition or support, in the belief that it might influence the full realization of these goals. Parents were reported by the manager of the madrasa in Sitapur to have opted to send their children to the madrasa because it teaches Arabic and Farsi. In addition, government schools teach Sanskrit, a classical language traditionally associated with Hinduism, and hence not in the realm of desired learning for Muslim children. This seems to indicate that at least some of the madrasas are not so much seeking to provide a separate education as resisting the Hinduization of government education and trying to offer what is in their view a balanced education.²⁷

■ Integration of 'modern' subjects

In UP, the integration of modern subjects into the madrasa curriculum began long before the launch of the state-led madrasa modernization process. It is a well known fact that the jamia in Lucknow was one of the first such institutions to introduce modern subjects. In fact, this jamia was itself born out of a belief that the growing political assertiveness of the West was influencing Islam in such a way as to create a rift between the spiritual and material spaces occupied by the Muslim community, with

religion beginning to be seen as separate from the state. As a result, it was believed that the importance of religious scholars was not only being undermined but this had in turn made the scholars themselves "...indifferent to the affairs of the contemporary world" (<http://www.nadwatululama.org>). The founders of the jamia thus believed that the Islamic community had become divided between those who supported "uncritical adoption" of the western system of science and education and those who swore by the traditional system. As a result, they felt that "Religion and the religious sciences had fallen prey to these excesses... Moderateness had become extinct." They therefore set up a place of learning with the objective of bringing about "...moral, religious and educational reform and progress of the Muslims." Hence, two of the principal objectives of the jamia in Lucknow are to

- "introduce suitable changes in the syllabus of Islamic theological institutions with a view to bringing it in line with the changed conditions of the modern age and enabling it to integrate religious education, as far as possible, with the cultural progress of the community. ... [and]
- "...train and educate preachers who have deep knowledge of the Holy Qur'an and Ahadees along with a deep insight of the prevailing situation and who can judge and take remedial action for changing moral environment for the betterment of the society." (<http://www.nadwatululama.org>)

Thus, the jamia is credited with bringing about changes in the traditional curriculum of the Indian madrasas that were teaching in Arabic, reflecting the changed needs of the age. It has continued to function on these lines, irrespective of the political regime in the State.

The state-supported madrasas, in contrast, have given more space to contemporary subjects. The madrasas defended this relatively liberal arrangement and pointed out that Islamic studies and study of the Qur'an are a compulsory part of their curriculum, while Islamic culture is a way of life within the madrasas. However, they also felt that it was imperative to develop other skills in the students because not all of them can become *imams*, *maulanas* or *Qazis*. As argued by the manager of the state-supported madrasa in Sitapur, madrasas should both provide religious education to nurture *alims* as well as imparting other functional learning and skills to enable graduates to access sustainable livelihoods. For this reason, there is a perceived need to provide options from both within and outside the religious field. The leaders of madrasas interviewed argued that government support had not been detrimental to the religious and cultural education they offer. The manager of the Sitapur madrasa was typical, stating that:

We had been teaching subjects like science, maths and English long before the launching of the state-supported schemes. The government funds have only enabled us to recruit better qualified teachers.

He added that to date the government had not interfered in the madrasa's management and that it would opt out of state support if it was ever felt that the state was in any way attempting to dilute its religious profile or ideology.

■ The political significance of madrasas in UP

Uttar Pradesh has seen a range of political leaders over the last five decades. For a long time after independence, it was a bastion of the Congress Party, which not only greatly influenced the formation of the government at the central level but also contributed a series of prime ministers. Since the early 1990s, however, there has been a radical change in the political environment, with the State government coming under the control of a string of political parties. As noted above, these have ranged in ideology from the Hindutva-oriented Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to the Dalit Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) that has lately made inroads, not only in upper caste Hindu communities but also among Muslims, and to the Samajwadi Party (SP) - the avowedly pro-Muslim political group that was recently ousted from power. For most of the initial decades after independence, the madrasas were more or less ignored by the primarily Congress-led governments. However, when the SP came into power in 2005, one of its numerous electoral promises was recognition of and aid to additional madrasas. During federal rule by the BJP government (1998-2004), there was an underlying feeling of insecurity and mistrust amongst Muslims in the State, especially after the demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 by Hindu nationalists and the consequent widespread riots. However, by and large, the madrasas did not report being especially targeted, with the exception of intermittent accusations of fostering terrorism. Hence, their relations with the state have mostly been uneventful.

The large number of Muslims in the State is, however, an important electoral constituency. Although political parties as such have never specifically focused on the madrasas, in recent years financial support to madrasas has emerged as one way of wooing the Muslim community. The recently ousted Chief Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav, who belongs to the pro-Muslim SP, had made several electoral commitments to the Muslim community, including the provision of grant-in-aid to 1,300 madrasas. In September 2004, soon after taking over the reigns of government, he promulgated an ordinance to set

up a Madrasa Board. In December 2006, when it was clear that the State would have to have a fresh round of assembly elections, he quickly announced further largesse, including funds for building and additional posts on the proposed board. He also announced the upgrading of 160 madrasas, including the opening of mini-Industrial Training Institutes in them, and proposed to bring another 100 madrasas of the *Alia* level within the government aid list. He promised to extend the midday meal scheme to students in aided madrasas up to the Tahtania level, and also to extend the Kanya Vidhya Dhan scheme (wherein girls who have passed the senior secondary or class 12 exams are given a one-time grant of Rs.20,000 - equivalent to \$500) to girls studying in madrasas.²⁸ However, many of these have remained half-fulfilled promises.

Sometimes, a particular madrasa is seen to have some, although not overwhelming, influence over the State government and political parties. A case in point is a jamia in Lucknow (see Box 2), which was observed to have considerable influence at the State and even federal levels, based largely on the eminence of its board members. For instance, its current Nazim is also the President of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, which was constituted in 1973 to ensure the application of Sharia law in India. As such, the major political parties cultivate his attention and the madrasa receives visits from senior politicians of ideologically different parties, like the Congress and even the BJP. The Nazim, by virtue of his dual positions, is also a key person in the on-going consultations regarding the establishment of a Central Madrasa Board. The Nazim, however, has his own understanding and position in regard to madrasas' relationships with the state. He feels that, although the federal state wants to have some controlling oversight of madrasas, partly through the funding it provides, it is at the same time also open to reason and does not exert undue pressure to establish a formal relationship with madrasas. He added that the State government's intentions were largely positive, reflected in the fact that it has provided grants to various universities and NGOs to train madrasa teachers. He sees the current pressure on madrasas in India more as a result of international politics than of internal strife, arguing that, unlike in Pakistan, madrasas in India do not have any conflict with the state because it operates within the ambit of the Indian constitution. The stature of the current Nazim and others before him has allowed this particular jamia to chart its own course without outside interference.

Interestingly, during interviews, while both the officials of the State Minorities Welfare and Waqf Department and the madrasas admitted that allegations of terrorism had been made against madrasas, especially in recent years, this has not led to any serious action being taken by the state. Some political parties, like the BJP, are felt to have at times used the 'terrorist' card to gain political mileage, while other hand political groups, like the SP, are considered to have taken up the cudgels on behalf of madrasas only as a political gambit. The madrasas even reported that they had a champion of sorts in the previous Chief Minister, who had declared that those who equate madrasas with terrorism are 'enemies' of the Muslims. Almost none of the madrasas that were interviewed in the course of this research saw such allegations as a major threat to their existence, referring to the guarantees and protection provided by the Constitution.

5.1.2 State engagement and provisions for madrasas

In UP, the government formally engages with the madrasas through two different departmental channels and programmes: most interventions - both in terms of the nature of activities and budgetary support - come from the State Minorities Welfare and Waqf Department (MW&WD), in the form of grants and development funds for aided madrasas, in addition to grants under the centrally sponsored Madrasa Modernization Programme. A relatively smaller percentage of funds come through the Alternative and Innovative Education component of the central government SSA programme, channelled through the SSA Directorate under the Department of Education at the State level.

By December 2006, 557 madrasas had been given 'temporary' and another 930 'permanent' recognition by the UPAFB (see Table 2). Out of these, only 359 were receiving grant-in-aid from the State government (MW&WD and SSA) at the time of the study. 132 of the recognized madrasas were girls' madrasas and 35 of these were receiving grant-in-aid. The large majority of the madrasas were unrecognized under the UPAFB or any other umbrella Act.

Table 2: Recognized and aided madrasas in Uttar Pradesh

Type of madrasa	Recognized (permanent)		Recognized (temporary)	Aided (from amongst the recognized)		Unrecognized
	Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls	
Numbers	798 (135 girls)	132	557	324	35	9000 (estimated)

■ Minorities Welfare and Waqf Department and the Madrasa Board

The madrasas are now governed by the MW&WD, which was created in 1995 specifically to look into the needs of all the minority communities, including Muslims. According to its annual report 2006-7, the MW&WD's objectives include (i) the development and modernization of madrasas/maktabs, primarily through the introduction of mainstream subjects like maths, science, English and Hindi; and (ii) introduction of vocational education and computer training in madrasas (MW&WD, 2007). The aim is to ensure that the products of these institutions are able to fully integrate into every aspect of a 'welfare state', including access to mainstream employment opportunities. Subsequently, in 1997, the Uttar Pradesh Arabi and Farsi Madrasa Board was shifted from the Department of Education to the Directorate of Minorities Welfare of MW&WD, as a dedicated division within the directorate.

The UPAFB itself was set up by the State government in 1918. Its principal functions are to assess and give recognition to madrasas and to conduct examinations at all levels (including Munshi/Maulvi, Alim, Kamil and Fazil levels),²⁹ with equivalency to regular degrees technically accorded up to the Alim level. This implies that students can be admitted to higher classes in regular schools after passing the Alim exams. Apart from these activities, the UPAFB is also responsible for the appointment of madrasa staff in aided schools, facilitating the process of giving grants to madrasas and supporting the Mini-Industrial Training Institute scheme of the government. At the time of the research, an ex officio Chairperson (a Muslim) headed the UPAFB and also held the additional charge of Registrar of the Board. The Chairperson/Registrar, together with a small team of support staff, is responsible for the operationalization of the activities of the Board, as well as for managing and monitoring the Madrasa Modernization Programme and the Development Fund. At the district level, the District

Minorities Welfare Officer is responsible for all interventions and support to madrasas. The research found that, for strategic reasons, the State government appears to have ensured that officials belonging to the Muslim community occupy some of these key posts.

The existing structure, however, is not that of an elected 'board' in the technical sense, although it discharges all the functions of a board as an interim measure. The structure is slated for a major change in the near future, when a long-proposed State Madrasa Board is expected to come into existence. As noted above, in 2004, an ordinance was promulgated to provide for the establishment of the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasa Education. According to the provisions of the ordinance, the Board is to be headed by a Chairperson who will be "...a renowned Muslim educationist in the field of traditional madrasa education..." nominated by the State government. Space for equal representation from the Shia and Sunni communities has been provided for, with both educationist as well as elected representation on the Board. The state, however, has retained critical positions for itself in the form of an ex-officio Vice-Chairperson (Director, MW&WD) and an ex officio Registrar. Besides, the crucial functions of accounts and finance, as well as inspections, are to be handled by the staff of the MW&WD. The Board is to be vested with several functions, ranging from prescribing and preparing courses and text books for all levels up to Fazil to arranging exams and awarding degrees and certificates to students of madrasas recognized by the Board or who sit the Board examinations. With the setting up of the Board all the registered madrasas would get statutory recognition.

The proposed Board, however, has as yet not seen the light of day. Promulgated at the beginning of the rule of the previous regime (SP), vested interests from within the ruling party itself are rumoured to have stalled the constitution of the Board, although several madrasas support its quick formation. The proposal also drew flak from both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata parties. The Congress called it a 'damage control' exercise to appease Muslims who were unhappy with the seemingly increasing proximity between the SP and the more Hindutva-oriented BJP. The BJP itself saw it as the Chief Minister's move to appease a minority community in a more general sense and thereby also to keep his own party happy. Nevertheless, towards the end of 2006, the then Chief Minister announced a budget of Rs.20 million for the construction of a new office for the UPAFB and sanctioned 34 new posts in the proposed Board. Before any of this could be operationalized, however, elections to the State assembly were announced, which meant that the proposal, as per the norms of the Election Commission, could not be implemented in the months immediately before the elections. Whether and

how the Chief Minister of the predominantly Dalit-based party that took power in May 2007, and which had forged new alliances with both Muslims and upper caste Brahmins, will fulfil the previous Chief Minister's promises had yet to be seen at the time of the research. The attention given by the various parties to madrasas clearly indicates that the latter are important focuses of political debate.

■ The focus of MW&WD interventions

Financial support under MW&WD: Almost the entire annual budget of the Uttar Pradesh Arabi and Farsi Madrasa Board is expended on the salaries of the teachers and support staff of aided madrasas (Rs. 46.54 million out of a total of Rs. 46.90 million in 2004-05). The full salary bill of an average of 15 staff per madrasa (including a principal, 12 teachers and two support staff) is borne by the State government as a grant-in-aid package. The madrasas visited appear to have a far better teacher-student ratio than the regular government schools, even though some of them (like the one in Sitapur) reported that they had to generate extra funds to pay for the additional teachers that they employed. Attempts have also been made to provide superannuation benefits to retiring teachers and staff. The State government, however, has been grappling with existing dichotomies within the structure as a result of two different salary structures: one for madrasas that were given grants while UPAFB was under the Education Department (prior to 1997) and the other for madrasas post-1997.

Funds have also been given for computer training of students at Alia level and setting up of mini-Industrial Technology Institutes³⁰, besides the administration and maintenance of schools. While the funds for the aforementioned schemes come out of the State exchequer on a shared basis with the central government, the Madrasa Modernization Programme is fully funded by the latter, although also channelled through MW&WD (see section 4.2). Thus, while 359 recognized madrasas are currently receiving full support under the grant-in-aid programme of the State government, 683 madrasas/maktabs have so far been provided with support under the centrally sponsored scheme in the form of a salary for one teacher, in addition to a lump sum for each madrasa for a science kit.

Exam recognition: 45,000 students are reported to have registered so far for the various exams, from the secondary Munshi/Maulvi to the postgraduate Fazil level of the UPAFB. Student numbers are a little over 31,000 for the Munshi/Maulvi examination but decline to little more than 5,000 at the senior secondary Alim level and even fewer at the undergraduate Kamil and postgraduate Fazil levels (2 per cent of the total students who appeared for the Board exams). While students with an Alim degree can

technically be admitted to any regular university, the Kamil and Fazil degrees have not been given equivalence by the State so far. In fact, the State engagement at the higher level is insignificant, for it only administers the final examination and issues certificates at this level. Up to the primary or Tahtania level, Hindi and maths are taught, along with the Qur'an. Other subjects like science, geography, etc., are taught at the Foqania level. Urdu is also taught as a subject up to the Faqania level and the Board now proposes also to introduce a course in Urdu journalism as part of its vocational courses.

It is thus clear that the State government intends to modernize the syllabus and madrasa teaching. However, the modernization process, according to State officials, is limited to the curriculum and does not erode the cultural base of the Muslim community. As the ex officio head of the Board at the time of the research, who is a Muslim himself, said: "We are not wanting them [children in the madrasas] to cut their beard or wear pants and shirts, but to receive help in improving their own livelihood."

■ Support under the AIE component

The madrasas also receive support under the Education Guarantee and Alternative and Innovative Education (A&IE) component of the SSA. The support is given to madrasas that have been recognized or aided by the UPAFB and is similar to the assistance being provided to other schools under the SSA programme. Hence, in 2006-7, 359 aided madrasas affiliated to the UPAFB were being provided with an annual teaching and learning materials grant of Rs. 500 and an annual school grant of Rs. 2000, together with training for teachers and free textbooks, although it was reported that these text books often do not tally with the madrasa syllabus and are not distributed on time or in sufficient numbers. The Board has therefore submitted a proposal for preparing and distributing the books on its own in order to synchronize with the syllabus.

Alternative & Innovative Education centres are also being set up in those madrasas that have been granted recognition by the UPAFB but do not receive any grant-in-aid. These are treated as centres for non-formal education (NFE) and receive an annual amount for teaching and learning materials and for teaching equipment, besides a small amount for contingencies. In addition a small monthly allowance is given as an honorarium for one instructor, who receives induction training and re-orientation training once a year according to the SSA norms. 710 madrasa management committees out of a target of 828 madrasas for the year 2006-07 were reported to have applied at the time of the research, of which

572 centres had been made operational in UP. Besides, scholarships are also given to the children from the listed backward Muslim class. The SSA inputs are provided and managed by the SSA Project Directorate, channelled through the District Basic Shiksha Adhikari (Education Officer), while the District Minorities Welfare Officer manages the inputs of the MW&WD. However, there is almost no co-ordination between these two departments at either the district or the state levels, to the extent that each is unaware of the other's schemes.

5.1.3 State-madrasa engagement in reality: influencing factors

In spite of these efforts, only a little over 10 per cent of the madrasas in the state have so far been recognized and an even smaller percentage is receiving grants from the State, including under the SSA programme. For instance, in one of the districts reviewed during the study, out of an estimated 200 madrasas, only 52 (26 per cent) had been recognized (30 at the primary level and 22 at the middle level) and only seven of these were being aided by the MW&WD. Another 30, however, had received aid under the Madrasa Modernization Programme of the central government. However, even they were reported to have been paid only for a period of three months; subsequent grants had not been released by the central government due to the non-submission of utilization certificates by the madrasas. Various factors influencing the desire of madrasas to seek recognition and funding and their ability to do so were identified during the research: cumbersome bureaucratic processes leading to delays, some allegations of political or bureaucratic bias, lack of awareness, fear of state control and weak implementation. These are discussed in turn below.

■ Procedural delays in the registration and recognition of madrasas

The madrasas in UP have to register with the Registrar of Societies under the Societies Registration Act 1860³¹ or other relevant acts if they want to ensure legitimacy and legal sanctions for their operations. All the madrasas (and jamias) interviewed in the course of the research had obtained the necessary registration and reported that they had not faced any specific problems in the process. Although independent madrasas and jamias do not receive funding support from the State government, they are also expected, like any other non-government organization, to be registered and certified under relevant acts in order to function and raise funds, especially where these come from external sources. However, independent madrasas and jamias have no further formal relationship with the state, other than observing mandatory requirements and minimum interactions with relevant

service providers, such as the departments of electricity, water supply, etc. In fact, the Nazim of the jamia in Lucknow stated that it had deliberately refrained from formalizing its relationship with the state beyond the statutory requirements that allowed it to function and raise resources, in order to retain its independence of vision and goal.

In order to receive state support, however, madrasas have to have been in existence for a period of at least three years prior to applying. Thereafter, they can apply to the UPAFB for recognition. Previously, recognition was given by the UPAFB at the State level; however, since 2003 this process has been decentralized to the district level. Specially-constituted committees under the District Minorities Welfare Officer and District Chief Development Officer have been vested with the responsibility of screening madrasas and recommending them for recognition. For instance, the madrasa in Sitapur was registered under the Societies Registration Act (1860)³² in 1945 and subsequently became affiliated to the UP Arabi and Farsi Board. In fact, its managers appear to have been able to sustain simultaneous relationships with two different departments of the State government: the niswan that it runs is also affiliated to and aided by the MW&WD, and its private school is recognized by the Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA or the Basic Education Officer of the district) and is affiliated to the Madhyamik Shiksha Parisad (UP High School Board).

Recognition by UPAFB is accorded in stages for various educational levels, after assessing the performance of the madrasa. Initially 'temporary' recognition is given for a period of one year and thereafter recognition is extended on a long term basis if performance with respect to all the stipulated criteria is assessed as satisfactory. The criteria include possession of land of a minimum prescribed area registered in the name of the madrasa, a building with a minimum of three classrooms with a minimum area of 300 square feet, with adequate seating arrangements for the teachers and children, and additional separate rooms for the principal, office and library. The suitability and safety of the building also have to be approved by a competent authority of the government.³³ Besides, the madrasa should have a minimum of 60 children (40 in the case of Faquania and 80 for Alim levels). The madrasas are not expected to charge students fees and have to follow the UPAFB-prescribed curriculum and textbooks. In the case of any dissatisfaction with the selection process at the district level, the madrasa can apply to the Registrar UPAFB for reconsideration. At the moment the Board has only given recognition to the Tahtania or primary level (Class1-5) and Faquania or upper primary level (Class 6-8 level); at the time of the research 1,285 madrasas had been recognized by the Board.

According to the Chairperson of the UPAFB and most of the madrasa heads interviewed during the course of the research, an increasing number of madrasas are now keen to be recognized and to access grant-in-aid, because it is felt to give them better financial support, allowing them to perform better and improve their facilities. Above all, recognition gives them the opportunity to mainstream their students into regular schools at the primary level, which in turn attracts more students. It also perhaps gives them a sense of security from allegations of terrorism. It is a telling fact that some unregistered madrasas have arrangements with others that are, and which allow pupils from the former to appear for exams.

Perhaps substantiating the claim of the state that most madrasas in UP were keen to access state support is the clear displeasure expressed by some madrasas that have not received a grant even after having applied for it. The fact that the previous government was unable to meet its ambitious electoral promise of recognizing and supporting 1,300 madrasas has caused much unhappiness amongst the madrasas, who see this as a betrayal of faith, and during interviews vowed not to support the said party in the impending State elections. The madrasas' attribute this failure to general lack of interest on the part of the government, especially the officials of the department, as well as the difficult-to-fulfil conditions for recognition and grant-in-aid (conditions which even government-run schools often do not meet). In fact, their complaint was that they are prevented from applying for recognition and grants because of the stringent criteria and bureaucratic processes, which they reported were also at times associated with unethical practices like demands for bribes, which were contrary to their religious tenets.³⁴

In contrast, the UPAFB itself attributed the delays to long drawn out procedural requirements and the temporary stalling of the processes because of the elections. It also conceded that the criteria may be too stringent for many madrasas to fulfil. Discussions with the Secretary of MW&WD indicated that political interference in the selection of madrasas for grant is also a limiting factor. The Secretary admitted that not much progress had so far been made in the support programme and that monitoring of progress was inadequate. He was of the view that in reality the government would prefer that children join regular mainstream schools and would probably like to discourage parallel religious schools. However, as part of its vote bank politics, it had been forced to evolve special support programmes.

During the field visits, some madrasa managers also alleged that funds earmarked for the madrasas were being diverted for other purposes or were simply not being utilized. Even in the case of scholarships, they complained that the process had been complicated by the fact that some scholarships to students from the Muslim backward communities are disbursed through the 'other backward classes' (OBC) fund, while the rest are received through the Board. Thus, they felt that the whole process of engagement with the government had become cumbersome and that procedures were simpler prior to 1997 when UPAFB used to function under the Education Department and the District Education Officer approved the recognition of madrasas. This implies that at that time, madrasas were treated as if they were regular private schools seeking grants from the State government. Minority status for Muslims has perhaps complicated both the relationships and the process.

Delays and vested interests in the selection of madrasas for support have also at times led to court cases against the government. In a recent incident, two madrasas that had not been included in the list even after a 10 year wait filed a case against the government in the High Court.³⁵ The Court in turn declared that Muslims were no longer a minority community in UP and hence the madrasas could not get special treatment! Not surprisingly, and coming just before the elections in April 2007, the court order saw accusations flying between the State government and the central government (of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance), with the former accusing the latter of being deliberately uncooperative. At the same time, the then UP Minister for Minorities Welfare charged his own government with 'mishandling' the case and accused the officers of MW&WD, as well as the legal department, of having conspired against Muslims on the issue. He also blamed the controversial Urban Development Minister for having made the inappropriate selection of 67 madrasas that had led to litigation and finally to the declaration that Muslims were not recognized as a minority community. However, the court order was stayed for the time being at the behest of the Mulayam Singh State government. The delays and hurdles in granting recognition and aid may also have contributed in a small way to the Samajwadi Party losing the 2007 elections and substantial erosion of its Muslim support.

■ Lack of awareness and fear of state control

Although bureaucratic problems clearly hinder implementation, in interviews both government officials and madrasa leaders claimed that the main explanation for the still large numbers of madrasas that have not sought recognition and grants seems to lie primarily in their lack of information and awareness and fear of undue government interference and control. It was clear from field research that district officials have had to work hard both to convince madrasas and to facilitate their registration and applications for state grants. The Board Chairperson emphasized that the state had no intention of targeting madrasas with a ‘control agenda’, instead asserting that it is the responsibility of the state to monitor the activities and incomes of all entities under its jurisdiction, including madrasas: “We try to motivate the madrasa management, and some of them have been so motivated that they have filed a case against the Government when they were denied support to establish mini-ITIs!” This non-threatening stand of the state was also emphasized by the religious head of a leading madrasa. He observed that, while on one hand there was a danger of the state interfering in what was the madrasas’ constitutional freedom as a quid pro quo for funding, on the other hand the state had not pressed madrasas to accept support. Similarly, a madrasa head in the district of Sitapur noted the contradictory reactions many of those concerned with them have: “... We have to change according to the times, but being a minority community we have some fear of control.” The ability of madrasas to deal with these potential contradictions is illustrated by the case of the madrasa in Sitapur (Box 3).

Box 3: Sitapur madrasa’s voluntary engagement with the state

The madrasa in Sitapur reported that the option of engaging with the state was voluntary; in its case it took the initiative when the opportunity to do so was provided by the State government. Its association with the state is an old one, dating back to the mid- 1990s, when the madrasa was being funded by the State’s education department. Most of its interactions are now reported to be with the District Minorities Welfare Officer (DMWO) and to a much lesser extent with the Basic Education Officer at district level. Relationships with the State government are reported to be cordial and the latter’s supervision and control limited to occasional review visits by the DMWO to assess the progress of students, check the attendance record of teachers and sort out operational problems. The control of the madrasa, however, remains largely with its

management; for example the state-paid teachers are identified, interviewed and short-listed by the madrasa, although their selection has to be approved by the DMWO. The madrasa appeared to have no complaints about the mainstream curriculum introduced by the State, perhaps because they themselves had been teaching these subjects even before receiving State support. However, the manager and teachers of the madrasa were firm in stating that, although the state had so far not shown any tendency to impose undue control by virtue of the grant that it was providing, the madrasa management would not hesitate to withdraw from the engagement if the support came with conditions that would interfere with their basic principles and internal workings.

■ Weak implementation

Gaps in implementation appear to be a critical reason for the slow progress of the programme. Most of the irritants in the state-madrasa engagement in UP appeared to be operational and also common to the problems of bureaucratic administration in government-supported mainstream schools. They include delays in the distribution of course books under the SSA programme, difficulties in the release of scholarships and lack of adequate training for teachers, although the latter was also part of the planned support package. The madrasa in Sitapur also reported that the State gives limited support for teachers and, hence, that it has to generate its own funds for additional teachers. By and large, salaries were generally reported to be released on time, probably because of the existence of the madrasa teachers' union. However, there was considerable unhappiness regarding the discrepancy between the higher salaries of regular teachers in mainstream government schools and those paid to teachers in the madrasas. Although the madrasa teachers' association had repeatedly taken up the issue, it had not been resolved. A decision to bring about parity in the salary structure of teachers in government schools and madrasas has to be initiated by the Secretary of the MW&WD. However, the managers of some of the madrasas interviewed were sceptical about the degree of support for equal salaries from officials (including senior bureaucrats, the State 'IAS lobby'³⁶), hinting at the subtle influence of caste and communal (religious) factors in the administrative structure.

The madrasas in turn are not always well equipped to comply efficiently with governmental requirements. During the interviews, some district officials observed that the reason for slow progress partly lies in the lack of response from madrasas and partly in the overall relationship between central and state governments, which affects the release of central government funds. Currently, under the Modernization Programme, learning materials and training are provided through the state and district level research and training institutes (SCERT and DIET respectively). These institutions apparently perceive the madrasas as an additional burden and hence are slow to act. As a result, the learning materials are not supplied on time and training is not provided on a regular basis. There is also reported to be a lack of communication and coordination between the two concerned officials at the district level, i.e. the District Minorities Welfare Officer and the District Education Officer, leading to delays in the distribution of books and learning materials.

5.1.4 Associations of madrasas

The madrasas in UP work independently or are loosely associated with some of the larger madrasas. In addition, there are two well known associations - the Dini Talim Council and the Madrasa Arabia Teachers Association. The former seeks to prevent Muslim children joining government schools, and the latter has a mandate to act as a platform for negotiating with both the management of the madrasas and the State government.

■ Unrecognized madrasas and the Dini Talim Council

The number of unrecognized madrasas is believed to run into thousands (see Table 2). Discussions with various madrasa heads indicated that, as in most states, while the unrecognized madrasas are informally connected to bigger madrasas, like the Darul Uloom Deoband and Nadwatul Ulama, a small number are registered with the Dini Talim Council of UP.

Qazi Mohammad Abdula Abbasi, a senior Congress leader in the 1950s, formed the Dini Talim Council in 1959, with the aim of establishing a maktab or primary school to impart the basics of Islam to every child. Kazi Abbasi was of the opinion that the Council and the maktab under it should not take any help from the state or its educational departments (Nadwi, 1980; Bandopadhyay, 2002). The Council aimed to restrict the number of Muslim children joining Hindu-oriented government schools and to bring Muslim educational institutions (especially maktab) under one umbrella, so that they can raise

their voice against what is regarded as a 'one-sided' curriculum. At the same time, the Council aimed to ensure the teaching of Urdu, Arabic and Farsi, as well as providing *dini talim* or religious education. According to the current General Secretary of the Council, after Independence the government adopted a curriculum that was considered to undermine the role of Muslims, not only in the freedom struggle but also in the whole history of India. At the same time, languages like Urdu, Arabic and Farsi were not given any space at the primary level, whereas it was considered to be important to teach children about their religion and culture at this formative stage. Thus, the Council formed a constellation of maktabas that taught children up to the level of class 5. He stressed that the Council was solely focused on educational issues and steered clear of any other issues, such as Muslim personal law.

Currently, there are reportedly 6,000 maktabas under the Council, although no data were available to substantiate this claim. The Council has district level units (Anjuman Taleemat-e-Deen), regularly conducts examinations and aims to ensure that children who pass out of maktabas are enrolled either in mainstream schools or in bigger madrasas. The Council has a prescribed syllabus up to the level of class 5, which includes religious as well as modern subjects, the latter being the same as those prescribed by the State government for primary level education. It apparently also works as an advocacy cell, primarily advocating equal status for maktabas and government schools. One of the main activities of the Council is to review the curriculum and textbooks prescribed by the State government so that they can be made more 'secular' (i.e. less pro-Hindu and more balanced). The Council has regularly published reviews of textbooks and proposed corrections; it takes credit for changing a controversial section on the disputed site at Ayodhya, which was published in the history textbook for class 12 in 2005. The Council thus appears to be playing the role of a 'voice' representing the case for state education that fairly represents different religious standpoints or, where that is absent, alternative (madrasa) education within the framework of the state curriculum.

According to the General Secretary, after completing the primary level in a maktaba, a child used to be required to study for another year at the primary level in a mainstream government school in order to gain admission to class 6 (in a government school). However, after much negotiation with the government, an amendment was passed in 1963 (Article 173), which allowed these children to be admitted to class 6 in a government school without an admission test. Thus, the maktabas were given

the same status as any other private school. However he went on to add that in reality this was not happening and every year complaints were registered with the Council about Basic Shiksha Adhikaris (District Education Officers) or head teachers of government schools refusing entry or even to administer admission tests to children from maktabas.

The Council believes that primary education is the responsibility of the state and that all children should be given the opportunity to access quality education. It also believes that state education should be 'secular', with the curriculum and textbooks developed in such a way as to include the values of all religions without undermining any. If the state could ensure this at the primary level, the General Secretary asserted, there would be no need for maktabas, which could then become like small private institutions teaching theology and religion. If this were to happen, he said, the government would not have to be concerned with them. He suggested several measures to ensure state provision of secular and good quality education, including the setting up of a state level review committee with proper representation from all minorities to review textbooks before publication, consultations with members of minority communities before planning programmes, and constituting an effective state level body to safeguard the interests of minorities.

■ **Madrassa teachers' association**

The Madaries Arabia Teachers' Association was established in 1967 and now has teachers from both aided and non-aided madrasas as its members. The association is registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860 and elections to it are held every five years. The Association at present claims to have about 7,000 members on its roll, each charged a nominal Rs.5 membership fee. According to the Treasurer of the Association, the MW&WD keeps close contact with the Association and consults with it on issues that matter. Earlier the management of some of the madrasas was reported to be opposed to the Association, perhaps perceiving it to be a potential irritant, but that now most see the benefits, in terms of its role in attempting to access support from the government, they are trying to improve their relationship with it. It is not affiliated to any political party. However, during the recent elections to the State Assembly, greatly disappointed by the failure of the ruling pro-Muslim Samajwadi Party to keep its promises to the madrasas, the Association reportedly made concerted efforts to ensure that the incumbent government did not get re-elected.

The Association appears to have several complaints against the State government and has been trying to raise these issues with them. The Treasurer of the Association reiterated the problem of the differences and anomalies in the salary scale of teachers in recognized madrasas referred to above, noting that, while teachers in regular government schools were given government scales in 1996, madrasa teachers were brought into this system only in 2006. Besides, he felt that the government was partial in its approach. He quoted an instance when it could not find time to complete the survey of 100 madrasas between December 2006 and February 2007 necessary for sanctioning grants, but approved grants for Sanskrit schools during the same period and in a lesser number of days. The Association also complained about differences in the quality of coordination and management in other areas, including the release of funds for teaching and learning materials. As noted above, not only are the funds under this head not released regularly, but also when an amount is transferred from the SSA to a madrasa, the information is generally not intimated to the madrasa or even to the District Minorities Welfare Officer.

The Association is, therefore, not averse to modernization of madrasas, but would like it to be implemented with more effectiveness and efficiency in terms of a rationalized salary structure, timely release of funds, simplification of processes and reduction in procedural delays.

5.1.5 Conclusion

The government of UP has been led by different parties with a range of political ideologies. In this context, tensions arising from politically motivated allegations of terrorism have had relatively little space to build up to unmanageable proportions. In fact, recent strains in the relationships between madrasas and the state were attributed by informants primarily to the failure of the State government to keep its promise to provide support and aid to madrasas, rather than to Muslim minority fear that it and its religious institutions might be suppressed. Against this background, madrasas that have remained independent of the state are indulgent about those that have opted to engage with it. Engagement is viewed as a convenient arrangement that enables resource-poor madrasas to generate adequate funds and to integrate mainstream education with religious education.

5.2 West Bengal (WB)

The results of the research conducted in West Bengal are presented in a similar order to the case study of UP in the previous section. First, the general characteristics of madrasa education in the State are described. In Section 5.2.2, the agenda of the State government in this different political context is discussed, followed by a review of the responses of a particular category of madrasas that have opted out of a close relationship with the state in Section 5.2.3.

5.2.1 *Locating the madrasas in the State*

West Bengal is a densely populated state bordering Bangladesh. With over 25 per cent of the population being Muslims, of whom a substantial percentage are suspected to be immigrants from Bangladesh, it has the second largest proportion of Muslims in the country. According to the 2001 census, while the overall literacy rate in the state was 68.7 per cent, the rate for Muslims was 57.5 per cent. The mean duration of schooling (6-14 age groups), at 2.84 for Muslim children, was also lower than the State average of 3.58 years (see Table 1). However, according to the estimates of the Sachar Committee, only a little over 130,000 students, with marginally more girls than boys, are reported to be studying in madrasas. Like UP, a majority of pupils in the madrasas in West Bengal are studying at the primary level, with most of the madrasas interviewed reporting a sharp drop in enrolment at the Alimiyat level (also noted by the Sachar Committee Report).

West Bengal has a unique structure of madrasa education, with three systems running parallel to each other:

- Kharzi Madrasas - 'non-government' madrasas that are not recognized by the State government and generally teach up to the Alim level, although in some cases also up to the higher levels of Fazil and Mumtazel Muhaddetin (MM), equivalent to senior school.
- An old system known as 'Senior Madrasas', which provides Alim, Fazil and Mumtazel-Muhaddetin (MM) degrees in theology, Islamic studies, etc.
- A new system of 'high madrasas', in which the education has been 'modernized' and is gradually being brought up to par with the standards of the regular government high school course. The high madrasas are in turn bifurcated into junior high (classes 1-5) and high madrasas (classes 6-10). A profile of such a madrasa visited in the course of the research is given in Box 4.

While kharzi madrasas follow their own system of education, are not recognized, and are not supported by the state, senior madrasa and high madrasa schools are affiliated to the State Madrasa Board. The high and senior madrasas are said to have emerged after Independence in Muslim populated areas, with patronage from different political parties. At that time, it was apparently easier to get recognition from the State and at the same time to generate funds through *zakat*, especially at the primary level. As elsewhere, however, there is no accurate record of the number of madrasas in existence. Figures ranging from 1,500 to 7,000 are quoted.³⁷ According to the State Madrasa Board there are 506 madrasas recognized by the Board and perhaps about 2,000 kharzi madrasas. The Rabata-e-Madarise, an association of kharzi madrasas (see Section 5.2.3), in contrast, states that at present there are about 1,000 madrasas in the State, out of which around 550 are kharzi madrasas. In addition, according to the Rabata-e-Madrise, there are about 7,000 maktab attached to mosques. The maktab are mostly run by Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, while a much smaller number of maktab are informally affiliated to the Bareilvi and Ahl-e Hadeess schools of thought.

Box 4: A state-supported girls' madrasa near Kolkata

The girls' high madrasa, located close to the city of Kolkata in the neighbouring district of South 24 Parganas, was established in 1973. It teaches up to the higher secondary level and has 1,000 students on its roll, all of whom are day scholars. The curriculum is similar to that of the government higher secondary schools and includes English, history, geography, life science and physical science. Bengali is the medium of instruction, while English is taught as a second language. Other modern subjects like computer studies, work-life education and yoga have also been introduced. Religious education is compulsory until class 10, Arabic literature is taught up to class 8 and Islamic studies are compulsory in classes 9 and 10. While the secondary section (up to class 10) was recognized in 1980, the higher secondary (class 12) section was started only in 2006 and was recognized the same year (by the West Bengal Board of Higher Secondary Education). The principal of the madrasa stated that, although at the time of the visit there were no non-Muslim girls on its roll, it was possible that the newly started higher secondary classes would attract some non-Muslims, as they did not have any religious subjects in their curriculum. However, three of the 17 teachers were Hindus. Seventeen teachers employed under

the regular State government programme and five para-teachers employed under the SSA, together with a team of four support staff, take care of the teaching activities and day-to-day administration, while a management committee, elected for a period of three years, is responsible for larger decisions and overall management. Ever since the school was granted recognition, the management committee of 13 members has included one nominee from the State government and one from the local panchayat. One of the founder members is also the local member of the State Legislative Assembly. All the teachers appointed between 1997 and 2007, including the current principal, had been recruited through the centralized State School Service Commission. The madrasa does not have access to *zakat* funds but receives some donations in cash and kind. Its major source of income, however, is the funds received from the State government. As school education up to higher secondary level is now free in West Bengal, the students do not pay any monthly fee. However, a lump sum of Rs.100 is charged at the beginning of the academic year and largely used for maintenance of the school, and payment of electricity charges, land tax, etc. By 2007, the school was also eligible to get funds for construction and major repair of buildings under the SSA programme, whereas earlier it had had to depend on donations or grants from the MPs Local Area Development Fund (MPLAD).³⁸ A Muslim lady principal, recruited through the State Service Commission, heads the madrasa. During an interview, she asserted that the situation and quality of the madrasas in West Bengal has improved vastly since they came under the West Bengal Board of Madrasa Education. For example, although the class 1-9 exam papers are set, administered and evaluated by the school, in order to maintain the quality of education within madrasas, the WBBME has provided guidelines for preparing 'student friendly' question papers.

■ Political influence

The madrasas in West Bengal have to be viewed against the political background of the State. This is one of two States in India that have been under the control of communist political parties, the other being Kerala. But unlike Kerala, which has had periods of Congress rule, West Bengal has been under the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) continuously for three decades. This has given the CPI(M) - also known as the 'Left Front' party - the distinction of being the longest running

democratically elected communist government in the world. Currently, a political alliance led by CPI(M), the All India Trinamool Congress, the Indian National Congress and some other major parties run the State, with the government at the time of the study having been elected to power in 2006.

The CPI(M) itself is a 'cadre'-based political party that has not only shaped governance in West Bengal over many years, but is currently also a deciding factor in the coalition government of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) at the national level. Given that the Communists are at worst considered to be atheists and at best known to relegate religion strictly to the private sphere, any move of the government vis à vis a religious educational institution like the madrasa is likely to be looked at with suspicion. On the other hand, the large scale illegal migration of Bangladeshi Muslims into the State over the last three decades and the supposedly soft stand that the CPI(M) has taken send messages to CPI(M)'s political opponents that the party is appeasing the Muslim community and lay open the Left Front government to accusations of "pampering minorities for electoral gain"(Bandhopadya, 2002). Over the years, especially under the new chief minister, the State government has also been in the process of veering away from its traditional Communist stand against capitalist concepts of industrialization. This has led to considerable controversies within the party and recently culminated in violent confrontations with local residents in a predominantly Muslim populated area over the issue of land acquisition for a Special Economic Zone for industry. Interestingly, one of the 'socio-political' groups which has supported residents and is in the forefront of the dialogue with the State on this issue is the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, whose State level chapter is headed by an *ulema* who also happens to be the President of the Rabeta-e-Madarise, the federation of kharzi madrasas.

5.2.2 The state agenda

The reforms attempted by the State government of West Bengal are identified in this section and then the evolution of the West Bengal Board of Madrasa Education (WBBME) described.

■ Transformation from 'madrasas' to 'senior' and 'high' madrasas

The West Bengal Government's engagement with the madrasas dates back to the setting up in 1781 of the Alia Madrasa – the Calcutta Madrasa College for the study of 'Muhammedan law'. The first attempts to bring the madrasa system onto a par with government education were made in 1915, when the Government of West Bengal introduced a new scheme of madrasa education, which

included subjects that would allow the students to pursue higher knowledge in other fields and achieve 'successful careers'. However, since 1977, when the Left Front CPI (Marxist) government came to power, the State's involvement has increased more rapidly and with a more sustained trajectory than in other States. Some, like the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind³⁹, believe that the goal of the Left Front government, especially in recent years, has been to make the madrasas more employment-oriented. As the traditional madrasa syllabus did not include relevant subjects, the State government felt it had to intervene, through providing support for madrasas willing to re-orient their curriculum. The number of madrasas supported by the State government under the CPI(M) more than doubled, from 238 in 1977 to 507 in 2006, and the budget to support them increased from a little over half a million rupees to almost Rs.15 million in 2006 (claimed to be the largest allocated by any State in the country). Several changes have also been brought about in the structure of the madrasas and the curriculum.

The Left Front government had the opportunity to align madrasas with the government in the early days of its tenure, when madrasa teachers demanded to be brought within a scaled salary system instead of being paid only a fixed allowance. A Senior Madrasa Education Committee was constituted to look into possible reforms in the syllabus, apparently as a condition for introducing a revised salary structure. Another Committee (the AR Kidwai Madrasah Education Committee), set up in 2002, recommended further rationalization of the courses in both high and senior madrasas, making the syllabus, the text books, methods of teaching and examinations for entry into high madrasas comparable to those of the Madhyamik Pariksha (class 10) of the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBCHSE). The AR Kidwai Committee also recommended that the newly initiated three year Kamil course should be patterned on the lines of the three year undergraduate pass and honours degree courses of Calcutta University. While Bengali, English and Environmental Studies would therefore be compulsory at the honours level, Islamic studies were primary, and were to include Islamic History, Philosophy, Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqa and Shariat. Besides this, it was recommended that students would take two subsidiary subjects drawn from a range of options including languages, social science and vocational studies like journalism and computer science (AR Kidwai Committee, 2002).

Following these recommendations, reforms were made in the high madrasas in 1977, the curriculum of the senior madrasas was changed, and five years later, in 1982, teachers were brought within the purview of a scaled salary structure. Subsequently, the State government also initiated a system for

upgrading existing high madrasas into higher secondary madrasas, bringing them under the exclusive authority of the WBCHSE. Thus, 75 high madrasas have now become higher secondary madrasas under the jurisdiction of WBCHSE (for an example see Box 4). The major change after upgradation is adoption of the curriculum and text books endorsed by the WBCHSE Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education, in addition to Arabic and *diniyat* (religious teaching). Arabic is, moreover, a compulsory subject and in order to obtain a grade students must pass this subject. A continuous and comprehensive evaluation system with terminal tests similar to government schools has also been introduced and the Alim level (class 1-10) in the senior madrasas given equivalency with qualifications granted by the State Boards of Education. In addition, all mainstream subject teachers are trained graduates (or postgraduates for the higher secondary level); and in-service training of teachers is provided on new issues like adolescent health and life-skills development. In the process of convergence, the division of marks between theological subjects and mainstream subjects in senior madrasas has also changed. Initially, 400 out of a total of 1,000 marks were allocated to theological subjects. This has now been reduced to 300 marks, eliciting much criticism from the kharzi madrasas, which use it to illustrate their contention that the government's motive is to gradually do away with religious education in the madrasas.

■ Evolution of the West Bengal Board of Madrasa Education (WBBME)

West Bengal has one of the oldest madrasa education boards in the country, established in 1927 primarily for the management of the Alia madrasas. Over time, the Board has been through several changes and has also assumed responsibility for conducting examinations in other madrasas in the State. It was renamed the Madrasa Examination Board (earlier known as the Central Madrasa Examination Board) in 1948 and reconstituted in 1973. As the West Bengal Board of Madrasa Education (WBBME), it became an autonomous government body when the West Bengal Board of Madrasah Education Act 1994 was passed, starting to function from April 1995. The Kidwai Committee recommended that the Board be allowed to function "...with the same academic, administrative and financial powers as enjoyed by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education, West Bengal Board of Higher Secondary Education, West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education and similar bodies in the State Government." It also recommended that the selection of teachers for the madrasas should be brought within the purview of the West Bengal School Service Commission, which is responsible for the selection of teachers for government schools, and that teachers' capacities should be increased through regular in-service training.

The WBBME is now one of the five boards or councils⁴⁰ responsible for education in the State. Like the others, it was until recently under the jurisdiction of the Education Department. However, recently it has been transferred to the Department of Minority Welfare, Development and Madrasa Education, while still being accorded the same status as the other school Education Boards in West Bengal. The Board also proudly claims to be a member of the National Council of Boards of Secondary Education - the only Madrasa board to have achieved this status at the time of the research.

The Board now has the power to direct, supervise and control both the high and senior madrasas and to manage the entire madrasa system and its functions as per the guidelines given by the School Education Department of the State government. As indicated above, teachers are selected through a centralized State-level School Service. However, unlike the state-supported madrasas in UP, in West Bengal the State government appoints its own nominee and a member from the politically active local panchayat to the management committee of each madrasa. It thus ensures both executive and political oversight and control. However, the WBBME itself does not have any functionaries at the district level and, hence, at present the madrasas are monitored by the District Inspector of Schools, an employee of the School Education Department. As in UP, teachers in the State-supported madrasas have organized themselves into a union but, unlike in UP, this was reported to be very powerful, due to the communist legacy in the state.

The WBBME has access to relevant SSA components and funds, including training for the madrasas' managing committee members, provision of teaching and learning materials and workbooks, development of teacher training modules, etc. Vocational classes have been started in 56 high madrasas and funds for construction and maintenance of buildings are provided. Students who have successfully completed the Alim (senior madrasa) and high madrasa exams are now entitled to national scholarships and are technically eligible for admission to regular higher secondary and equivalent classes within or outside the State. The WBBME has introduced a continuous system of quarterly and terminal comprehensive evaluation (see Box 4) and at the time of the research was also proposing to soon introduce a grading system.

The WBBME counts its strengths as its 'secular' (non-religiously biased) character, an increasingly co-educational system and the effective process of convergence with mainstream. The process of 'fullest possible convergence' between the regular school and madrasa systems, especially up to the Alim level, is rated by its members as the key strength of the Board. It lays emphasis on quality in education and what it calls a 'socialization process' by which it attempts to provide all-round development for children, especially in terms of improved health care, sensitization of teachers on gender equity, etc. The President of WBBME, a Muslim nominated by the State government, stated in an interview that "we have no objection to religious education but do not believe that the madrasas are only for religious education," in a way confirming the accusation of critics that in West Bengal the process of modernization and convergence has gone so far that madrasas are no longer 'madrasas' – distinctive institutions that have a different conceptual basis to government schools.

With 4 per cent non-Muslim students in the high and 8 per cent in the junior high madrasas, and 11 per cent non-Muslim teachers, the Board's claim to a 'secular' image appears to be somewhat justified. Indeed a few madrasas, such as the kasba madrasas (those in small hamlets near larger towns), are reported to have an even larger percentage of non-Muslims (512 out of 813 students are non-Muslims) and some of the heads of the madrasas are non-Muslims. Over 95 per cent of these madrasas are co-educational and 65 per cent of the students are girls. Interestingly, the state-supported madrasas visited during the research, while pointing out that Islamic studies are a compulsory part of education at the higher levels, were also keen to emphasize the growing secular nature of madrasa education in the State under the Left Front government. As noted above, the principal of one of the madrasas also said that it was possible that more non-Muslim students would join higher secondary classes, as there are no religious subjects in their curriculum. The principal went further, arguing that the overall academic environment in the State, including the madrasa system, had greatly improved since the Left Front Government had come to power; in this informant's view, the increasingly secular character of education in terms of the curriculum and its overall profile are strengths of the system.

Indeed this was a view held by informants in all the state-supported madrasas that were visited in the course of the study (see for example, Box 4). Most of these madrasas welcomed the support received to maintain the quality of education and the State government's attempt to bring them up to the same level as mainstream education. However, some of them also feared that, as the religious content of the syllabus had declined under the pressure of reform, a number of madrasas that were in need of

support had refrained from seeking it. Moreover, they drew attention to the fact that, because adequate infrastructure is a pre-condition for the allocation of grants, many otherwise interested madrasas have been prevented from seeking support.

Informants in the state-supported madrasas that were visited denied any interference by government, except that related to routine monitoring, in spite of the fact that state intervention in the management of madrasas was implicit through its representation on the Board, its responsibility for the recruitment of teachers and its role as the sole funding source. Informants in the madrasas also strongly denied that a large number of the teachers recruited through the Central Service Commission, as well as representatives on the WBBME, owed allegiance to the ruling CPI(M) and were, therefore, controlled by the party. Further, they did not believe that the party itself was determined to gradually phase out religious education from the curriculum. The major problems they faced in their interactions with the state were reported as procedural delays (as in UP), which were said to be sorted out eventually.

The WBBME currently controls 130 junior high madrasas, 275 senior high madrasas and 102 senior madrasas. Furthermore, as stated earlier, 75 of the senior high madrasas have now been brought under the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education – i.e. fully under the government system. 17 of the 102 senior madrasas that come under the WBBME have been recognized for the (10+2) Fazil course and a vocational stream has been introduced in about 58 madrasas. The Alia madrasa in Kolkata also comes under the jurisdiction of the WBBME and the government is attempting to upgrade it into a fully-fledged university. According to the President of WBBME, while an estimated 800 madrasas are reportedly following the Board's syllabus, only 507 have been recognized so far. The State government has directed district collectors to undertake a survey of madrasas in their districts to facilitate the process of convergence and bring more and more madrasas within its scope. The fact that the State government has so far spent an estimated Rs.10.25 million on madrasa education out of Rs.10.50 million earmarked under the current Five Year Plan gives some indication of its commitment.

According to the State minister for Minorities Welfare and Madrasa Education (who was earlier the President of the WBBME), interviewed in the course of the research, the State government proposed to extend its support to another 100 madrasas in 2008, depending on the amount of funds allocated by the State and central governments. The funds are currently channelled through the project director of

SSA at the State level and the district project officer at the district level. The minister also indicated that his ministry was in the process of establishing a trust to channel SSA funds, amongst others.

However, many, like Bandhopadya (2002), are of the opinion that such a high volume of expenditure on madrasas with what are in their view “antiquated syllabi” does not necessarily indicate that the government has a secular character. Instead, they believe: “It only shows that for garnering minority votes the LF can easily jettison all progressive and secular ideas to promote non-secular religious institutions.” Bandhopadya, like Shahabuddin (2001), also points out that such preferential treatment for madrasas “violates the spirit of sub-clause (1) of Article 28 of the Constitution.” In their view, a secular and progressive approach would have been to set up efficient good quality mainstream schools where children from minority communities would have opportunities to study on an equal basis with children from the so-called ‘privileged’ communities.

5.2.3 Response of the kharzi madrasas to state interventions: Rabeta-e-Madarise

A substantial number of madrasas have opted to stay out of the centralized madrasa education system promoted by the State. These are the kharzi madrasas, most (700) of which are associated with Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, although some are also associated with the Barelvi and Ahla-Hadees schools of thought (150 in each case). The kharzi madrasas believe that a student cannot acquire pure religious knowledge and mainstream education at the same time (although the jamia described in Box 5 illustrates a more nuanced stance). They are determined not to be recognized by the state. In 1999, primarily in order collectively to counter allegations of terrorism, some of the kharzi madrasas came together to form the Rabeta-e-Madarise-Islamia-Arabia, a ‘nodal agency’ of the non-government madrasas in the State. The Rabeta-e-Madarise is in fact the West Bengal unit of the Darul Uloom Deoband All India Committee founded in Deoband in the early 1990s to promote the interests of madrasas associated with this school of thought.

Box 5: A kharzi jamia in West Bengal

Another madrasa visited in the course of the study was a jamia situated in the district of North Medinipur. It is a kharzi institution affiliated to the Rabeta-e-Madarise (see section 5.2.3) and is closely associated with the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind. It was established in 1975 and caters to the needs of a total of 850 students, all of whom live on the campus; among them are 250 orphans whose entire expenses are borne by the madrasa management. Education is imparted up to the Mumtazel Muhaddelin (MM) level. At the primary level Bengali, English, history, general science, mathematics, Urdu, Arabic and Persian are taught. At the secondary level the primary focus is on Hifz and Arabic literature and Islamic studies. Subsequently, the students specialize in Fatwa and Kirat. However, the head teacher reported that a large number of children drop out after completing the Alim course. According to interviews with the head teacher, the madrasa believes that education should focus on *dini talim* (religious education), but since *duniyavi talim* (worldly education) education is also required, they have compromised to the extent of teaching Bengali, English and mathematics, as well as history and general science up to class 8, and have also recently introduced computer training. The jamia, which is ideologically aligned with Deoband Darul Uloom, has a staff of 36 teachers¹ and 20 support staff and is managed by a board under the direction of a governing body consisting of eminent Muslim scholars. While poor children are given a small monthly stipend as well as clothes, children from better off families (about 100 of the 850 children) pay a subsidized monthly amount for food. As in most madrasas, the classrooms double up as dormitories. However, education itself is free and no fee is charged to the students, for the reason that the community in the area around the jamia is by and large poor. Often, it was reported, the jamia has to make an effort to encourage community members to send their children to the school. The jamia's income comes primarily from *zakat* and donations from the Muslim community; according to interviewees, at times it is faced with a shortage of funds. Nevertheless, it supports about 500 maktabas attached to mosques, providing them with a token monthly amount. It is also actively engaged in routine social work, as well as relief work during times of disaster. However, it proposes to register a separate NGO for these activities.

The Rabeta-e-Madarise, though not a *wakaf* like those in Pakistan, in essence discharges some of the functions of the *wakafs*. Its principal objectives are to bring about overall improvement in the quality of madrasa education and to guard its members against allegations of terrorism. It is structured in the form of a madrasa board (a parallel examination body) and its activities include prescribing the syllabus for religious as well as basic 'modern' education and organizing training courses for teachers. It has gradually put into place an apparently elaborate and well coordinated centralized system of examinations. However, the Rabeta-e-Madarise is primarily a mechanism for protecting the collective rights of the madrasas as religious educational institutions and, according to its stated mandate, its other activities include "...Protecting madrasas from official harassment malafide information and wrong publicity...Securing the fundamental rights, inclusive of religious rights of the minorities...Advancement of education and culture among the minorities...,[while at the same time] ...Cultivating nationalism and communal harmony and endeavouring to eliminate the environment of intolerance and hatred."

The kharzi madrasas were concerned about the way in which the West Bengal government was attempting to bring madrasa education onto a par with mainstream education. In their view these changes were being forced on the madrasas. They felt that the state had never appreciated the purpose and function of kharzi madrasas and that it was attempting to eliminate religious education from their curriculum. Although only one of the madrasas visited reported that it had been accused of harbouring or nurturing terrorists, all were concerned about such allegations; their motive for joining the Rabeta-e-Madarise was, according to informants, to protect the interests of the madrasa community as a whole.

The Rabeta-e-Madarise has a 22-member Working Committee, eight of whom are post-holders. It is vested with the power to prescribe the curriculum, hold examinations and declare results. It can also inspect any madrasa at any time during teaching sessions. A five-level primary course structure - up to Hifz - is followed by the member madrasas, and the language of instruction is Urdu. The Board and its member madrasas asserted that they want their pupils to be well versed in *duniyavi talim*, but at the same time to acquire religious education. Besides Islamic studies, the syllabus therefore also includes languages like English and Bengali, as well as subjects like mathematics. As noted in Box 5, one of the jamias visited in the course of the research had thus included English and computer training in its curriculum at the primary and secondary levels and noted that it had no objection to

children learning other modern subjects. However, it believed that at higher levels the purity of the religion had to be maintained and was of the view that specialization in various fields of Islamic studies did not allow for integration of other mainstream subjects. Believing that Islamic research and education should be kept separate from general education, but at the same time believing that contemporary education is necessary, at the time of the study it was considering setting up a separate school in which contemporary subjects would be taught, rather than integrating these into the traditional madrasa curriculum, thereby diluting its religious content. The jamia's aim was stated as to ensure that children studying with them not only became 'good preachers' but also 'good human beings'.

In fact, most of the leaders of kharzi madrasas in West Bengal interviewed in the course of the study held the view that children in madrasas need to be exposed to contemporary education at the primary level. However, they felt that the State-promoted modernization programme had only succeeded in reducing the religious orientation of the madrasas - a development that in their view was perhaps intended by the State government - without significant improvements in the quality of education.

After completing the primary level course, a student may choose to move on to the secondary level of madrasa education. It was reported that examinations had been conducted regularly for the five years prior to the study, with around 6,500 students appearing for the exams in 2007 through 33 centres. Exams are held over a period of three days and an Examination Committee sets the papers, based on a set of questions provided by all the member madrasas. A central team of examiners thereafter evaluates the papers and declares the results.

325 kharzi madrasas have so far registered as members of the Rabeta-e-Madarise, each paying a Rs.510 annual membership fee. Besides, each madrasa pays Rs.250 as examination fees, and every student who appears for the exam pays another Rs.7. One of the purposes of setting up the nodal agency and focusing on education, as stated by the President of the Rabeta-e-Madarise in an interview in the course of the research, is to continuously improve madrasa education without any outside interference. Some of the members of the Rabeta-e-Madarise also pointed out that the need for preachers and kazis to continue and sustain the religious tradition and inform the community at large on Islamic practices and interpretation of the texts is a practical and undisputed requirement that only a madrasa can fulfil. The member madrasas raise their own funds in the form of *zakat*, etc, with

the help of both the Rabeta-e-Madarise and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, which issues certificates of identity to enable the madrasas to raise funds from the Muslim community.

The President of Rabeta-e-Madarise, who is also the President of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind's West Bengal chapter, believes that the CPI(M) government in the State is working towards demolishing the very foundation of the madrasas – hence, in his view, the process of mainstreaming and the allegations of terrorism. First, he stated that, given that there are very few madrasas relative to the size of the Muslim population, phasing out the madrasas through a process of mainstreaming and modernization will obviously lead to a gradual abolition of madrasas as religious educational institutions. To demonstrate his point, he noted that, while in 1947 there were 87,000 madrasas in East and West Bengal together, there are now only about 1,000 madrasas in the state of West Bengal. In West Bengal, where the same party has led government for three decades, and where that party is labelled as 'atheist', apparently supportive overtures from the State are more pronounced than elsewhere in the country, but are also looked at with suspicion. Although State support to madrasas had been in existence well before the CPI(M) began its long rule, most of the activities to bring madrasas up to the standard of mainstream education have taken place during the tenure of the party. Coupled with occasional disparaging statements emanating from the political leadership, this has led to the attribution of sinister motives to the apparent desire for state control. The increased role of the State government in the selection of teachers and its significant presence on the management boards of state-supported madrasas has strengthened madrasas' suspicions. The Left Front coalition has been criticized by the opposition for its soft stand on Muslim migrants from Bangladesh, but at the same time is accused of harassing the madrasas. The apparently well-coordinated curriculum and system of examination of the Rabeta, however, seems to allow it to retain its independence from state interference and also to raise its own resources to maintain the system. Indeed, some of the educationists interviewed were of the opinion that madrasas' performance levels fall when they receive funding from the government, because the assured flow of funds and reduced accountability to the Muslim community are said to foster complacency.

West Bengal is one of the States where there has been the highest level of allegations that madrasas foment religious extremism or harbour (future) terrorists. In 2002 the Chief Minister added to the apprehensions of the madrasas by declaring that the number of madrasas in the border areas of the state had increased 'alarmingly' over the previous few years. He attributed this supposed increase to

money coming in from the Middle East with ulterior motives. His suggestion that these unregistered madrasas should be investigated for their source of finance as well as their activities was so vehemently opposed by the madrasas that he had to subsequently retract his statement. Subsequent damage control measures were not much help and it was during this time that the Rabeta-e-Madarise was formed. During the course of the interviews with the President and the heads of some of the kharzi madrasas, it became clear that the Board provided them with a sense of collective strength to defend themselves against allegations of terrorism. In fact the President expressed the view that the Board's most significant achievement to date had been to achieve "unity amongst its members; the ability to convey that we are also citizens of this country and also to improve ourselves as citizens."

In the political circumstances of contemporary West Bengal, madrasas that want to retain their independence (because they do not want the state to interfere in their curriculum and management) and that also fear being accused of terrorism have organized themselves for a collective purpose. The President of Rabeta-e-Madarise asserted that, until recently, the madrasas had kept themselves apart from any kind of political engagement, but a growing perception of external threats had pushed their leadership towards political ambitions. While he stated that the political parties themselves had never deliberately sought to court the madrasas, he and the other leaders have clearly decided that political engagement may now be desirable. Thus, as the current leader of Rabeta-e-Madarise, he is politically active in West Bengal and heads the West Bengal chapter of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind.

6 Conclusions

This study indicates that the Indian central and State governments have always had a relationship with the madrasas, based on reasons ranging from welfare to politics. The relationship has been at times supportive, at times contentious and often just indifferent. While for several decades after Independence, the relationship was largely passive, in recent years it has become more active, in the context of the official minority status of Muslims and the state's constitutional commitments, including respect for the rights of minorities to establish and operate religious institutions, including educational institutions. In addition, ripples from the larger international controversy regarding madrasas' alleged association with terrorism have given a new twist to the relationship in India. Both the state and the madrasas are somewhat wary of engaging in power struggles and taking up a position of open confrontation.

Nevertheless, even though a very small proportion of all Muslim children attend madrasas, the government has chosen to engage with madrasas in different ways. To legitimize its interventions, it invokes its responsibility to raise literacy and educate all children between the ages of 6 and 14 years. The madrasas in turn refer to their constitutional right to groom children in the tenets of Islam. The relationship mainly revolves around these relatively safe positions. In such circumstances the state and madrasas have limited points of interaction.

Hence, the state primarily directs its attention to the primary and secondary levels of madrasa education, choosing to limit its interactions at the higher levels to a largely ineffectual recognition of exams and degrees rather than the provision of active support. Even such selective intervention by the state is, however, often judged by critics to be politically motivated, populist or loaded with the ulterior motive of imposing checks and controls on madrasas. The research reveals that government interventions have to some extent diluted the religious content of madrasa education. The Sachar Committee's finding that fewer than 4 per cent of Muslim children in the school going age group are enrolled in madrasas would appear to strengthen the argument that the provision of support to them is influenced more by the political and populist agendas of the state than by any serious intention to improve the literacy levels of the Muslim community.

The madrasas, however, are not all averse to receiving state support or to the introduction of mainstream subjects into their curriculum, as long as these do not greatly impinge on their freedom to impart religious education - even those receiving substantial government contributions to their costs

have retained some religious subjects in their curriculum. It is their ability to raise resources and the degree of financial independence that results that appear to determine the relationships between a madrasa and the state rather than the status or level of education that it imparts. Financial independence allows a madrasa or jamia to refrain from 'volunteering' for a formal engagement with the state that might make it vulnerable to routine but cumbersome controls and checks. In contrast, the study indicates that a madrasa's need to obtain support is associated with a willingness to formally engage with the state through grant-in-aid or 'modernization' programmes.

The ability of madrasas, which are traditionally embedded in the local or wider Muslim communities, to retain their autonomy is directly related to the degree to which they serve community needs. When the changing needs of the Muslim community are pitted against traditional madrasa education, the latter appears to lose much of its relevance. Many madrasas have a long history of adapting their curriculum to changing social needs, and many have introduced secular and vocational subjects. However, if they are unwilling or unable to adapt, the community's willingness to provide financial support may decline. Thus, some of the jamias and madrasa visited in West Bengal and UP had assured and adequate incomes from the Muslim community and had been able to retain control over the extent of 'modernization' they had adopted. Such madrasas have been cautious about engaging with state reform agendas, while the madrasas that are dependent on state funds have had to modify their curriculum to a greater extent in response to conditions set by the government.

At the same time, state-madrasa relationships are clearly not apolitical. The political influences on the nature of their relationships with the central and with State governments vary over time and between States, depending on the nature of the governments in power, especially at sub-national level. The cases of Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal present two different patterns: in the first, tensions between the state and madrasas are related to the perceived non-fulfilment of electoral promises of support as well as poor administration, and in the second, the issues of safeguarding ideological territory and operational independence are the cause of tensions. The Rabate-e-Madarise in West Bengal, for example, appears to have been established with the dual purpose of preserving the independent identity of its members and also providing a collective platform from which madrasas can defend themselves against accusations of terrorism.

Although the Rabate-e-Madarise was providing a political platform for its leader at the time of the research, the study also indicates that the madrasas per se have neither played decisive political roles nor negotiated for a better position as institutions of learning - religious or otherwise. The reason is that the madrasas are a house divided. The nature and process of 'modernization' and mainstreaming of their curriculum is the single major issue on which they engage with the state and some choose not to do so. This bone of contention, not only between the state and religious educationists, but also within the Muslim community itself, has prevented the madrasas from building a united platform for networking or collective bargaining. All the madrasas and jamias insist on a bottom line of retaining religious education. While those that can self-fund their educational activities prefer to do so, they tolerate others' search for government funding. This may appear to be a coherent strategy, but this way of working is one of convenience, rather than informed and strategic. It has not evolved through a collective process and has no sustainable structural base or commonly agreed and focused agenda. Given the experience in UP and West Bengal, it is thus possible to foresee that more and more of the less well-endowed madrasas will be co-opted into the state-supported system.

Thus, state-madrassa relationships in India, where Muslims are a minority community, are at present very tentative. They are influenced by three main inter-related factors: the state's constitutional obligations to minorities, the quest for political power of parties with different ideologies and bases of electoral support, and finally, the madrasas themselves, with their need to survive as institutions while retaining elements of Islamic education. The state needs to be clear about why it is supporting madrasas: is it doing so because it has an obligation to protect the interests of a minority religious institution of learning or is it a way of achieving its policy objective of ensuring basic education for all, irrespective of their social and economic category? These call for different approaches and strategies.

During the course of the research, several issues that need to be explored to develop a more comprehensive understanding of state-madrassa relationships in India have emerged.

First, there seems to be little information available on the motives and socio-economic characteristics of parents who send their children to madrasas. Do they do so because they value a religious education, they cannot afford other types of school, they live in an area where government schools are scarce or poor quality, or they believe that the social and religious networks associated with madrasas

may constitute a form of 'cultural capital' which provides them with an identity, access to certain livelihood opportunities and a coping mechanism in times of crisis?

This links to a second issue, which relates to the livelihood opportunities open to and choices made by graduates from madrasas that teach primarily traditional religious subjects and those that have a curriculum which attempts to balance religious and mainstream academic and vocational subjects. While much was said by respondents about the positive livelihood effects of reforms, including the adoption of a modern curriculum, little evidence is available.

The third issue for further enquiry is an extension of the analysis in the present study, which has dealt with the policies and administrative mechanisms on which state-madrassa relationships are built, but has only touched upon how policies get translated into programmes and the outcomes of impacts of those aspects of policies and programmes that are implemented. First, further analysis is needed of whether policies are fully reflected in particular programmes. Second, programme implementation is affected by many factors, which may facilitate or obstruct it, influencing outcomes and the overall impact. In other words, a full evaluation needs to look at the outcomes and impacts of madrasa modernization policies for both madrasas and their associations, and students and their families and wider communities.

Finally, this study has focused on only two States within India. They have distinctive histories and socio-political contexts, which have influenced their policies towards madrasa education and their implementation of central government programmes. The size of the Muslim minority at State and local levels appears to be relevant to understanding state-madrassa relationships and the shape and outcomes of reform programmes, but has not been systematically examined in this study. It would be desirable to extend the research to other States, especially those that have apparently intervened successfully in madrasa modernization or have increased the educational levels of Muslims without actively engaging with madrasas. In addition, it would be interesting to compare areas with and without a significant Muslim population, and urban and rural areas.

Notes

- ¹ Madrasas, which provide full-time schooling, following a curriculum primarily focused on religious education or one more balanced between religious and secular subjects, can be distinguished from *maktabs*, neighbourhood schools, generally attached to a mosque, which provide religious education to children attending mainstream schools.
- ² A few years later in 1792, an English resident obtained permission from the East India Company to establish a Sanskrit College in Banaras to study Hindu law, literature and culture.
- ³ The belief that Hindus and Muslims are two nations, which underpinned the partition of India.
- ⁴ Occasional support from the State or local administration was reported, mostly short term or once off.
- ⁵ This fragmentation had actually started with the coming into existence of Darul Uloom Deoband, Nadwat-ul-Ulema, etc and was consolidated and expanded during the period after Independence.
- ⁶ Indeed, the Sachar Committee expressed the view that “Muslim parents are not averse to modern or mainstream education and to sending their children to the affordable Government schools. They do not necessarily prefer to send children to Madarsas. Regular school education that is available to any other child in India is preferred by Muslims also” (2006, p. 85).
- ⁷ A recent fatwa issued by Deoband forbidding co-education for Muslim girls has become controversial, with many religious leaders opposing such edicts as contributing to poor literacy levels amongst Muslims.
- ⁸ Jami'at us-Salihah, Rampur, Siraj ul-Uloom Girls' Madrasa, Aligarh
- ⁹ Jami'at us-Salihah in Malegaon, Maharashtra and Jami'at ul-Banat, located in the slums of Delhi.
- ¹⁰ Siraj ul-Uloom (Aligarh)
- ¹¹ According to the Sachar Committee's Report 1.1 million boys and just under 1 million girls attended madrasas in 2002 (2006, p. 293), with over 70 per cent of these being at the primary level. A similar proportion of Muslim children (around 4 per cent) attend maktabs, with the overall total likely to be about 6.3 per cent (2006, p. 78).
- ¹² Rs. £1= Rs. 80 (approximately)
- ¹³ *The Hindu*, May 19, 2002
- ¹⁴ The Constitutional provision is, however, not without flaw, for it is not very specific in its definition of 'minorities', giving only two broad indicators for determination of minority status: religion and language. Nor is there any legislation that specifies the religious or linguistic minorities or lays down any procedures for identifying them. Nevertheless, it does lay the foundation for communities like Muslims to run institutions like madrasas.
- ¹⁵ A separate empirical study of the state support actually received by religious institutions would throw light on the practical outcomes and status of Article 350, 44th Constitutional Amendment, and similar Constitutional provisions, enabling an assessment of Muslims' often voiced perception that they are discriminated against in the implementation of the Article.
- ¹⁶ www.centralwaqfcouncil.org
- ¹⁷ Jamia Millia Islamia, the reputed national Islamic university located in New Delhi, offered to facilitate implementation of the reform process through teacher training. The central government initially declined the offer, saying that training could not be provided only for madrasa teachers, ignoring other minority institutions. However, it subsequently agreed when the University suggested that the training be treated as training in the Urdu medium.
- ¹⁸ During the course of this study, some scholars and religious leaders expressed their belief that distrust between madrasas and the state came into existence primarily after the wars in Afghanistan and Iran in the 1990s and had intensified after 9/11.

- ¹⁹ This statement about 'divulging data' does not hold true now, in the light of the fact that the Sachar Committee was constituted and appointed by the present Congress-led UPA government (with the Left Front CPI(M) as a critical ally). The Report of the Committee clearly indicates the poor conditions of Muslims in the country and the extent of their neglect by the state.
- ²⁰ A number of madrasas have independently initiated a process of modernization, in some cases prior to the initiation of the state-led programme of modernization. The nature and outcomes of these madrasa-driven initiatives may be different from those of the state-supported madrasa reform programme and are, therefore, worthy of separate research.
- ²¹ The Khutbah (Friday sermon) is delivered in Arabic and often neither the Khatib (preacher) nor the disciples are said to understand it.
- ²² Conclusions based on discussions with educationists from Jamia Millia, Hamdard University, AMU
- ²³ The Religions Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1988 allows the central government to deal with the issue of vigilance, provided that a religious institution runs the madrasa concerned. The responsibilities for registration and regulation of the madrasas are, however, vested in State governments.
- ²⁴ The lowest group in the hierarchy of the caste system in the country, including *dalits* within the Muslim community.
- ²⁵ As the focus of the study was specifically on the process of madrasa reform and madrasa-state relationships, no attempt was made to carry out comprehensive studies of the madrasas visited. Thus no attempt was made to assess their claims about the content or quality of education offered or the socio-economic profile or expectations of students' parents, and nor was any attempt made to conduct tracer studies that might indicate the subsequent career paths of graduates. These would all be valid subjects for further research.
- ²⁶ Based on discussions with Maulana Farengi Mahal and other madrasa heads in the districts of Sitapur and Barabanki
- ²⁷ In some instances parents may also send their children to a madrasa because its infrastructure is considered to be of better quality than that of government schools (for example, as reported by the manager of the madrasa in Sitapur), but this is clearly not true of all madrasas.
- ²⁸ These moves earned Chief Minister Mulayam Singh the title of 'Mulha Mulayam'.
- ²⁹ According to MW&WD 50,000 students took the various exams of the UPAFB in 2006.
- ³⁰ Training in three trades similar to that offered in the regular Industrial Training Institutes is provided. Support includes a token grant of Rs. 0.2 million, and salaries of three teachers and two office staff.
- ³¹ Most private schools and NGOs are registered under the same Act and have to produce audited financial reports for the three years prior to an application in order to be eligible for any government grants.
- ³² Most NGOs across the country are registered under the same Act.
- ³³ Similar conditions also apply to any private school seeking aid from the state.
- ³⁴ The research did not probe into the religious identity of government officials and whether this made any difference to their willingness to implement madrasa support programmes.
- ³⁵ In 1994, when UP was under the federal President's rule, the Governor of the State declared that 135 Madrasas would be granted financial assistance. However, only 68 were given grants at that time, while the remaining 67 applications were approved 10 years later when the Mulayam Singh government was in power. A few madrasas that were not included in the list of 67, and claimed priority on the basis of seniority and other criteria, filed a case in the High Court against their exclusion.
- ³⁶ Members of the Indian Administrative Service, who are posted to senior posts in the federal and State governments.

- ³⁷ Based on discussions with various government officials, educationists and religious leaders in West Bengal
- ³⁸ The MPs' Local Area Development Fund consists of untied funds sanctioned to each member of parliament for the development of their own constituency.
- ³⁹ Interview with Secretary, Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, West Bengal
- ⁴⁰ Three separate boards/councils exist for primary, secondary, higher secondary levels of regular government schools, in addition to an exclusive board for the madrasas and one for the open school system.
- ⁴¹ Annual salaries range from Rs.24,000 to Rs.44,000

References

- Ahmed, Manzoor (1990) *Islamic Education*, New Delhi: Genuine Publications.
- Alam, Arshad (2007) Beyond rhetoric: understanding contemporary madrasas. In Tahir, Mahmood (Ed) *Politics of Minority Educational Institutions: Law and Reality in the Sub-continent*, New Delhi: ImprintOne.
- A.R. Kidwai Committee (2002) *Report of the Madrasah Education Committee, West Bengal*, Calcutta: Government of West Bengal.
- Asad, Talal (1993) *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, Baltimore Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Arshad, Mohamed, (2005) Tradition of madrasa education. In Wasey, A. (Ed) *Madrasas in India - Trying to be Relevant*, New Delhi: Global Media Publications.
- Bandhopadya, D. (2002) Madrasa education and the condition of Indian Muslims, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(16), April 20-26 (<http://www.epw.org.in>)
- Darul Uloom Deoband, India, www.nadwatululama.org
- Hamdard Education Society (2003) *Evaluation Report on Modernization of the Madrasah Education Scheme (UP)*, New Delhi, Hamdard Education Society.
- Hasan, Mushirul (2003) The madrassas in India, *The Hindu*, May 21.
- Khan, A.U., Saqib, Mohammad and Anjum, Zafar H. (2003) To Kill the Mockingbird: Madarsah System in India: Past, Present and Future. In Babu, S. and Debroy, B. (Eds) *The India Mosaic* (<http://www.idfresearch.org/ipnservices/pdfs/madarsas.pdf>)
- Mahmood, Tahir (2007) Educational rights and institutions of minorities: international norms and national landscapes. In Mahmood, Tahir (Ed) *Politics of Minority Educational Institutions: Law and Reality in the Sub-continent*, New Delhi: ImprintOne.
- Ministry of Human Resource Development (2006) *Annual Report 2004-2005*, New Delhi: Government of India www.education.nic.in
- Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (2004) *Annual Report 2003-2004*, New Delhi: Government of India <http://www.socialjustice.nic.in>
- MW&WD (Minorities Welfare and Waqf Department)(2007) *Annual Income-Expenditure Report and Performance Budget 2006-7*, Government of Uttar Pradesh.
- Nadwi, A.B. Hasan Ali (1980) *Muslims in India*, Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications.
- Naheed, Uzma (2007) Traditional madrasas: Deoband and its inspirations. In Tahir, Mahmood (Ed) *Politics of Minority Educational Institutions: Law and Reality in the Sub-continent*, New Delhi: ImprintOne.
- National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language, www.urducouncil.nic.in
- Rahman, S. Ubaidur (2005) Tradition of madrasa education. In Wasey, A. (Ed) *Madrasas in India - Trying to be Relevant*, New Delhi: Global Media Publications.
- Sachar Committee (2006) *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India*, New Delhi: Government of India, Cabinet Secretariat, Report of the Prime Minister's High Level Committee.
- Shahabuddin, Syed (2001) Throttling the madrasahs in the name of security, *Milli Gazette* <http://www.Milligazette.com/archives>
- Siddiqui, M.K.A (1997) *Institutions and Associations of the Muslims in Calcutta*, New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies.
- Sikand, Yoginder (2002) Reforming the Indian madrassas: contemporary Muslim voices. In Limaye, S.P., Virsing, A.G. and Malik, M. (Eds) *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia*, Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, p. 117-43.
<http://www.apcss.org/Publications/Edited%20Volumes/ReligiousRadicalismPagesfromReligiousRadicalismandSecurityinSouthAsiach6.pdf>

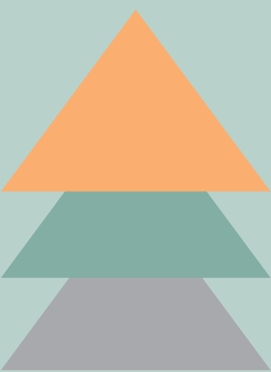
Sikand, Yoginder (2007) Reformed madrasas: new forums of Muslim education. In Tahir, Mahmood (Ed) *Politics of Minority Educational Institutions: Law and Reality in the Sub-continent*, New Delhi: ImprintOne.

Sultanat, Aisha (2003) *Madrassas in India*, New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Issue Brief No. 14. http://www.ipcs.org/pdf_file/issue/1850403881IB14-AishaSultanat-MadrassasInIndia.pdf

Religions and Development Working Papers

- 1 Shah, R., Larbi, G. and Batley, R. *Religion and Public Management Literature Review* 2007
- 2 Nkurunziza, E. *An Overview of Development Studies: Background Paper for the Religions and Development Research Programme* 2007
- 3 Jackson, P. and Fleischer, C. *Religion and Economics: A Literature Review* 2007
- 4 Tomalin, E. *Sociology, Religion and Development: Literature Review* 2007
- 5 Bradley, T. *The Relationships Between Religion and Development: Views from Anthropology* 2007
- 6 Tomalin, E. *Religious Studies and Development: A Literature Review* 2007
- 7 Alhassan Alolo, N. , Singh, G. and Marquette, H. *Political Science, Religion and Development: A Literature Review* 2007
- 8 Tomalin, E. *Gender Studies Approaches to the Relationships between Religion and Development* 2007
- 9 Rakodi, C. *Understanding the Roles of Religions in Development: The Approach of the RaD Programme* 2007
- 10 Religions and Development Research Programme, University of Birmingham. (Editors) *India: Some Reviews of Literature Related to Religions and Development* 2008
- 11 Mhina, A. (Editor) *Religions and Development in Tanzania: A Preliminary Literature Review* 2007
- 12 Bano, M. with Nair, P. *Faith-based Organisations in South Asia: Historical Evolution, Current Status and Nature of Interaction with the State* 2007
- 13 Bano, M. *Allowing for Diversity: State-Madrasa Relations in Bangladesh* 2008
- 14 Bano, M. *Contesting Ideologies and Struggle for Authority: State-Madrasa Engagement in Pakistan* 2008
- 15 Nair, P. *The State and Madrasas in India* 2009
- 16 Kim, K. *Concepts of Development in the Christian Traditions: A Religions and Development Background Paper* 2007
- 17 Alhassan Alolo, A. *African Traditional Religions and Concepts of Development: A Background Paper* 2007
- 18 Tomalin, E. *Buddhism and Development: A Background Paper* 2007
- 19 Tomalin, E. *Hinduism and International Development: Religions and Development Background Paper* 2009
- 20 Kroessin, M. R. *Concepts of Development in 'Islam': A Review of Contemporary Literature and Practice* 2008
- 21 Tatla, D. S. *Sikhism and Development: A Review* 2008
- 22 Zaman, A. *Islamic Economics: A Survey of the Literature* 2008
- 23 Kirmani, N. *The Relationships between Social Movements and Religion in Processes of Social Change: A Preliminary Literature Review* 2008
- 24 Iqbal, M. A. and Siddiqui, S. *Mapping the Terrain: The Activities of Faith-based Organisations in Development in Pakistan* 2008
- 25 Martin, F. *Psychology, Religion and Development: A Literature Review* 2008
- 26 Mahajan, G. and Jodhka, S. S. *Religions, Democracy and Governance: Spaces for the Marginalized in Contemporary India* 2009
- 27 Waseem, M. and Mufti, M. *Religion, Politics and Governance in Pakistan* 2009
- 28 Jodhka, S. S. and Bora, P. *Mapping Faith-based Development Activities in Contemporary Maharashtra, India* 2009
- 29 Bano, M. *Engaged yet Disengaged: Islamic Schools and the State in Kano, Nigeria* 2009

- 30 Kroessin, M. R. *Mapping UK Muslim Development NGOs* 2009
- 31 Roberts, F.O. N., Odumosu, O. and Nabofa, M. *Religions and Development in Nigeria: A Preliminary Literature Review* 2009
- 32 White, S. C. *Beyond the Paradox: Religion, Family and Modernity in Contemporary Bangladesh* 2009
- 33 Dugbazah, J. *The Relationships between Values, Religious Teaching and Development Concepts and Practices: A Preliminary Literature Review* 2009
- 34 Bano, M. *Marker of Identity: Religious Political Parties and Welfare Work - The Case of Jama'at-i-Islami in Pakistan and Bangladesh* 2009
- 35 Kirmani, N. *Beyond the Religious Impasse: Mobilizing the Muslim Women's Rights in India* 2009
- 36 White, S. C. *Domains of Contestation: Women's Empowerment and Islam in Bangladesh* 2009
- 37 Nair, P. *Religious Political Parties and their Welfare Work: Relations between the RSS, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Vidya Bharati Schools in India* 2009
- 38 Odumosu, O., Olaniyi, R. and Alonge, S. *Mapping the Activities of Faith-based Organizations in Development in Nigeria* 2009
- 39 Nolte, I. with Danjibo, N. and Oladeji, A. *Religion, Politics and Governance in Nigeria* 2009
- 40 Devine, J. and White, S. *Religion, Politics and the Everyday Moral Order in Bangladesh* 2009
- 41 Marquette, H. *Whither Morality? 'Finding God' in the Fight against Corruption* 2010
- 42 Marquette, H. *Corruption, Religion and Moral Development* 2010
- 43 Jackson, P. *Politics, Religion and the Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda* 2010
- 44 Gupta, D. *Elusive Peace: Seeking a 'New Normal' in Post-conflict Ahmedabad and Mumbai* 2010



ORDERING PUBLICATIONS

Publications can be obtained by either telephoning Carol Fowler on **44 (0) 121 414 4986** or Email: c.a.fowler@bham.ac.uk and also downloaded as a PDF file from www.rad.bham.ac.uk