STATE, COMMUNITY AND IDEOLOGY: LOCATING CONTEMPORARY MADRASAS

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the Dissertation entitled **State, Community and Ideology: Locating Contemporary Madrasas** submitted by me, **Arshad Alam, Zakir Hussain Centre for Educational Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi**, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** is my original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full for any other degree or diploma in any other university.

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This may be placed before the examiners for the evaluation for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**.

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Introduction

Introducing Madrasas

Madrasas are centres of learning that evolved in the Arab society during the middle ages. Over the centuries the Muslim expansion carried it to other geographical locations. The madrasas were the only centres of higher learning in all those societies that were ruled by the Muslims. It was different from the *maktabs*[1], which were basically Quranic schools for the acquisition of functional literacy. As used in this study, the madrasa system would encapsulate the maktabs within its domain.

In India the Turks introduced the system during the period of the Delhi Sultanate in the twelfth century. Since then though there have been various ups and downs, but the madrasa system has had an almost unbroken line of continuity. The medieval period saw it catering to the needs of both Hindus and Muslims; though the lower castes and classes from both these communities were generally excluded from these institutions (Ahmad, 1988). As the Empire expanded, the need for managing the state's paraphernalia increased and Persian became the language whose acquisition was necessary for social mobility. The madrasas catered to these societal requirements of the time. The madrasas provided for both secular as well as religious learning.

[1] Maktabs can be considered as primary schools which teach only the basics of religion. They are finishing schools after which one enrols in a madrasa.

As Nizami (1996), has shown the orientation of a particular madrasas depended upon the emphasis that it placed on the curriculum. Some institutions emphasised the study of the Quran, *Hadith*, *Fiqh*, etc. and were therefore popular as centres of religious excellence. Others emphasised secular sciences such as those of geometry and architecture. The madrasas, therefore, provided both kinds of knowledge-religious and secular- the only difference being in terms of emphasis. This in effect meant that a student learnt both the subjects but was able to master one of them depending upon his proclivities.

During the period from twelfth to eighteenth century, there were madrasas that were financed by the state and there were those instituted by individuals. The Sufis had their own network of madrasas within the *khanqahs*[2]. The state did not have the monopoly of controlling the educational structure. Tibawi (1973), informs us that even in the Arab countries, the state did not plan for primary education. This function was mostly performed by the *ulema* within the sphere of civil society. Extending this statement we can see that in India also, the need for primary education was never felt so strongly so as to elicit planning by the state. Even in the realm of higher education, the state-funded madrasa operated alongside various other madrasas that were established either by rich nobles or leading *ulema*. Thus it would be erroneous to assume that madrasas operated solely within the realm of civil society or was just the ideological tool of the state. It is in this context that Makdisi's (1981) suggestion that

[2] Khanqhas were Sufi hospices. Usually it was a large compound where the master and his family as well as the devotees would live. Often a madrasa, a public kitchen and other facilities were attached. These qhanqhas were often in opposition to the sate-supported madrasas.

madrasas should be understood as trusts becomes extremely valuable. This means that they are privately founded but at the same time put at the disposal of the public. They are therefore both private as well as public. They are held in trust for the community but at the same time they are under the direct supervision of an individual. Makdisi's perspective makes it clear that the madrasa system would have a plethora of ideological variations. The ideological differences would depend upon the personal ideology of the founder. This also means that the state-funded madrasas would have different ideological orientation from those started by the individuals. Thus, the madrasa system would singularly fail to have a uniform curriculum.

Theoretical Framework

State, Education and Hegemony

Marxism understands the state as being organised for the furtherance of the interest of the ruling class. For Marx the state was nothing but a committee for managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie. The state exercises a monopoly of power in the interest of the dominant groups in society. However, later Marxist scholars argue that the state does not rule by force alone. They argue that to understand clearly the way in which the state functions, one has to look at how it manufactures consent. In other words, we have to understand how the state extends its hegemony over the civil society. The term hegemony means that the discourse of the state becomes the common sense of the masses. Hegemony would mean that the statist discourse is accepted as natural and legitimate. Neo-Marxists such as Althusser and Gramsci has

written on the hegemonic activity of the state. For Althusser as well as for Gramsci, education becomes the central mechanism through which the state carries on its ideological functions for the extension of the ruling class hegemony. Althusser (1978), terms the school, family, church, etc. as the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) which carry out the functions of the state. He regards the school-family couple as the most important ISA in the capitalist societies for the dissemination of statist hegemony. Gramsci also emphasises the way in which the state achieves moral, intellectual and political hegemony. In Gramsci's schema too education becomes an important tool for the extension of the hegemony of the state. The school becomes the positive educative channel, which forms part of the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes. The state does have and request consent, but it also educates this consent at the same time (Gramsci, 1983). Another Marxist scholar, Michael Apple has argued that education reproduces the existing power relation in society. Far from the statist rhetoric of equality through schools, Apple (1985), argues that class inequality gets reinforced and is actively maintained within the school system.

The educational apparatus, therefore, becomes the most important means for the transmission of the ideology of the state. The important question that arises is whether such hegemonic activity of the state is accepted unchallenged within the sphere of civil society. For Althusser, the state seeps in everywhere including the domain of the family. Indeed his conception of ISAs is nothing but states in microcosm. He discounts the possibility of creating parallel processes of hegemony

within the civil society as opposed to the statist hegemony. Such 'reification' (using Lucak's term) as occurs in Althusser is not accepted by Gramsci and Apple. Gramsci sees the possibility of hegemony creation within the sphere of civil society that would be carried out by the organic intellectuals. Gramsci argues that the state educates consent by means of political and syndical associations. However, much of these associations are left to the private initiatives of the ruling classes. The new intellectuals can occupy these sites within the civil society that can then act as sites of subversion that could erode the hegemony of the ruling class. Similarly, Apple (1985), argues that it is possible to subvert school institutions. He argues that the inherent contradiction of the class society creates a lot of open spaces within which those desirous to change the system can work. The school can act as an effective site for puncturing the ruling class hegemony.

The above viewpoints clearly indicate that state and civil society do not exist as rigidly compartmentalised entities. Their relationship is often characterised by mutual tensions and contestations. In the process both impinge upon each other which results in their mutual modification. Neera Chandoke (1995), following the lead of Gramsci has argued that new social movements can be understood as a challenge thrown up by the civil society to resist the hegemony of the state. She argues that environmentalism, feminism, etc. are movements which seek to develop alternative bases of hegemony within civil society. In the same work she also states that in a multi-religious society like India, such contestations from within the civil society, do take communitarian overtones. By extension, it can be argued that, communitarian

movements such as those of Arya Samaj, Deoband etc. can be seen as attempts to offset the statist intrusions into the social space called community. This does not imply that community is a 'given'; rather it is also the result of various processes within society. We shall now turn to the formation of the community and its relationship with the state in the specific case of India.

Community and State

Neera Chandoke (1995), highlights the fact that the boundaries of state and civil society are never fixed but are constantly changing. One of the ways in which the state expands its reach is to redraw the public/private boundaries and reconstitute the definition of the private. This the state does by either recognising the citizen (individual) or the community (collectivity) as the locus of its influence. In the Indian context, the communities have been favoured more than the individual. Sandria Freitag (1989), has noted that the very nature of the imperial 'intruding state' of British India offered no possibility of a direct relationship between the individual and the state. The imperial state emphasised a representational mode of government based sociologically on communities and interests with particular individuals representing those interests. Focussing on the state level rituals, Freitag notes that in the imperial setting such rituals operated in a very different way from the collective activities that were developed in the 18th century western Europe. While in Western Europe national rituals stressed the common values, traditions and a history that defined participants as alike in their relationship to the state, imperial rituals emphasised the diversity of

the British Empire, which was seen as one of its needs that would strengthen it. Freitag also makes a connection between local community activities, the British Indian State and the process of identity formation that fed into a wider political process in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. She points out that the religious and cultural activity carried out by Indians in the public sphere became an alternative world to that structured by the imperial regimes providing legitimacy and recognition to a range of actors and values denied place in the imperial order. Freitag argues that in this alternative world, people made conscious choices about self-definition that enabled them to create a newfound sense of community. Thus, what people said and did in the public arena (Freitag's term following Habermas' public sphere), in the colonial state was intrinsic to the process of community formation.

It was in this public sphere that the Muslims were imagined as a community. And this imagination had a lot to do with the coming of the print technology. Historians have frequently noted the importance of print technology in furthering community formation in the late 19th century. In 'Imagined Communities', Benedict Anderson (1991), argues that print capitalism contributed to the growth of nationalism in colonised countries. More recently, Francis Robinson (1993), has argued that printed works on religion were one of the important means for the formation of Muslim identity in South Asia. Usha Sanyal (1999), in her study of Barelwis has also arrived at similar conclusions. Sanyal regards print as one of the institutional structures furthering the ongoing process of community formation. The other important institutional structures were the madrasas. The madrasas were the

institutionalised bases for the writing of books as well as their popularisation. The way in which it was related to the state and the community forms the crux of the present study.

Locating Madrasas

The proposed study locates the madrsasa within the matrix of state, community and ideology. We have already discussed the ideological functions of the state, which gets effected through the schools. We have also seen how this hegemony is accepted or resisted in civil society. Institutions such as the madrasas too have an ideological role to play. According to Gramsci (1983), ideology produces a unity of faith between a -particular conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct. Althusser (1971), also sees ideology as having a quasi-material existence, which defines what people think and is embodied in society in what he calls Ideological State Apparatuses such as the church, family and school. Ideology is not merely an illusory representation of identity; it is the means through which people live their relation to reality. It is a characteristic feature of ideology that it persuades people of their freedom and autonomy. Thus, all ideologies function to constitute concrete individuals as subjects. The word subject here is taken both in the sense of an independent person and also in the other sphere of a subjective being, who submits to a higher authority, and is stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission. The function of ideology is to impart an identity to the subjects.

The above discussion clearly relates to the fact that madrasas perform ideological functions in civil society by giving an identity to the Muslim community. Contrary to the popular notion that madrasas impart a monolithic community identity to the Muslims, this study argues that they are concerned with imparting denominational identities within the overall Muslim identity. They are more concerned with the perpetuation of denominational identities such as those of Deobandis, Barelwis, etc. On the other hand, it is also true that madrasas have been generally critical of the syncretic Islam that developed in India. By carving an autonomous sphere for themselves and shielding the community space form state intrusions the madrasas can be seen as actively fostering what has been generally termed as Islamization by social scientists. Islamization can be seen as a movement to make Islam a relevant source of power and social control. Geertz viewed the movement as an effort to make Islam "a universal, in theory standardized and essentially unchangeable and usually well integrated system of rituals and beliefs.... Not merely as religion but a complete and comprehensive way of life" (1971: 14). Madrasa education in this context plays a pivotal role in reproducing Islamic culture and promoting the ideological goals of Islamization.

Location of the study

There have been various books written on the subject of religious education among the Muslims. Most of these books have been written from a religious point of view and hence lack in sociological analysis. Manzur Ahmad (1995), laments the fact

that despite a high premium placed on learning in Quran, the Muslims generally lag behind in education. Ahmad argues that Islamic learning is not opposed to scientific education. He places the blame for the current deterioration of Muslims to their lack of education. He sees the current state of madrasas as fostering backwardness and makes an impassioned plea for the introduction of secular knowledge and reforming the pedagogical practises within the madrasas. Marshalling evidences from *Hadith,* he argues that Islamic conception of man means all-round development of personality. Such a personality, according to him, can only be fostered through the inculcation of Islamic spirit. The objective of Islamic education should be the development of that spirit of Islam.

Sharif Khan's (1990) work is also one of lamentation. The work starts with extracts from the works of Ghazali and Khaldun to prove high standards of learning during the classical period of Islam. It goes on to say that during medieval India, high standards of education were maintained in the madrasas. The decline started with the coming of the Britishers who changed the language of the court from Persian to English. Khan showers praises on the *ulema* that even in such adverse circumstances, they held on to the faith by opening various madrasas. Khan notes that there has been a decline in the standards within the madrasas and argues for the introduction of secular instruction and even English. The Muslims can bring back their lost glory through education.

Works such as these have various shortcomings when viewed sociologically. They are all biased in favour of a religious ideology. Thus their works lack in

objective analysis of the institution of madrasa. They assume that Muslims have always been a monolithic homogenous block, which has been cemented by the *ulema*. Such a view is erroneous, as even today the Muslims do not constitute a single community. These works also fail to problematize the notion of *ilm*[3] as to whether it means secular or religious knowledge. Moreover they also fail to see the effect of their impassioned plea for the introduction of secular education in the madrasas. Whether such integration is possible or not never occurs to them as worthy of analysis. Lacking in any theoretical framework these works cater to those audiences who have a vested interest in representing the Muslims as one undifferentiated block.

The work of Faruqui (1963), is a serious engagement over the question of the political role of madrasas. Focussing solely on Deoband, Faruqui analyses the reasons for which the Deoband ulema opposed the idea of partition. He argues that it was a fallout of their contestation with the Aligarh School over the leadership of the masses. The *ulema* feared that in the newly created state of Pakistan, their status as the sole guardians of Muslims would be challenged by the western educated Muslims who would obviously man the state apparatuses. They would be better off in India provided they shielded the community space from state intrusions. Though the book lacks any theoretical framework and is largely a historical text yet it is useful in understanding the interplay of religious and secular elite within the Muslim

[3] *Ilm* literally means knowledge in Arabic. But there is still a debate as to whether this term means only religious knowledge or any kind of knowledge. The madrasas, in general, have the view that *ilm* refers just to religious knowledge.

community. It also does not describe the role of madrasas in community formation. It focuses solely on the activities of the *ulema*.

The work of Metcalf (1982), talks of Islamic revival during the colonial period. She argues that the popular impression that the colonial period was one of all-round decay is not correct. Her study of Deoband indicates that various 'movements of renewal', such as the *Deobandis*, *Ahl-i-Hadith* and *Barelwis* could not have been possible without the colonial presence. Her insights about the modernist influences as reflected in the pedagogical practises of Deoband are refreshing. She also argues that Deobandi *ulema* were in contestation with other denominations such as the *Barelwis*. However, as to how this contestation played an important role in the formation of Muslim identity is not addressed by her. The book lacks a theoretical perspective but throws up rich insights regarding the social basis of the Deobandi *ulema* and the ideas around which the institution was built.

A richer theoretical work is that of Usha Sanyal (1999). She focuses her attention on the *Barelwis*[4]. She argues that the position of the *Barelwis* can only be understood in their contestation with the *Ahl-i-Hadith*[5] with whom they competed for hegemonic influence over the masses. She takes into account the impact of print technology and argues that the Muslim community was imagined within the discursive space provided by colonial print technology. However her work mostly

[4] Barelwis are a denomination founded by Sayyid Riza Ahmad Khan in the second half of the nineteenth century. It treats the Prophet as having mystical qualities as opposed to Deoband which treats him just as a model man.

[5] The Ahl-i-hadith is a denomination, which considers *hadiths* as the only guide. It rejects the derivations of the ulema and argues for a direct reading of the various *hadiths*.

revolves round the movemental aspect of *Barelwis* rather than its institutionalisation through a network of madrasas.

All the books mentioned above are located within the colonial context. Very little has been written on the post-1947 situation. However, there are two comprehensive surveys of madrasas, which map the development upto 1980s. The first survey is that of purely religious seminaries conducted by Hamdard Education Society. The second survey is that of Kuldip Kaur (1982), which maps the changes in both the state-funded madrasas and those founded by the community. They present a vast array of facts that are very helpful to understand the post-colonial situation. Being surveys, they lack in analytical depth and theoretical understanding of the problem.

The proposed study would draw from various sources but it would largely tread in the directions outlined by Metcalf and Sanyal. Both of them have brought out the internal plurality of the Muslim society. We know that the Muslim society is characterized by caste and class; like any other community within India. We also know that culturally the Muslims have plural orientations in terms of language, dress codes, rituals etc. Yet, the Muslims are portrayed as a monolithic religious block. The present study would be an attempt to break this myth. Its tool would be madrasas, an institution which apparently is seen to impart a monolithic community identity.

Objectives of the Proposed Study

- To understand the location of the madrasa within the matrix of state, community and ideology.
- To understand the role of madrasas in the formation of Muslim community identity.
- To understand its present day relationship with the Indian State and account for its role in a multi-religious society like India.
- To understand the way in which an institution of civil society circumvents the hegemony of the state and engages in the creation of its own hegemonic influence.

Methodology

The proposed study is largely theoretical. It will draw from various theoretical traditions in trying to locate the madrasas within the matrix of state, community and ideology. The theoretical work would be supplemented with interviews of madrasa students from a Delhi madrasa. Earlier it was conceptualized that a proper field study would be done. This was not possible due to the adverse circumstances faced during trips to various madrasas. Most of them were reluctant to enter into any kind of negotiation over the question of field study. Under these circumstances, it was decided that only interviews of few students would be conducted. This was to serve as supplements to the arguments advanced in the text.

Chapterization

Chapter 1: Islamic Education: Some Theoretical Considerations

This chapter would probe the theoretical foundations of Islamic education. It problematizes the notion of *ilm* in Islam. There has been much ambiguity as to whether *ilm* means purely religious knowledge or all kinds of knowledge. It is argued that this ambiguity has mostly been resolved in favour of the *ulema* who have interpreted *ilm* as meaning only religious knowledge. This ambiguity had come about because the Sufis and the Philosophers had their own notion of knowledge. It is argued, therefore, that right from its inception, Islam has been characterized by doctrinal divisions. The madrasas, as the transmitters of these ideological divisions would also assume a partisan character. It would be more concerned with propagating the true faith of a particular denomination; rather than representing the Muslim community as a whole. This chapter becomes important to understand the ways in which the theoretical structure within Islamic philosophy actually translates into a socio-historical context; in our case India.

Chapter 2: Colonialism and 'New Madrasas"

This chapter is important to conceptualize the way in which colonial madrasas were different from the medieval ones. Taking Deoband madrasa as example, it is argued that colonial madrasas were expressly created for the purpose of reaching out to the ordinary, lay Muslims. This concern for the Muslim 'public' was something that had not existed before. It is argued here that this was an attempt by the *ulema* to maintain their hegemony within civil society, since their patron, the Mughal State and

the Nawabs were no longer there. At the same time, it also started the process of islamization. Central to this islamization discourse was the way in which the Muslim community was imagined. This imagination took place within the public sphere which was itself the creation of colonialism. The colonial categories of the private and public domain were internalized by the *ulema* in their own interest. It is argued here, that the *ulema* could wield their influence only when religion was made an element of the private domain, into which any outside intrusions were resisted. This dichotomy of the public and the private had not existed in the medieval period. The madrasas as custodians of private domain, therefore, purged all rational studies from its curriculum. It was successful in bypassing the hegemonic activity of the modern state through extending its own hegemony over the civil society.

Chapter 3: Imagining a Community

This chapter elaborates the configuration of the spaces between the public and private sphere. It understands the fallout of such a policy in the post- colonial Indian society. Taking the example of Muslim Personal Law, the chapter tries to understand the state-community relationship in India. The chapter argues that state's reluctance to interfere in the private affairs of the Muslim community is based on the assumption that Muslims constitute a religious homogenous block. This only serves to enhance the power and authority of the *ulema* within the Muslim society. The chapter argues that this conceptualisation of Muslim society is a carry over from the colonial times. This conception has accorded little space for the articulations of the class and caste ideologies within the Muslim society. Thus it comes handy for the *ulema* to represent

the Muslims as primarily a religious community as only they can now claim to be its sole spokesman. The Indian state is all too happy to accord this status to the *ulema*. In the process therefore the madrasas as sites of social reproduction of the *ulema* are conferred legitimacy and authority by the secular state. However, this does not mean that Muslims are a reified community.

Chapter 4: A Repetition of Structures

The fourth chapter therefore negates the conception that the Muslims are a homogenous religious block. It brings out the internal tensions within the community. This tension relates to both class and class. It argues that there were challenges to the authority of the *ulema* during the 70s and early 80s. This was due to the emergence of neo-elite comprised solely of lower caste Muslims. Within the sphere of madrasa education this tension has been seen at the level of power struggle in various Muslim Boards, etc. the chapter contrasts these divergent voices from the Muslim community with the statist perception of Muslims being a homogenous religious block. It is due to this perception that the madrasas have been given generous grants and recognition by the successive governments. The chapter maps the statist measure in the field of madrasa education by looking at the concrete measures taken. It also takes into account the perception of the community regarding the measures taken by the state. It sees unison of opinions between the religious elite and the state. By being well entrenched in the private sphere, they shield the community from any state intrusions, yet at the same time ask for state support in their educational endeavour. In this endeavour they are ably supported by upper caste urban elite among the Muslims.

This convergence of interests between these two elite was something absent during the colonial period, where they were in contest with each other. The madrasas become the prime instrument in this coalition of interest between the two elite. However, the chapter also notes that government measures have touched a very small portion of the madrasas. There are those madrasas who have come up with the effort of the community. Most of these madrasa teach only religious education, though few of them are experimenting with the introduction of modern education. However, the chapter questions the very rationale of such a move. It problematizes the notion of the integration of knowledge within Islam. The chapter also contains the observation from the interviews taken in a madrasa at Delhi. These are used to supplement the main body of work.

Chapter 1: Islamic Education: Some Theoretical Considerations

This chapter tries to understand the concept of Islamic education through an analysis of Islamic philosophy. It locates the Islamic educational discourse within the formative years of Islam. It focuses on the Islamic theory of education, which was present in a rudiment form in the Quran and *hadiths*[1]. Since the Quran serves as the most important guiding philosophy, it becomes important to understand as to how the Quran looks at knowledge. The Quran does not recognise any church; it enjoins that every man is equal in the eyes of God. Yet over the years there has arisen a class of *ulema* who have been concerned with the interpretations of God's words. It is being argued here that this has much to do with the premium placed on the acquisition of knowledge in the Quran. However, whether this meant only religious knowledge is still open to debate.

The chapter looks at some prominent Islamic intellectuals and trends within Islam to map the contours of this debate. While Ghazali and Khaldun stressed the need for secular learning, they nevertheless gave more importance to religious knowledge. For them the secular knowledge could only serve as a tool for refining the religious knowledge. Moreover, they argued that until a person is fully saturated with the religious knowledge, he should not be socialised into any other knowledge system. This understanding of knowledge may prevent any fruitful integration of

[1] Hadith means tradion from the Prophet or reporting of his words in a given situation. An individual hadith consists of a text and a chain of transmitters. The most reliable sources of hadith are those of al- Bukhari (d.870) and Muslim (d.875), together known as the ' two correct ones.'

secular and religious knowledge being currently attempted in the madrasas. It also means that religious knowledge would define the way in which community should proceed which would further enhance the authority of the *ulema*.

However, this is not to say that there have been no contestations to this authority in Islam. The last section of this chapter brings out this contestation and challenge. This means that the Islamic society has been characterised by inherent plurality in the realm of ideas right from its very inception. It is noted that the challenge to the authority of the *ulema* and the religious basis of society have ended in failure. The religious basis of the community as defined by the *ulema* stood as the only true representation. This representation itself was characterised by plurality of claims from various denominations within Islam. The inception of madrasas was for the specific ideological purpose of disseminating the opinions of one denomination rather than for the whole Muslim community. Therefore, the madrasas, which seek to fashion a monolithic Muslim community, invariably end up perpetuating only denominational sects within the community. As to how this theoretical structure gets replicated in the Indian society will be taken up in the later chapters.

The Philosophy of Islamic Education

The single fact that determined the concept and governed the evolution of Muslim education is the belief that God's final message to mankind was revealed in its entirety to Muhammad and is enshrined in the Quran. The revelation does not only embrace the dogmas of faith and moral duties of the believers but also guidance on

the political, social and economic organization of the community. This is the basis of the philosophy of Muslim education. Its content is of divine origin; its aim is to direct the conduct of the individual and the community according to God's command; its first teacher was the Prophet; his followers in the task of teaching and preaching were caliphs, traditionalists and theologians. These regarded themselves as the guardians of religious law (*sharia)*[2] and of religious knowledge *(ilm)*.

Tibawi (1954), informs us that Muslim education was launched simultaneously with the preaching of Islam. Its purpose was to spread the precepts of the faith, and to gain God's favour by living according to his commands. Those who undertook the task of teaching the divine message to the believers quickly acquired a great prestige commensurate with their mission. Under the urge of religious fervour, members of the early Muslim community were either teaching or learning, with little or no formality or technique (Khaldun, 1958). In this formative period the basic principles were the pursuit and imparting of learning as a religious duty. As to the principle concerning the nature of knowledge, it must be clearly understood that all that is meant by the term is religious knowledge and learning. If for the purpose of teaching and acquiring this knowledge, other subjects had to be mastered, they were considered merely auxiliary, facilitating the achievement of the main purpose (Khaldun, 1958).

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[2]Sharia is the sacred law of Islam which comprises the totality of Allah's commands and which is supposed to regulate the life of every Muslim in relation to Allah and to those around him/her.

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The ingredients of a philosophy of education are there in the Quran which was collected nearly twenty years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. What is briefly mentioned in the holy text is elaborated in the collection of *hadiths,* which were finally compiled in the ninth century. The Quran begins its discussion of knowledge and the importance of its cultivation and acquisition by stating that knowledge is power and virtue and there is no limit as to how much one can acquire (Quran, 54:34). The individual himself determines such limits as may be imposed. It goes on to say that people with knowledge are the lords of those who have less or no knowledge (Quran, 44:32). The Quran distinguishes the learned from the ignorant and asserts that the former is sort of superior to others. In fact, the learned are the leaders of men and nations (Quran, 67:26). They are said to be second only to God and even the angels pay homage to them for their knowledge of things in the world (Quran, 2:34). In the Traditions, the authority of the guardians of knowledge confirmed. 'The learned are the successors of the prophet' is one of the most frequently quoted Traditions (Tibawi, 1974). Others describe the path of the seeker after learning as a path to paradise and affirm that even the angels spread their wings to facilitate the mission of the scholar. There is in fact nothing more important than seeking and spreading learning except the first article of the faith that is the belief in the unity of God and the prophethood of Muhammad.

The Quran places a high premium on the learned. Owing to the fact that this knowledge was purely religious, all philosophy within Islam had to take Quran as the fountainhead of all knowledge. There is scarcely a book on traditions, mysticism,

theology or philosophy without a section on the virtue of learning and quest for knowledge. From the middle of the ninth century onwards separate books on educational subjects started to appear in increasing numbers. The main themes were much the same as discussed above.

One of the earliest attempts at a philosophy of education was made by *Ikhwan-as-Safa*, a society of lovers of philosophy, during the second half of the tenth century. They published some fifty tracts during the period. Behind a facade of conformity to the Quran and Traditions, the tracts strive to install philosophy as an integral part of religion. The ultimate aim is that by the diffusion of such integrated learning, a more righteous and utopian society will be created in which the learned would be the leaders. The opening passage of the tract on Divine Law reads: 'The best types of men are the wise, the select among the wise are the learned; the highest of the learned are the prophets; then comes after them in the rank of philosophers' (quoted in Tibawi, 1974: 207). It will be observed that the position of the philosophers is left deliberately obscure. To the initiate, it may be above that of the Prophets, but to others, it can mean to show the opposite. Elsewhere this dictum is varied. 'The guardians of law' reads a passage in the tract on Opinion and Religion' 'are the teachers, the tutors and educators. The teachers of the guardians are the angels, and the teacher of the angels is the Universal Soul, and the teacher of the Universal Soul is Active Intelligence, and the teacher of all is God' (Tibawi, 1974: 197). This is reminiscent of a Quranic passage.[3] However, whereas in the Quranic

[3] The Quranic passage reads as follows: God bears witness that there is no god but He and the angels and men possessed of knowledge. Sura iii.16, Quran.

passage, the chain recognized is the three links of teachers, angels and God, two new links, in the shape of philosophical concepts are now interposed between the angels and the God. Here is an attempt under the cover of allegory and skilful stretching of the Quran and Tradition, to question directly or by implication the divine origin of the philosophy of Muslim education. Reason and senses are equal to Revelation: individual judgement is as valid as divine command. The appeal of such a philosophy was limited and met the fate of rejection. The attempt of the *Ikhwan* to establish philosophy as an integral part of Muslim education ended in a failure.

Before the end of the eleventh century, al-Ghazali gave a philosophy of education, which is supposed to be the climax of theological thinking on the subject. Philosophy as such had already been rejected and al-Ghazali was governed by this fact. His contribution is one of confirming tradition and elaborating codes of behavior on the practical as well as the ideal level. Although according to Ghazali learning is a virtue for its own sake, the purpose of all learning is to open a way to the knowledge and love of God. This knowledge is the noblest and the highest that could be pursued, but it does not imply the neglect of other branches of knowledge, which are called introductory or tools (Tritton, 1957). To his theological mind, learning is either a personal duty incumbent on every believer, or a general duty that, if performed by some members of the community, ceases to be incumbent on them all. In the first category, learning is belief, action and abstention: belief in God, acting according to His commands and abstention from what He forbade. In the second category,

medicine and other similar subjects are mentioned which are called 'tools' or 'introductory'.

Two centuries later ibn- Khaldun added a new dimension to the philosophy of education. Man is distinguished from animals in his capacity to think and how to maintain himself, how to act as a member of the social order, and how to obey what has been revealed by God through His prophets for the welfare in this world and next. Thinking is the origin of all learning. The acquisition of learning became a craft that varies according to teachers, though knowledge itself is the same entity. Two branches of knowledge are discussed: those that derive from Reason and those that come through Revelation. The first, which comprise all branches of philosophy, are considered natural for man to pursue through his reasoning. The second which include all branches of religious knowledge are accepted as transmitted by tradition, and there is no place in them for reason except to relate secondary matters to their corresponding fixed principles by analogy.

Towards an Educational Theory in Islam

Classical Arabic literature contains no theory of education more authoritative, systematic and comprehensive than had been bequeathed by al-Ghazali. He began with the infant child before the age of conventional education. 'The child', he wrote 'is a trust (placed by God) in the hands of his parents, and his innocent heart is a precious element capable of taking impressions' (quoted in Tibawi, 1957: 79). If the parents and later on the teachers, brought him up in the righteous way, he would live

happily in this world and the next and they would be rewarded by God for their good deeds. If they neglected the child's upbringing and education he would lead a life of unhappiness in both worlds and they would bear the burden of the sin of neglect. Ghazali's view of the maktab and what should be taught in it corresponds to that of his predecessors and current practices of his time. However, he surpasses them in the high moral standards that he expects from the teacher. The teacher undertakes 'a great responsibility' and therefore is as tender to his pupils as he is to his children. He must correct moral lapses through hinting rather than direct prohibition, gentle advice rather than reproof. Above all, he must himself set an example so that his actions accord with his precepts.

Higher education is dealt with under the curriculum and the qualities of the teacher and the pupils. The question of remuneration is theoretically resolved by a classification of branches of knowledge into purely religious and auxiliary studies. Pursuit of the former is a personal duty of the believer, while the study of such subjects as mathematics and medicine in the latter is merely desirable. While it was legitimate to expect material reward for teaching auxiliary subjects, it was still the duty of the ideal teacher to teach religious subjects gratuitously. He may however accept such remuneration as would free him from material worries and make him devote himself entirely to the diffusion of religious learning.

In discussing the process of learning, Ghazali re-echoes the doctrine of reminiscence: 'Knowledge exists potentially in the human soul like a seed in the soil; by learning the potential becomes actual' (Tibawi, 1974:79). Yet there are two

distinct channels in his system through which learning is acquired: actual application and divine inspiration: the efforts of the mind and the body on the one hand and a 'light from God' on the other. Here the mystic in al-Ghazali asserts the firm belief in a divine illumination more efficacious than human reason. However, this is not a denial of reason; it merely places it in a hierarchical order second to divine grace. Ghazali's system is so balanced that its preoccupation with things divine and mystical experience leave room also for rational thinking, logical deduction and empirical observation. Nor does it neglect the needs of the body. While he warns against the luxury that leads to laziness he recommends that primary school pupil should be allowed physical exercise including walking. To prevent play and to insist on continuous study leads to dullness of heart, diminishing in intelligence and unhappiness.

Ghazali's ideas dominated Islamic educational thought for centuries after his death. Except for the writings of ibn- Khaldun nothing of significance was added until about the nineteenth century. According to Khaldun man is distinguished from animals by a capacity to reason. His reason guides him to make a living, to cooperate with other members of society. 'Man is therefore a reasoning animal and reasoning is the foundation of all learning' (Khladun, 1958:76). Yet, Khaldun is very close to Ghazali in setting limits to the capacity of human reason in the process of learning, which ultimately must depend on divine guidance. He advocates gradual imparting of knowledge according to the capacity of the learner, asserts that proficiency in one branch of knowledge prepares the learner for acquiring another and approves of the

custom of travel in order to learn from different teachers as conducive to a deeper understanding and wider vision.

Ibn-Khaldun explains that in the whole process of learning reason enables the learner to grasp the meaning through the spoken and written word and to deduce laws establishing order and relations between different things. Not every learner is capable of reaching this stage. To him who is in difficulty his advice is this: 'Abandon all artificial means of learning and appeal to your natural reason innate in you and seek God's guidance which had illuminated the way of learners before you and taught that which they knew not' (Tibawi, 1974: 34). This is clearly addressed to the advanced student who is Khaldun's main concern. His mention of elementary education until the age of adolescence is less direct or detailed. He recommends the treatment of the young children with compassion, not only because harshness dulls the child's capacity to learn but also because it 'depraves his humanity'. Commenting on teaching methods Khaldun states that the best order of approach was not to begin with the Quran which is too difficult for children, but with Arabic language and poetry, then arithmetic and finally the Quran. According to him this was a better method but says that custom was against it. Khaldun deplores the greater dependence upon memory in learning texts with commentaries and super- commentaries thereon; 'repetitive in words while the meaning is one and the same'. He equally deplores as confusing and discouraging to students the custom of condensing whole disciplines in short treatise to facilitate memorizing.

Nothing of significance was added after Khaldun's death in 1406. The destruction of the temporal power of the Caliphate, internal strife and successive waves of invasions by Crusaders, Mongols and Turks, coupled with consequent devastation and impoverishment reduced the intellectual vitality of Muslim society and endangered the survival of even the material symbols of its civilization. On the other hand, Europe made progress via the Renaissance and Reformation, which culminated in the modern national states wresting secular power from the Church. In contrast, Islam always stood for one spiritual community of believers, which transcends the limitations of race and geography. Perhaps the concept of nation state and more particularly secular education lay outside the cognitive structure of Islam. Even a rationalist thinker like ibn-Khaldun had to warn that children had to be first saturated with religious sciences and only then with the auxiliary ones lest they might go astray. In addition, the attempt to integrate philosophy with Islamic tenets by *Ikhwan-as- Safa* ended in a failure. As to why this happened we have to go into the history of early Islam.

History, Contestation, Implications

With the establishment of the Arabs and the spread of Islam to different territories, cultural fertilization was inevitable. An internal movement for the verification and recording of the Arabic and Islamic heritages accompanied it. The first step was taken when the Quran was established in the Authorized Version. It was followed by the compilation of the Traditions. Both necessitated the extension of the

process of the Arabic language itself. The written word acquired a new and practical significance in the service of the state, apart from its increasing use in the service of religion.[4] However, the business of the day, the administration, etc. were all carried on in the language of the natives and were manned by them. This peculiar anomaly remained in force for half a century. When the government business was at last Arabicized, there was a sudden demand for large number of Arabs who could act at least as accountants and clerks. However, the state still failed to take the logical step of establishing institutions that would train them. This function, of the training students for state-related jobs, was also acquired by the madrasas now. Hence the madrasas grew in importance and there was emphasis on the teaching of mathematics. The rudimentary education hitherto provided at this 'private school' was auxiliary to religious purposes. It had now to serve another material and secular purpose. The madrasa therefore remained for the first four centuries of Islam the only place where various skills could be learned (Tibawi, 1954).

Such in brief were the main lines of development stimulated from within. External stimuli became operational when Islam encountered Greek and Persian civilizations and absorbed considerable number of Christians and Jews. These contacts opened new horizons for material and intellectual adaptation and development. The fraternity of Islam, which began with the Arab tribes, had now

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[4] Pre-Islamic Arabic tradition was oral its rich heritage in poetry was transmitted orally. There is little or no evidence to suggest that literacy was a necessary qualification in a poet or in the transmitter of his poems. Indeed, the Quran itself, revealed piecemeal in the lifetime of the Prophet, was first proclaimed orally and transmitted by word of mouth. Not before the end of a generation was it written down in an authorised version. mouth.

been greatly enlarged by an admixture of races with various religious and cultural backgrounds. Any such development was bound to create tensions and to present challenges. There were two possible courses to follow: Islam's attitude to the foreign civilizations and cultures might have been one of hostility and rejection or it might have been an attitude of reception and assimilation. Islam opted for the second alternative. The greatest assimilation was from the Greek heritage. Translation of Greek philosophy and science was gradually followed by assimilation and comment. The cultivation of the 'sciences of the ancients' often with the active support of the Caliphs produced a philosophical stream, which was termed as Islamic Arabic thought (Walzer, 1962). It developed from religious studies, grew to maturity under the patronage of the Islamic State, and was expressed in Arabic language.

The mainstream remained religious in content and direction. However, while its guardians, the theologians rejected philosophy as putting Reason in opposition to Revelation, they adopted the dialectic methods of the philosophers. A subsidiary stream of religious thought was Sufism, the mystical philosophy in Islam, which began with the yearning of the spirit for personal communion with God. But on the whole the orthodox theologians succeeded in silencing or at least isolating the philosophers, and often by infiltrating the ranks of the mystics. The outcome of these struggles, discernible from the end of the tenth century, was the establishment of the supremacy that was essentially orthodox but contained important concessions to mysticism or even philosophy (Tibawi, 1974). Despite all its capacity for compromise, the orthodoxy failed to establish a universal unity among the faithful.

The doctrinal division between the Shias and the Sunnis, which had started long back, ultimately led to political divisions and consequently to rivalry in the realm of education.

The three main streams in the Arabic Islamic thought in order of their impact and influence on education were theological, mystical and philosophical. To generalize it would be correct to say that the education of the majority remained firmly in the hands of the theologians. This is not to say that the mystics and the philosophers did not resort to teaching in order to propagate their ideas. The mystics in particular were very active in this field, employing an elaborate system of initiation and promotion from one stage to another. Through studying meditation and precept they achieved a considerable measure of success and their following was numerically great. The philosophers, on the other hand, could influence only very small sections of the community.

The hold of the theologians did not go unchallenged. An early attempt at a comprehensive synthesis of the three streams within Islam was made in the tenth century AD when the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwan-as-Safa*) published in Basra and elsewhere some fifty tracts in which they sought to integrate Greek philosophy with the Islamic tradition. Distributed anonymously the tracts represented a popular encyclopaedia of the entire knowledge of the time. The underlying assumption that religion needed philosophy or that in other words Revelation depends upon Reason was unacceptable to the orthodox and the attempt ended in failure. A century was to elapse and radical political changes were to take place before another more successful

attempt was made. The semblance of political unity as the Sunni caliphate in Baghdad had maintained was shattered when a Shii caliphate was established in Cairo before the end of the fourth century of Islam. To the doctrinal differences between the two camps, there was now added political rivalry for supremacy. Education was on of the weapons used in the contest.

The rival Caliph in Cairo had a well-planned state education designed principally for adults and disseminated from a central institution known as *Dar-al-Ilm* (House of Learning). A mosque established in Cairo was used as another repository of learning according to the doctrine of the new rulers.[5] This was the first active and direct intervention in education despite the fact that it was limited to post elementary education and the basics had still to be learnt privately or more formally at the madrasa (Makdisi, 1981). The initiative taken in Cairo was not lost on Baghdad which took an identical step. The eleventh century witnessed the rise of a new institution for adult education known as al-madrasa. Like its parallel in the rival camp, it was established by the state for the dissemination of the dogma of the rulers. Here again elementary education was left to private initiative; in the east as in the west the state was in need of preachers, judges and other officials, but cared very little how or where they prepared themselves for admission into higher institutions.

For the first time in the history of Muslim education, teachers in the new institutions became practically civil servants paid by the state. Students received free tuition, and under certain foundations also free lodging and food. Allowing for

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[5]This mosque is now well known as al-Azhar and is supposed to be the oldest university in the world.

doctrinal differences, the new institutions had similar curricula. The central core was religious studies; exegesis, theology and jurisprudence. Philosophy as such had no place in either the eastern or the western institutions (Tibawi, 1974). It was under such a situation that another attempt at a synthesis was successfully attempted by al-Ghazali. Of the three strands identified in the Islamic tradition al-Ghazali ruled out the philosophical but rehabilitated the mystic with the theological. He recast the whole Islamic tradition in a synthesis of dogma, ritual and ethics at once authoritative and rational. In his method of treatment he frequently employed syllogism and invoked the authority of Reason but he decidedly reserved the final authority for the divine Revelation. A compromise more enduring has never been achieved. However, it contributed to the isolation of philosophers who, despite repeated attempts at reconciling Reason with Revelation, could never make a permanent impression. After Ghazali they remained a race apart, ignored, admired or declared heretics according to the occasion. The theologians and the mystics emerged as the guardians of Islamic learning, and the transmitters of the Islamic tradition through teaching and preaching (Tibawi, 1954). The character of Muslim education, in aims, content, methods and institutions was determined for centuries. It hardly changed until the last hundred and fifty years.

It has been argued so far that education has always been used as a tool for reconstruction in Islam. As an ideological tool it could be used to justify doctrinal rivalries. However, the madrasas as a site of contest were only the centers of adult education. The early Islamic states never attempted to lay the foundation of

elementary education. This sphere always lay in the hands of the theologians and the mystics. Thus what comes out very clearly in the above discussion is that throughout the Islamic civilization education had a certain amount of autonomy. The sate controlled the higher education but the theologians could never be dislodged from the network of madrasas they created in the sphere of civil society. This is one of the very important reasons as why despite the fall of the Islamic state the madrasas continued to flourish.

Moreover such a distribution of power between the state and civil society in the realm of education would essentially mean that there would be no homogenized school curricula. Though the core remained solidly religious, yet there remained considerable space for doctrinal differences to exist. What comes out clearly is that Islam, right from its inception, has been characterized by internal contestations. Education as one of the most important ideological tools has been used to justify one position or the other. We have already seen that the foundation of al-madrasa at Baghdad was clearly a response to the foundation of the *Dar-al-ilm* at Cairo. Islamic education therefore is not a monolithic discourse. Indeed behind the veil of one Universal Community (*Ummah*[6]), there exists various competing discourses. The madarasas as transmitters of discourses would also be plural in its orientation. It would seek to represent that community according to the ideological leanings of either the founder or the state. The implications of these theoretical premises will be detailed in the subsequent chapters.

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[6] Ummah means the universal community of Muslims regardless of geographical boundaries sharing the characteristic of being subservient to the sharia.

Chapter 2: Colonialism and New Madrasas

The preceding chapter tried to understand the philosophical bases of Islamic education. It focused on certain ambiguities in Islamic education, particularly on the notion of *ilm* or knowledge in Islamic education. There is considerable ambiguity over the meaning of *ilm* in Islam. Its literal meaning in Arabic is knowledge. The *ulema* have interpreted it as meaning only religious knowledge. Any other knowledge, such as worldly knowledge is used as a tool for the further refinement of religious knowledge. Another interpretation, such as that by Syed Ahmad Khan, treats the notion of *ilm* as meaning all kinds of knowledge. However, even in this interpretation, much ambiguity remains because it is not clear as to where the primacy lies- on religious education or on worldly education.

This ambiguity came to be reflected in the madrasa system where it was debated whether *ilm* meant only religious education or any kind of knowledge. This ambiguity was resolved in favour of the *ulema* who argued that *ilm* meant only religious education. Any other kind of education was considered an adjunct to this religious education. Secular education or worldly education came to be regarded as a tool to further refine the knowledge present in the Quran and *hadith.* Focussing attention on the writings of Ghazali and Khaldun, two prominent intellectuals of the

formative period of Islam, it was argued that integration of knowledge within Islam has been a problematic that has not been seriously studied so far.

It was also noted that even during the formative period, the madrasas had an autonomous existence. Its relationship with the state was one of dualism. Some madrasas disseminated the ideological concerns of the state while others were in active opposition to it. The state was primarily interested in madrasas for the supply of professionals while the ulema were primarily interested in fashioning a community based on the precepts of 'true Islam.' Despite this, religious education did not succeed in creating a monolithic community; rather it was primarily meant to enhance sectarian ideological concerns. Therefore, the madrasas, which apparently seek to create a monolithic Muslim community, inevitably end up creating only a homogenized denomination or *maslak*[1].

This chapter shifts the focus from the theoretical to the practical. It seeks to understand the way in which the theoretical structure outlined in the previous chapter supplants itself in the Indian situation. Though mostly concerned with the colonial period, it discusses some features of the medieval madrasas to facilitate comparison and arrive at a better understanding of the colonial madrasas. It argues that these madrasas were new in the sense that their concerns were very different from that of

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[1] Maslak literally means a denomination, in this case within the Muslim community. A maslak shares the defining characteristics of the faith, but differs on interpretations and applications of law. Deobandis, Barelwis, etc. are all maslaks within the overall Islamic community.

medieval madrasas. Foremost among them was the concern for the ordinary Muslim to whom the *deen* was to be taken. Deen literally means faith or 'true faith'. However, this conception of true faith would be dependent upon the way in which basic texts such as Quran and Hadith are interpreted. Consequently, there can be various true faiths, each in contest with the other version. Second was the dichotomy between the private and the public sphere, which arose during this period. Central to this dichotomy was the fact that the colonial state conceptualized the Indian society as consisting of various religious communities and that they should not interfere with the private life of these communities. This categorization was useful for the *ulema* who could use the non-interfering policy of the colonial state to carve their own area of influence in the private sphere. They could also engage with other ideological rivals to create their own influence in public sphere. It is contended that the Muslim community was imagined in this public sphere and the madrasas had a role to play in this process. Through the dissemination of the printed texts, the madrsasas sought to represent the Muslim community as primarily a religious community. However, this imagination was marked with contestations from various other Islamic denominations, which were vying with each other to define the community in their own ways.

The Medieval Educational System

Nizami has written at length about the medieval educational system. This section depends on his writing corroborated by other sources. According to Nizami (1996), there were two types of institutions in medieval India. There were *maktabs* attached to mosques that imparted elementary education, particularly the teaching of Quran and subsisting mostly on local charity. The others were the madrasas which were centers of higher learning and were of different categories. Some were established by private scholars and functioned in an atmosphere of penury and penitence; some were established by the collective efforts of the locality and subsisted on charity provided by the residents of the area; others were established by the nobles or the rulers and thrived under affluent circumstances. Huge endowments were made to the institutions run by the state. The state sometimes gave madad-e-mash grants to scholars to relieve them of their financial worries[2]. It was inevitable that the orientation as well as the atmosphere of these institutions widely differed and the scholars and students who thronged there pursued differing ideals. A scholar of repute, even if he functioned under conditions of penury, attracted students from far and wide. On the other hand, those who desired a career in government or in the revenue and the administrative departments turned to institutions maintained by the

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[2]Madad-i-mash grant was given to a scholar or institutions for the services provided to the community in general. It was also a tool for controlling ulema as it could be withdrawn if it went against the interest of the Emperor.

government that provided education in a variety of subjects. Technical or vocational courses had a different structure altogether. Boys eager to acquire any particular art or craft attached themselves to some specialists or turned to factories. There was, however, provision in the syllabus of the madrasas for the teaching of mathematics, geometry, etc. Those who eventually distinguished themselves in civil engineering usually pursued such courses in the madrasas (Nizami, 1996).

The method of instruction largely depended on the teachers. Some would read the texts themselves, others would ask the students to read it first and would then explain it, some would start with semantics and end with content, others, would proceed the other way. At every stage, the students were involved in answering and asking questions and teaching was considered a joint venture of teacher and the student. Nizami (1996), informs us that there were certain methods that were followed in general- conversation, dialogue, revision and repetition were the standard techniques of instruction. The purpose of debates was to expose a scholar to criticism and scrutiny and make the knowledge acquired by him a part of his self. In bigger institutions, like in one madrasa of Delhi, the monitorial system was followed which meant that students of higher classes taught the students of the lower classes.

There was no formal examination or test for students but the teachers were continuously involved in watching the progress of a student in debates, discussions, etc. Great emphasis was put on memorization of Quran as well as certain key texts on

Fiqh and hadith. Instructions up to a level were imparted in Persian, but higher education was in Arabic. Only during the time of Akbar education in Arabic was discouraged but he did not succeed in changing the character of education or undermining the importance of Arabic language. This was because apart from purely religious works, important works on medicine, mathematics, logic and philosophy were also in Arabic.

According to Sufi (1977), there were four distinct stages or grades covering the entire gamut of education in those days and the syllabus were planned accordingly. The elementary basic education consisted in teaching the reading and recitation of the Quran. It gave to the boys basic minimum religious awareness. They learnt to offer obligatory prayers at this stage. The second stage slightly broadened the area of study by instructing them to read and write. The third stage was for one who wished a place in the cultural set-up of the day or for those who aspired for government service. He had to acquire the art of drafting documents, writing letters, maintaining registers, accounts, etc. This was Persian-based education. The content of religious studies at this stage was confined to certain basics relating to religious obligations, like ritual prayers, fasts, hajj, zakat, etc. Most people finished their educational career at this stage. Those who aspired for academic career or positions in judicial or religious departments adopted the fourth channel of Arabic-based instructions in a variety of subjects (Ahmad, 1999).

Only after going through the fourth stage could a person be competent to give fatwas, instructions in religious sciences and to act in a judicial capacity or pursue further studies pertaining to the Quran, jurisprudence, astronomy, mathematics, geography, etc. Here at this stage were produced jurists, physicians, astronomers, mathematicians, theologians, etc. It was here that the ratio of rational sciences (maqulat) and traditional sciences (manqulat) came in for review, and, in fact, the orientation of education was determined by the syllabus prescribed for this advanced category of students. Maqulat meant the whole gamut of rational sciences such as those of logic, philosophy,etc. as opposed to manqulat which meant the transmitted or revealed sciences such as the Quran and hadith or the works based on them. Reason was to be applied only in the maqulat studies. During the medieval period, both these branches were taught in the madrasa. During the colonial period, however, madrasas such as Deoband would banish the study of maqulat.

A great change came about in the syllabus of medieval times with the coming of Akbar (Nizami, 1966). He declared that no one should be allowed to neglect those things which the present time requires. This implied that the syllabus of the day was not keeping pace with the requirements of time and Akbar wanted it to be more flexible and fruitful. He commanded that every boy should read books on morals, agriculture, mensuration, geometry, astronomy, rules of governance, medicine, logic and history and religious studies. The new syllabus, which perhaps

touched both the third and fourth stages, relegated religious subjects to a secondary position. It strengthened the Persian-based education by adding important subjects of practical value in life, but made the Arabic-based educational pattern fragile and superfluous. Akbar's educational policy seems to have been to abolish the fourth grade and strengthen the third one by introducing new subjects of practical importance in it. The contemporary historian Badayuni sarcastically remarked that the reading and learning of Arabic was looked down upon as a crime, and those who read them were considered bad and deserving of disapproval (Tritton, 1957).

In a way, the implications of this approach were deeper and wider than Akbar could visualize. By discouraging the study of Arabic language, he cut-off the main source of not only the manqulat studies (traditional studies) but maqulat (rational subjects) also. No development of ideas in any branch of knowledge was feasible- even in the framework of medieval education- if direct access to intellectual achievements of the medieval Muslim scholarship was denied. He sought to fill the gap by initiating an elaborate program of translations. Genuine scholarship could hardly draw its sustenance from translations alone.

The response of the contemporary *ulema* to this development was partial. They retrieved the religious dimensions of Muslim personality by greater emphasis on *fiqh* and *hadith*, but ignored restoring its intellectual vigour by adopting the methods of enquiry and research though the earlier generation had explored new realms of

thought (Nizami, 1996). Akbar's educational experiment did not merely offset the balance of maqulat (rational) and manqulat (traditional) in the syllabus of the time; it changed its entire orientation by reducing the Arabic content, and eliminating all works of religious import. It was not the introduction of practical significant books on philosophy, but denigration of religious studies, which offended the *ulema* of the time. While private institutions looked askance at the syllabus proposed by Akbar, government owned institutions and madrasas established by nobles fell in line with it.

Mir Shirazi influenced Akbar's educational policy and encouraged the study of rational subjects, specially philosophy and mechanical arts. His policy was to initiate instruction in philosophic subjects at the age of seven or eight years, thus paving the way for secularization of education at the earliest level. His introduction of the works of Mulla Sadr and Mirza Jan in the curriculum of the madrasa did not provoke the same criticism which depriving the young of religious instruction did[3]. The ulema sought to retrieve the Islamic scholarship from a subsidiary level to which it had been relegated. The ideal of that scholarship was to produce a God-conscious personality, rooted to the Quranic principles and adhering to the *Sunnah*. Reacting to the developments during the time of Akbar the *ulema* began to lay greater emphasis on following meticulously the Fiqh and on the introduction of greater content of *Hadith* literature in the syllabus. Thus, the leading *ulema* of the time, Sheikh Ahmad

[3] Both Mulla Sadr and Mirza Jan were widely known philosophers of their time.

Sirhindi advised that instruction in mystical works should go hand in hand with the works of *Fiqh*. Another *ulema* Shaykh Abd-al-Haqq went to Hijaz and after coming back popularized the study of *Hadith* to resusciate the Muslim society.

The madrasas in medieval India had hardly any fixed syllabus (Sufi, 1977). The inclusion of books in the curricula depended on a number of factors such as personal predilection of a teacher, availability of books, adherence to traditional approach or utility in some specific context. There were teachers who were known for their special insights in certain classical woks and students came to them to receive education in that particular book and obtained certificates which entitled them to teach the book to others. Moreover, the madrasa could be founded by either the state or any influential person in the society, particularly by the *ulema*. The institutions run by the state had a more comprehensive syllabus than those run by others. The emphasis on any branch of study also shifted from time to time. For example, during the Lodhis and Tughluqs, there was an emphasis on Fiqh[4]. This importance of *Fiqh* at this time was not a casual phenomenon. It was connected with the apprehension of the erosion of Muslim institutions at a time when the Sultans were laying the foundation of the empire. The state at this time was weak and it could not offend the *ulema* by

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[4] Fiqh means jurisprudence. It includes within its domain the explanations for the correct performance of rituals, etc. it is at the same time concerned with the state and society, the way in which it should be organized on Islamic principles. Fiqh, therefore, becomes important with the emergence of a new Muslim state; but would generally be less important when the same state becomes stable and powerfull.

relegating religious studies to a subsidiary position. On the other hand a powerful state under Akbar could carry on the work of secularizing the syllabus without paying heed to the protests of the ulema.

What emerges from the discussion above is that though the medieval state at times tried to enforce certain changes in the educational pattern, yet the very character of the madrasa made it impossible for the state to impose uniformity. This was so because the madrasa could be founded by anyone in society for considerations of status or piety. This autonomy of the madrasa meant little control on the curriculum as it depended on a number of factors. Moreover, it would be wrong to assume that the medieval madrasas were purely theological seminaries. Thus, the categorization of the syllabus into maqulat and manqulat often obscures the real problems involved because the former is considered rational and progressive while the latter becomes conservative and reactionary. This categorization is misleading as rational subjects were also taught along with the purely religious ones. It depended upon the personal predilection of the student as to what interested him most. Thus the fact that Mir Shirazi was the intellectual ancestor of Mulla Nizam al-Din Sihlawi, the author of *Dars-i-Nizami*, which eventually became the standard syllabus of Deoband, is too significant to be ignored. What is being argued is the idea that religion as something separate, concerned only with the personal life of an individual, was alien to the

medieval educational system. This distinction was the specific contribution of the colonial masters.

Colonial categories and Madrasas

In their effort to understand and regulate the systems of education prevalent in India, to relate them to their own ideas of how education ought to be imparted and to what end, and to reform the local system in view of their own perceptions, colonial officials routinely invoked what to them were familiar and often self-evident concepts and categories. The significance of these categories lies not only in their defining the British understanding of Muslim education but also in their subsequent influence on the *ulema*. The most important category, which has shaped all discussions of the madrasa, as, indeed of many other institutions of Indian society, is the notion of religion itself. As Talal Asad has argued, developments in modern Europe, and specially the impact of the Enlightenment, have led not merely to the subordination of religion to the state or confinement of the former to the sphere of 'private' life but also to "the construction of religion as a new historical object: anchored in personal experience, expressible as belief statements, dependent on private institutions, and practiced in one's spare time. This construction of religion ensures that it is part of what is inessential to our common politics, economy, science and morality" (1993: 207).

In India, the British constantly encountered situations and institutions where no clear distinction between the religious and secular or non-religious was made. To many, this situation was reminiscent of Europe's own medieval history, where such distinctions were generally blurred, often to the advantage of their church. Viewing India as dominated or determined by religion meant that Indians could be seen not only as different from the post-enlightenment Europeans but also as inferior to the colonial rulers and, therefore, in need of the latter's enlightened governance (Metcalf, 1995). There was also much ambivalence on whether all life was in fact governed by religion in India. It was imperative for sound practical administration to make a distinction between the religious and non-religious, the personal and the public or general. Such distinctions were commonly made in the sphere of education. In government schools a policy of religious neutrality was adopted, which meant excluding all formal instructions from the school curriculum. This policy suggested that religion could be confined to a definite sphere, which, in turn, ought to be excluded from the course of general education. The madrasas were of course regarded as religious institutions and, in many cases, specially in the aftermath of the Mutiny of 1857, were abolished or their existence was effectively jeopardized for that reason (Leitner, 1971). Yet, many continued to be administered or financially supported by the government. What concerns us here that familiar distinctions between religious and secular learning continued to be invoked in the colonial analyses of madrasas, quite as much as in other

educational institutions. Thus, the distinction between religious and secular was central to any discussion on madrasas.

We have already noted in the previous section that the mediaeval Muslim scholars often distinguished between the 'traditionally transmitted' sciences like those of Quran and *hadith* and the 'rational sciences' such as philosophy, logic etc. The rational sciences were also studied in the madrasas whereas the study of the transmitted- or for that matter any other- sciences was not confined to these seminaries. The standing of the sciences relative to one another was frequently discussed, and many scholars were opposed to the study of such foreign, rational sciences such as Aristotelian logic and philosophy. There were also complaints that the sciences which are worth studying for their own sake, such as the Quran and *hadith* were sometimes given less attention than the ancillary subjects like morphology and syntax, which were meant to assist in the study of the former. Yet discussions on madrasas representing, and guarding, the religious sphere in society; on what is purely religious in the curriculum of the madrasa; or on religion as occupying a distinct sphere in society are eminently modern debates with little precedent in the medieval Indian society. Interestingly enough this colonial category was internalized by the *ulema* of the times. In the contemporary debates on reform in madrasas, the *ulema*, oppose any state intervention in the name of the private sphere. The acceptance of this colonial logic, however, was in the interest of the *ulema* as they were successfully hiving off the personal sphere in which state intrusions were

resisted. Within this sphere they were able to engage in the hegemonic representation of the masses. Madrasas served as the most important tool for this hegemonic activity. However, this engagement with education as a medium of resistance only dawned after other medium had been exhausted.

The British State and the Elite Resistance

The coming of the British had signaled the doom for the Mughal Empire as well as the traditional social order on which it rested. For the Muslim elite, it meant the loss of status and self esteem apart from material losses. They tried to win back their lost 'glory' by resisting the British State in all possible ways. At first, this resistance took the form of capturing state power through a violent overthrow of the colonial state. The Mujahidin movement of Sayyid Ahmad, Faraiji movement of Bengal and the Revolt of 1857 amply demonstrate this. The point worth noting here is that in all these movements the 'ulema' played a prominent part. The Mujahidin movement was started by Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly who along with his followers migrated to Afghanistan and tried to wage a `jihad'[5] from there. The movement had two- fold programme: resurgence of political power through active struggle and al all out effort to improve the moral tone of Muslim society and revive true religious spirit. The latter was considered a necessary adjustment to achieve the first (Nizami, 1971). The Faraiji movement in Bengal led by

Haji Shariatullah also laid great emphasis upon the performance of the obligatory parts of religious devotion and trenchantly assailed all 'un-Islamic' ceremonies and superstitious beliefs of the Bengali Muslims. But, it also had definite political objectives and its drift and direction was determined by the political and economical forces then operating in the life of people of Bengal.

Both these movements were inspired by the Wali-ul-Allah tradition about which we shall talk later. Suffice it is here to state that they could not exhaust the medium of theology for wresting control from the British. Moreover, both these movements were cognitively incompetent to understand and challenge the nature of colonialism. This point becomes manifest in the Revolt of 1857. This so-called 'first war of Independence' was the last attempt on the part of decaying feudal classes to wrest state power from the foreigners. The failure of 1857 therefore was also the failure of an earlier cognitive structure embedded in Indian history. It was the failure of the earlier worldview - of hierarchies; of caste; and gender. The resistance to colonialism had to be reformulated afresh; and education was to serve an important purpose in this endeavor. Thus, it was only after the repeated failures to capture state power, that the *ulema* turned their attention to education through the madrasas. One man who was responsible for this stress on education as a tool for reconstruction was Shah Waliullah Rahmani.

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[5] Jihad means holy war against the infidel. It also means to struggle against one's own baser instincts. Often, both the notions are combined in any Islamic movement.

Shah Wali-ul-llah hoped for a restoration of stable Muslim rule in which the *ulema* would play an important role (Jalbani, 1967). He explicitly analyzed the basis of the arrangement between ruler and *ulema* and argued the necessity of their complementary functions and the need for proper balance between the two. He enunciated the pervasive ideal of enlightened Muslim leadership guided by responsible *ulema*. In that ideal the outer caliphate' would be responsible for securing order and stability, whereas the `inner caliphate' of the religious leadership (which he called the 'batini' khilafa), would guide the ruler and direct the community.

Even in a flawed political order, however, Shah Wali-ul-llah sought an important role for the religious leadership - that of advising rulers, guiding the community and safeguarding the intellectual heritage. His success, however, vested neither in curriculum and institutional innovations nor in the compilation of mere commentaries, but in a major individual effort at intellectual synthesis and systematic action, an unprecedented *`tatbiq*[6] (synthesis) of the whole range of Islamic knowledge (Metcalf, 1982). Troubled by the disorder he saw around him, he sought to stem the tide of decline by consolidating and clarifying the entire body of Islamic tradition. Knowledge of `truth' would bring Muslims to religious obedience that would end the divisions and deviations he so greatly deplored. That is why his work was characterized

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[6] Tatbiq means drawing things together face to face. As applied here it would mean resolving and uniting religious approaches and interpretations.

by an insistence on the necessity of the study of *`Hadith'*, a study that had been peripheral for most of the *ulema*. The *Hadith*, according to him, provided an absolute standard, and he sought to demonstrate in his writings how conflict among the various *Hadiths* could be reconciled if they were properly understood, and if only Hadis of unquestioned authenticity were accepted. Thus, his espousal of jurisprudential eclecticism combined with the study of Quran and *Hadith* clearly enhanced the responsibility of the ulama for interpreting the law to their followers (Ahmad, 1999).

It were these ideas of his, which crystallized in the founding of Deoband Madrasa in 1867. The emphasis on hadis and the almost abhorrence of syncretic traditions are a legacy of Wali-ul-llah's thought. It is also interesting to note that Syed Ahmad Khan was also influenced by Wali-ul-llah's ideas. Syed Ahmad Khan took the legacy of *`itjtihad'* [7](interpretation) present in Wali-ul-llah's thought and sought a rational interpretation of Islam in an atmosphere of `Western culture'. For this he turned to western system of education, which culminated in the foundation of M.A.O. College at Aligarh. On the other hand, the `Deoband' charted its own course of religious education by establishing a network of madrasas in North India.

The interesting point that emerges is that though both charted very different courses; yet, they were influenced by the same personality.[8] There was another

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[7] Ijtihad means individual inquiry to establish the ruling of the shariat upon a given point, generally by a person qualified for the inquiry.

[8]Both Sir Syed (founder of Aligarh) and Q.A. Nanowtawi (founder of Deoband) had studied at the madrasa in Delhi founded by Shah Abdul Aziz (Son of Shah Wali-ul-Uah).

similarity, which needs to be addressed here and is quite important. Both were the expression of the decaying feudal class that somehow wanted to cling to power. While Aligarh sought to do it through modern Western education, Deoband tried to do it through being masters of the 'community' (which reminds us of the notion of *batini* or inner caliphate advocated by Shah Wali-ul-llah.

The initial impetus for founding the Madrasa came from the same class that had financed the Aligarh College. It is important, therefore, not to see them as two different poles, but as unified in its aims. The difference was only in the way in which the 'community' had to be represented and imagined. It also seems plausible that both of them carved their own spheres of influence. Thus, while Aligarh appealed to the urban and newly emerging middle class of Muslims, Deoband appealed more to the rural and lower sections of Muslim. However, this carving of separate spheres was not smooth. For in the sphere of Deobandi madrasas, there were parallel contestations from Barelwis and Ahl-i-Hadith - a phenomenon about which we shall talk later. For the time being, let us look at the madrasa at Deoband.

The New Madrasas: Deoband as an Example

The Madrasa at Deoband, founded in 1867, was not an innovation in itself such educational institutions had existed before through the centuries. What was indeed novel was its curriculum and organization and through that what social purpose such an

education was supposed to serve. Its founders, emulating the British bureaucratic style for educational institution, in fact eschewed the informal pattern of education that was earlier practiced. The school was conceived of as a distinct institution, not relegated to a wing of a mosque or home and dependent upon the parent institution. As soon as possible, it acquired classrooms and a central library. It was run by a professional staff, and its students were admitted for a fixed course of study and required to take examinations for which prizes were awarded at a yearly convocation. Gradually an informal system of affiliated madrasas emerged. Many of these madrasas were ultimately staffed by the school's own graduates, and the students were examined by visiting Deobandis. Financially, the school was wholly dependent on public contributions, mostly in the form of annual pledges, not on fixed holdings of wakf or pious endowments contributed by noble patrons. The school was, in fact, so unusual that the annual printed report, itself an innovation, made continuing efforts to explain the organization of the novel system (Metcalf, 1982).

In older schools like the Firangi Mahal[9] of Lucknow, family members taught students in their own homes or in a corner of a mosque. There was no central library, no course required of each student, no series of examinations. A student would seek out a

[9] Firangi Mahal madrasa was founded at the turn of eighteenth century, by a family of religious learning, long supported by Mughal court, in Lucknow. It prepared legal and religious personell for for the Mughal court and later for Oudh kingdom. The famous curriculum, *dars-i-nizami* was prepared by Mulla Nizamuddin at this madrasa. The madras depended largely on the patronage of the princely courts. This was in stark contrast to the founding principle of Deoband madrasa which solely depended on ordinary Muslims.

teacher and receive a certificate (called *Sanad*) listing the books he had read, then move on to another teacher or return home. The *ulema* in such a setting depended primarily on revenue from their endowments and on the largesse of princes whose courts they graced and for whom they trained government servants. Such *ulema* were part of the larger structure of a `Muslim' state (Mujeeb, 1969; Ahmad, 1999).

The Deobandi *ulema* in contrast could not depend on a court to provide a framework of patronage or to take responsibility of Muslim Law and education. They themselves would serve the daily legal and spiritual needs of their fellow Muslims, training *ulema* in schools modeled on a variety of British institutions whose effectiveness they had witnessed (Metcalf, 1982). Thus they eschewed kin ties and instituted a system of popular financing. One of the leading founders, Maulana Muhammad Qasim enunciated eight principles dealing with institutional characteristics. Five of these principles had to do with the new system of financing (Hasmi, 1985). They stressed the obligation of all associated with the school to encourage donations of cash and food. They also pointed out the spiritual advantage of poverty in fostering the unity sought in the principles. The five principles were as follows:

- The workers of the madrasa should, as best they can, keep in view the increase of donations and should encourage others to share the same concern.

- The well wishers of the madrasa should always make efforts to secure the provision of food for the students; indeed they should try to increase the food.
- As long as the madrasa has no fixed source of income, it will, God willing, operate as desired. And if it gains any fixed income, like jagir holdings, factories, trading interests, or pledges from nobles, then the madrasa will loose the fear and hope that inspire submission to God and will loose His hidden help for matters of income...let there be a sort of deprivation.
- The participation of the government and wealthy is harmful.
- The contributions of those who expect no fame from such gifts are a source of blessing.

This system of popular financing arose in part because the founders had no option but to find an alternative to the increasingly insecure princely grants. Muslim princes of states such as Hyderabad, Bhopal and Rampur patronized learning as did large landlords in the United Provinces. But such contributions could never be as substantial as those of the days of Mughal rule, nor could they be as certain in a period of economic, social and administrative flux. Nor were the *ulema* willing to accept British grants-in-aid, for such help was precarious and

carried with it the taint of its non-Muslim source. Instead, they created a network of donors who formed a base not only for financial support but also for the dissemination of their teachings. This point needs to be grasped because it was this network which was fundamental in the ways the madrasas would later define the community. This novel tool - the reliance on the masses/popular support - was something that had not existed in the past. This tool was not just the search for an alternative patron.[10] Rather it was also a tool for hegemony and control over the masses. And its success is attested by the fact it becomes a model for all new religious schools that were to dot various towns of North India.

The aspect of hegemony and control becomes even clearer when we probe the curriculum of Deoband. Various writers have commented upon the relationship between knowledge and control (Apple, 1985; Focault, 1980). Curriculum as the embodiment of a kind of knowledge seeks to perpetuate what it assumes to be `true'. Societal discourse mediates its power and control through institutions and elites `who are charged with saying what counts as true' (Focault, 1980). In this case, the control rests which the *ulema* that define what counts as truth. For the Deobandi *ulema*, this truth resided in the Quran and *hadith*. The school taught the *Dars-e-Nizami*, the curriculum evolved in the Firangi Mahal during the 18th century. The Deobandis, however, reversed the emphasis on `rational' studies in favour of an emphasis on *hadith* that was to be the basis of their

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10. As seems to be suggested by Metcalf, *Islamic Revival,* pp.96-98.

popular teaching. Undoubtedly, this was the influence of the writings of Shah Wali-ullah. They greatly expanded the offerings of the `nizami' curriculum that required only one text of selection from the *Hadith*. Instead, they included in their entirety the six classical collections of the precedents of the Prophet (Metcalf, 1982; Ahmad, 1999; Faruqui, 1963). However, to argue that this stress on *hadith* was not based on opposition to or rejection of the rational sciences, but on the plea that the traditional learning was on the verge of extinction in India, is to miss the social context in which *hadith* gained importance.[11]

The social context here was not only the colonial presence but also the syncretic tendencies within Indian Islam. It was precisely to arrest this syncretic tendency that the *ulema* went back to the pristine purity of Quran and *hadith*. With the Mughal State no longer there, the *ulema's* power would solely depend upon the influence that they would yield over the masses. But, for this, the masses had to be cleansed of all the fuzzy identities that they had and had to be made into personally responsible and `scriptural Muslims'.[12] The teaching of *Hadith* was therefore designed to create personally responsible Muslims. And it was precisely for this reason that study of mysticism did not find a place in the curriculum (Ahmad, 1999). This also becomes clear when we see that the Deobandis' second specialty, *`fiqh'*, was of similar importance for popular

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11 As seems to be suggested by Ahmed and Grunebaum, 1970, pp.6.

12 The term 'scripturalist Muslims' is used by Clifford Geertz to denote Muslims who have repudiated their customary way of life in favour of more fixed way of life as enunciated in the Quran and the hadith.

teaching, since they stressed correct performance of ritual and ceremonial duties (Metcalf, 1982).

There was actual opposition, led by Rashid Ahmad Gangoh, to teaching the rational sciences of logic, philosophy and jurisprudence at all. These subjects were `rational' in the sense that they represented the exercise of men's minds on the materials provided by the revealed sources. As such he felt they were trivial in comparison to the basic texts, and that the only merit in studying them was the preparation for their refutation. More importantly, the school continued the use of Urdu, not Persian, as medium of instruction, and it thus shared in the general trend of the times toward the development of the modern vernaculars. Students came from places as distant as Afghanistan and Chittagong, Patna and Madras, but all were to return with a common language in Urdu. Even those who were from North India often spoke a dialect in their homes, and now acquired a standard form of the language. Deoband was therefore instrumental in establishing Urdu as the language of communication among the Muslims of India. Such a change was obviously central to enhanced bonds among the *ulema* and between them and their followers (Metcalf, 1982). However, the point should not be missed that it was also instrumental in the creation of the community and for the specific purpose of ideological dissemination through such publications as pamphlets and fatwas. Urdu as the link language not only bound an otherwise multilingual `community', but it was also helpful to disseminate ideologies which otherwise would

not have been possible. These ideologies were disseminated through various printed fatwas. Let us therefore look at the `fatwas' in order to understand what they were aimed at.

The Ideological Dissemination: The Domain of Fatwas

The printed collection of fatwas of the late nineteenth century suggest that the influence of the *ulema* was primarily limited to matters of beliefs, rituals and relations to other religions groups. The fatwas reflect the fact that religious leaders had, willy-nilly, restricted the realm in which they gave guidance. The *ulema* ignored such issues as those related to court procedure, conduct of state and issues cognizable under British law (Cohn, 1961). Rather they focused on belief and ritual, which they explored with remarkable depth and range. Indeed, in that sense the fatwa reflected not a narrowing of concerns but an expansion, for they treated issues earlier fatwas had not even considered (Metcalf, 1982). They weighed customs and beliefs related to Sufism, examining them and other issues in order to identify `bidat' (innovations antithetical to prophetic tradition). Their concern with innovation was thus limited to a narrow but a highly valued domain. It was this choice of focus, coupled with a concern for identifying a scriptural standard, that gave the Deobandi fatwa their special characteristics. As suggested by Metcalf (1982), the fatwa in general affected three underlying principles:

- To revive lapsed practices such as undertaking the hajj and permitting widows to remarry;
- To avoid holidays like the `maulud' of Prophet, the `urs' of the saints, etc[13].
- To prevent optional practices being made obligatory; such as distribution of sweets upon the completion of reading of the Quran.

On this foundation the Deobandis build, point by point, to convey to their followers the conviction that they confirmed to the "*sunnat*"[14]. Undoubtedly, the fatwa also had reformist content such as those insisting on widow remarriage. But to emphasize only this aspect[15] is to downplay other strands such as the purging of Hindu dress codes, popular customs etc. deemed to be Hindu influence on Islam. Moreover, the fatwas were also an example of how madrasas reached out to the masses. Another interesting point is that they were also debates that were intra-Islam. Thus, a large

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[13] Maulud means the anniversy of Prophet Muhammad's birth which was celebrated in much of India; urs means 'marriage' with God upon the death of a saint and also the festival commemorating that date held on the tomb. The Deobandis interpreted the '*sunnat*' as forbidding celebrations at birth or mourning at death because all were considered as God's will. Hence, both maulud and urs were pronounced by them as 'bidat'.

[14] Sunnat means the 'way' or 'path' of the prophet Muhammad, as known to Muslims through the hadith literature. Everything the Prophet is reported to have said, done, or advised others to do, is thus part of his sunnat.

[15] As suggested by Metcalf, 1982..

number of Deobandi fatwas were against the Ahl-i-Hadith and Barelwis who were their rivals for hegemonic control over the masses.

Some fatwas were also indicative of Islamic supremacy over the British. However, the small number of these fatwas indicates the reluctance of the *ulema* to get into any kind of confrontation with the British State. The purge of 1857 was still afresh in their memory. They thus curved their own area of influence over which they sought mastery and it was an exercise in which they were in contestation with other `movements of renewal' such as the Ahl-i-hadith and Barelwis (Sanyal, 1999). The point to be noted therefore is that Deobandis were not alone in utilizing this kind of education for the furtherance of their ideology. Rather, there were parallel contestation with the Ahl-i-Hadith and Barelwis who had their own madrasas. Madrasas, therefore, came to be used as institutional bases for ideological dissemination. All these *`maslaks'* (denominations) within Indian Islam were therefore engaged in perpetuating their own `community'. It is only in the face of external threat such as those of countering the Hindu images, that they were united.

However, in perpetuating this community the *ulema* could not negate their own social milieu. Rather they actively stressed the fact that they were ashrafs and hence special responsibility towards the ordinary Muslims. Like other of the ashrafs, the *ulema* claimed descent from outside India: as Sayyids, the descendants of the Prophet himself; as Shaikhs, the offspring of the Prophets companion and as Mughal and Pathans, the

descendants of the immigrant rulers and settlers of medieval India. They shared the ideology that these four hierarchically ordered groups or `qaum'[16] were the social elite, and they guarded this status by strict endogamy. They held themselves superior to indigenous converts, particularly those of low occupational castes. The claim to foreign descent in the case of the *ulema* enhanced their religious authority, for it implied proximity to the Prophet. Religious leadership was one of the specific responsibilities of the newly defined ashraf, for, as Mahammad Qasim wrote in the proceedings of the Deoband School, "God entrusted religions learning to these four qaums" (quoted in Metcalf, 1982: 239).

It were precisely these four qaum(s) who were preponderantly the donors of new madrasas during the colonial period. Though they were the people most likely to be in a financial position to make contribution, yet these were also the people who were particularly affected by the changes of the period: the presence of non-Muslim rules, new patterns of recruitment to government service, the economic consequences of colonial rule. It was this class which had also financed the `secular' institution of Aligarh; it was also this declining, embattled landed and service elite which financed

[16] In the specific case of India, qaum would translate as caste, though the ulema would seek to differentiate it from the Hindu caste system. Caste as such has no religious legitimacy within Islam. In India, however, a primary distinction arose between the ashrafs(those who came frm outside) and the ajlaf(the indegenous converts to Islam, generally from lower castes). Within the ashrafs the four important qaum/castes are the Sayyids, Shaikhs, Pathans and Mughals. These collectively considered themselves superior to the ajlafs.

Deoband and other madrasas of the time, yet, what about the non-ashrafs who were attracted to this kind of education?

The answer to this problem may be found in the process of `ashrafisation' or `islamisation'.[17] Adherence to the `great tradition' of Islam was a mark of being ashraf. Those who wanted to improve their status needed not only to improve their economic position but to also acquire such hallmarks of ashraf behavior as refined language capable of subtle social distinctions and some degree of religious learning and interest in patronizing religious establishment. These humble donors to the madrasas were probably, in large parts, clients and subordinates of ashraf donors. Some may have had direct relation to the *ulema* as well (through the institution of discipleship). The new madrasas therefore can be viewed as sites of interaction between the ashraf and non-ashraf. For the non-ashraf it meant additional merit for the other world. For the *ulema* ashraf, apart from merit, it also meant defining the Muslims as `community' - purged of all caste based and customary distinction. The presence of the non-ashraf was of great importance to the *ulema*, who sought to speak for all Muslims and increasingly had close contacts with Muslims of all the classes and castes.

Thus, we see that psychological, social and political milieu of the day together encouraged religious revitalization among the Muslim ashraf. From them that

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[17]As a parallel to Sanskritization in Hindus, ashrafization can be understood as a movement of lower caste Muslim groups to way of life the high caste ashrafs.

revitalization spread to all classes of Muslims who took pride in the *ulema* for their learning, their independence from government and their accessibility to all Muslims. This concern of the religious elite for the faith of the humble reflected new and significant changes in Indian Muslim society of the nineteenth century. Madrasas had a role to play in this. For it not only defined the community by being directly in contact with the ordinary Muslims through the fatwas; but also by producing *ulema* who would perpetuate the ideology of ` true Islam'. More importantly, they would be the sole authority as to pronounce on what counts as `true Islam' and what is `*bidat*' or innovation.

Colonialism, Public Arenas and the Madrasas

Contrary to popular perception which sees colonial period as the period of all round decay, it is argued here, that, in fact, the flowering of intellectual opinions among the various `*maslaks*' (Deobandis, Barelwis, Ahl-i-Hadith, etc.) could not have been imagined in an earlier period. The emergence of `public sphere' during colonialism provided the space within which most of the debates took place (Gilmartin, 1991). Recently, Freitag (1989), has used the concept of 'public arenas' to establish a link between the British state and identity formation. She argues that rituals like *Muharram,* etc. became an alternative world in which people made conscious choices about self-definition that enabled them to create a new found sense of community. Thus, what

people said and did in the public arena, in the colonial state was intrinsic to the process of community formation. Based on shared religious and cultural concerns, in the early decades of the twentieth century, the Muslim community mobilized around issues like defense of mosques to come together on a larger national scale. The new madrasas need to be understood as supplying discourses for this public sphere as well as for `personal/private' sphere. The Muslim `community' as a homogenous entity seems to have been imagined within this public sphere. However, this public sphere as a discursive space was open to all and hence ideologies of all the `maslaks' tried to perpetuate their own community. It has been argued that only in the face of external threat, that there was identification with an all-India Muslim identity. Moreover, a lot of this imagination took place through print. Benedict Anderson (1983), has noted the importance of print technology in furthering community formation in the late nineteenth century. In 'Imagined Communities', Anderson argues that print capitalism contributed powerfully to the growth of nationalism in colonised countries. Sanyal (1999), who brings out the impact of written word on the Barelwi identity formation has recently articulated this point.

However, the impact of the medium of print on Muslim society meant that the *ulema's* interpretation of religion can be challenged or even ignored by those who can have independent access to religious texts. Indian Muslim society saw the emergence, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of what some scholars have characterized

as the new religious intellectuals. These were the individuals whose understanding of Islam was not derived from the *ulema* or from formal education in madrasa and who more often than not were skeptical of the usefulness of the *ulema* and their institutions of learning. It is not surprising therefore that the *ulema* should seek to preserve their autonomy from bureaucratic reform committees as well as from the new religious intellectuals. To do so entails for them defining religion as a distinct sphere and claiming to be its exclusive guardians and representatives.

That is why the colonial period assumes such importance in our discussion on the madrasa. For it was during this period that that the distinction between the private and the personal sphere arose. This was reflected in the curriculum of deoband and other madrasas of the time which banished all kinds of maqulat studies such as geometry, philosophy, etc. We have already noted in a previous section that such categorization did not exist in the medieval period. This categorization is eminently modern and a specific creation of colonialism. Moreover, the rational of the madrasas as occupying the purely religious sphere also does not have any precedence in the medieval times. Colonialism also created the public sphere where most of the debates took place. This public sphere was a space of competing discourses. This discursive space should be located/understood within the overall context of the colonial times. For our purposes, it should be related with what we have earlier termed as Islamisation. According to

Geertz, islamization should be viewed as a movement to make Islam "a universal, in theory standardized and essentially unchangeable and usually well integrated system of ritual and beliefs...not merely as a religion but a complete and comprehensive way of life", (1971:14). Thus it has been a predominantly sociopolitical and economic struggle, but it emerges from the acceptance and interpretation of revealed knowledge as appropriate knowledge. Education in this context plays a pivotal role in reproducing Islamic culture and promoting the ideological goals of Islamisation.

The transformation of societal discourse sought by Islamisation would mean fundamental changes in power structure and social control that regulate and legitimize knowledge and meaning in society. Each society, according to Foucault, has its regime of truth, "its general politics of truth, that is, the type of discourse it accepts and makes function as true", (1980:131). Society is an arena for a struggle to establish and pass on a regime of truth and develop techniques and procedures to inculcate and transmit values considered being true. Societal discourse mediates its power and control through institutions and elite "who are charged with saying what counts as true", (Focault, 1982: 101). Hence, the creation of educational institutions like madrasas is part of the power struggle to establish, expand and sustain a particular notion of truth through control over the power of legitimacy. Educational sites are centrally involved in the propagation, selective dissemination and social appropriation

of discourses. No doubt, madrasas are engaged in the propagation of hegemonic discourses, but these discourses are in competition with each other as there are various ideologically oriented madrasas. Madrasas thus are not a monolithic category but they seek to perpetuate their own version of a monolithic community.

Chapter 3: Imagining a Community

The preceding chapter delineated the conditions under which the colonial madrasas emerged. It argued that its foundations were different from that of the medieval madrasas. The concern for the ordinary Muslims was altogether absent during the medieval period. It has already been stated that medieval madrasas catered only to the upper class Muslims and Hindus. It also delineated the ways in which the ulema carved out space for itself in civil society by establishing a network of madrasas. Central to this was the way in which the colonial state interacted with the Indian society. It was argued that citizens' rights were altogether absent from the consciousness of the colonial masters. Rather they interacted with communities. In the process the elite within the community was able to define what the community meant and framed its rules and regulations.

This chapter relocates the configurations of spaces between state and community after Independence. It argues that post-colonial imagination of the community has been a carry over from the colonial times. As such, no radical departure was initiated at the attainment of Independence in so far as Muslim community was looked upon. It was essentially seen as a homogeneous religious block without any internal differentiation based on caste or class. Such a conception of Muslim community reinforced the legitimacy of the ulema within the Muslim society, thereby hindering the process of democratisation. By taking the example of Muslim Personal Law, it is demonstrated that though the Muslim community resisted the efforts of the state to initiate changes in the private domain yet, at the same time, they looked at the state for support. The state on its

part has also been reluctant to initiate any change in this sphere. All this has resulted in the reification of the community. Therefore, the concept of the community is viewed as a problematic. The understanding of state-community relationship has important bearing on the madarsas system. The madrasas being institutions in private realm get the uncritical recognition of the state. On the other hand, the madrasas engage in their hegemonic representation of the Muslim masses. Thus, both the discourses- of the state and of the madrasas- fit together, leaving very little space for the articulation of other important categories of caste, class, gender and individual dissent which constitute the focus of the next chapter.

Post-colonial Predicament

Achieving Independence in 1947, India inherited the contemporary understanding and commitment to religious liberty; namely, mistrust of state regulation or control over religion and a commitment to non-discrimination between religions. It is sometimes argued that religious tolerance was an intrinsic feature of Indian society. According to this view, people of different religious persuasions stayed on this land, over time, lived in harmony with the Hindu population. There is certainly no doubt that rulers from different nations conquered India, settled here and practiced their own religions. It is also true that several religions co-existed in India in reasonable harmony and communities enjoyed considerable freedom to observe their own separate beliefs. However, religious freedom of this sort did not usually grant equality to all religions in the public domain. The religion of the ruler always had a special, if not higher, status. It received state patronage and the 'other' could be tolerated so long as it did not

challenge the supremacy. But within the framework of democracy, particularly in the twentieth century, religious freedom was postulated to mean equality of all religions in the public domain. That is, hierarchy and dominance of one group was displaced to make room for tolerance and equality. The framers of the Indian Constitution were aware of this distinction and made equality between religious groups the basis of religious tolerance in India (Bhambhri, 1988). They ensured that rights of citizenship are granted to all individuals and no one is discriminated against on accord of his/her religious beliefs. In addition, they made religious freedom a fundamental individual right.

The task before India was a difficult one. With Independence came partition on the basis of religion. In an environment charged with communal passion and violence, it was necessary to reaffirm the commitment to religious liberty. Before Independence, the Indian National Congress in its 1931 Karachi session proclaimed that a free India would have no state religion. It would respect all relig.ons and give equal liberty to members of all faith. The pledge had to be redeemed in the midst of existing communal divide. Religious minorities, particularly Muslims who had chosen to remain in India, had to be reassured that the state would recognise freedom of religion as a fundamental democratic right of the people of India. In addition to this right, the Constitution also guaranteed the cultural and educational Rights of the minorities. Central to this granting of group rights was the way in which state assumed the foundations of Muslim community.

State and Muslims

The relationship of minorities with the state is generally one of contradiction. Since the state frequently expresses the cultural orientations of the majority, minority communities view the state with suspicion. They demand special privileges to curtail the power of the state and to protect their own autonomy. However, in India the Muslim minority perceived the state in a dual light (Mahajan, 1998). On the one hand, they see the state as an instrument of the cultural homogenisation, and on the other, they perceived it a potential ally. Viewing themselves as vulnerable population, the Muslim community feels that it is dependent upon the state for the protection of their life and property. Hence, they appeal to its neutrality and seek special facilities from it. Thus, the Muslim community does not merely claim the right to establish educational institutions to preserve its culture, rather they ask the state that when there is a sizable linguistic minority in the region, state run educational institutions should provide instructions even in the language of the minority.

Dualism of this kind was apparent even in the Constituent Assembly. Here, against the homogenising tendency of the state, religious minorities sought the protection of their own cultural practices. At the same time they favoured and supported the idea of a secular state, as it would be neutral between different religious doctrines and ways of life. These perceptions have continued in the post-Independence era. In situations of communal tension and violence, Muslims rely upon the resources of the state for their protection. Even right-wing groups like *Jamat-e-Islami* appeal to the state. Unlike its counterpart in Pakistan, the Jamat in India supports the idea of a secular state for its 'utilitarian expediency'.

Interestingly enough, Muslims do not favour a state that is indifferent to their religious and cultural demands. Although they resist the intervention of the state in their cultural and religious life and are opposed to a strong alliance between the state and any one religion, yet, they do not accept complete silence on religious concerns.

What is perhaps equally important is that Muslims have sought the assistance of the state for its institution by appealing to the benevolence of the state (Mahmood, 1991). The state too has accepted this role and responded sympathetically by granting small concessions and facilities to Muslims and their institutions. The modernisation of the madrasas programme launched by Human Resource Development Ministry serves as a noteworthy example. Thus the state is not always perceived as an enemy. In fact, at times it is represented as a benevolent and neutral patriarch. In western countries, the conflict between minority community and the state is predicated on the close association between the majority community and the state. Minorities challenge the dominance and hegemony of the majority by questioning the policy of the state. In India, since the cultural rights of the minorities were conceded at the outset, opposition to the state was not integral to their nature.

Thus the Muslim community in India depend upon the state for the protection of their basic rights. At the same time, in the sphere of social and cultural life, they remain opposed to any intervention by the state. Since homogenisation and integration are only the desired ideals that have yet to be realised by the nation-state, what is resisted vehemently is the probable intervention of the state in the practises of the community. In other words, what is

defended is the autonomy of the community, and minority rights are seen as instruments of protecting and realising that ideal. In the context of Muslims, a noteworthy example has been the issue of the Muslim Personal Law. Any attempt by the state to interfere in the Muslim Personal Law has met with vehement resistance by the Muslims. A discussion on this issue would not be out of place since it throws light on the relationship between minority identity and the state as well as the formation of the Muslim community identity.

The state has virtually no attempt to reform Muslim Personal Law; in fact it has consistently adopted a policy of non-interference. In this, the post-colonial state, while professing secularism, nevertheless, responded to the Muslim minority community in much the same way as the erstwhile colonial state with its policy of non-interference in the domestic and religious affairs of its subjects (Zoya Hasan, 1989). Muslim Personal Law was indeed codified in 1937 but within the framework of the *Shariat*, and Muslim strongly opposed any further change or attempt by the state to bring about reform within it.

The *Jamiat-al-Ulema-i-Hind* took the lead in opposing changes in personal law stressing the need for safeguarding the sanctity of the Shariat, which became not only a symbol for representing Muslim identity, but the basis for claims to establish a status for the community commensurate with its substantial minority population. A powerful section of Muslim leadership, pre and post-Independence, has consistently tried to politicise religion as a means of safeguarding the community's socio-religious identity. Gail Minault (1982), has pointed out that the political movement among Muslims in 1920s used religion and cultural symbols which were relevant to all strata of society. This was done deliberately to

foster unity among 'believers' and to enhance their bargaining position in the constitutional wrangling. In the post-Independence period, this symbolism has come to rest entirely on the Muslim Personal Law.

The Directive Principles of the State Policy, however, expected the state to endeavour to secure a uniform civil code for its citizens. Nehru believed that such a code was inevitable but was reluctant to press the issue in the difficult circumstances after partition (Baird, 1981). The opposition of the Muslim members of the Constituent Assembly to it, on the ground, compounded his government's hesitation that the Islamic community, rather than the state, should initiate legal change. 'Secularism will become meaningless if Parliament discusses a common civil code applicable to Muslims as well as other communities and gets it passed with the help of non-Muslim votes. Indeed Muslims, being in a minority, their representatives in Parliament cannot stop the passage of any Bill,' observed Asad Madani, then President of *Jamiat-al-Ulema-i-Hind* (quoted in Mushirul Haque, 1982:13). The essence of this objection lay in the claim that only the ulema are competent to approve reform measures.[1] In this imagination of the community, the Muslims constituted a distinct community on the basis of fixed religious principles and doctrines. The state accepted this perception and construction of the community and, in effect, admitted that it could not amend the laws of the Muslims.

The state's perception of the Muslim community was again established during the Shah Bano controversy. The Supreme Court ruled that a Muslim

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[1]According to Faruqui (1963), Jamiat-al-ulama-i-Hind was founded in 1919 for "exclusive purpose of safeguarding the *Shariat*."

woman unable to maintain herself was entitled to take recourse to section 125 of the criminal Procedure Code that requires husbands with sufficient means to pay maintenance to support themselves. Its judgement was based on the understanding that Muslim Personal Law, which limits the husband's liability to provide maintenance for the period of *iddat* does not deal with a situation of destitution, the prime concern of the provision of the Criminal Procedure Code (Zoya Hasan, 1989).

The judgement evoked widespread reaction. The campaign spread through madrasas, mosques, local community leaders and newspapers who repeatedly stressed the apprehension that *sharia* was in danger. Large number of Muslims considered it an assault on the *shariat*, which in their opinion makes no provision of maintenance in the event of divorce. They took to the streets to register their protest and accused the Supreme Court of trespassing on their domain. The ulema condemned the judgement as an attempt to undermine the *shariat*. The conservati /e reaction was most pronounced in opposing the reference to Article 44 of the Indian Constitution, which provides that the state shall endeavour to secure for its citizens a uniform civil code.

By bringing this up the judgement broadened the scope of the debate from an interpretation of a precise point of law to a general consideration of the validity of Muslim Personal Law. For many Muslims this was an infringement of the covenant of composite nationalism and secularism, which binds different communities together. The basic argument in opposing a uniform civil code has remained virtually unaltered and has been put forward most clearly in the *Jamiat-al- Ulema's* position that 'the demand is tantamount to a fundamental departure

from the position that, in the present day situation where the Muslim community is deeply entangled in a struggle for the search and safeguard of its self-identity, it is only the personal law that can be a permanent guarantee for its preservation' (Faruqui, 1983:9). The Muslim Personal Law therefore became a symbol that was used by the Muslim elite to bargain with the state.

We all know that the state succumbed to fundamentalist pressures. Liberal and progressive opinion was ignored; allowing the ulema to appropriate the task of defining the overarching concerns and interests of Muslims. Admittedly, the objectives of the Muslims divines were to defend the *shariat* and resist legislation that would, in their perception, lead to a change in the divinely ordained laws. However, interpretations of the ulema are neither final nor irrevocable; there were other trends and interpretations, which the state chose to ignore. This was partly because the state shared the underlying assumption that Muslims are a homogenous religious community and that the theologians are its sole spokesmen. On the other hand, ideology, organisation and mobilization by the ulema sought to homogenize the community on the contested site of Muslim-ness.

What is often ignored in the discussion of Muslim community identity is that Muslims are not a homogenous entity. They do not exist in Indian society as separate and isolated entities; they operate within the social structure as segments of a composite social framework. Equally significant is the tendency towards pluralism in matters pertaining to the *shariat.* We have already seen in the previous chapter how the various madrasas impart denominational identities rather than a single Muslim identity. As Maxime Rodinson observed, 'one is not dealing with Islam, a single coherent doctrine, but with several ideologies, several

Islams'(1980:46). Similarly Akeel Bilgrami (1993), emphasises the diversity and differentiation in the Islamic community and notes that interpretations and practises are determined by particular historical and cultural contexts. Indian Islam is a product of the circumstances in which it emerged and crystallized and, in the process, it became necessary to adapt to indigenous environment. However, for the ulema who were primarily concerned with Islamic norm, the maintenance of Muslim identity in a secular society required an increasing emphasis on the acceptance of these norms. Adherence to the *shariat* becomes for them the central symbol for the preservation of Muslim identity and an idiom for integration. This brings us to the very important question of who speaks on behalf of the community.

Community and its Reification

It has been already stated the Muslim community is internally heterogeneous. There are contestations within the community identity; a fact brought out in the previous chapter. It was noted that Deoband was in contestation with other denominations such as Barelwis and Ahl-i-Hadith. Even the madrasa system, which apparently seems to impart a monolithic community identity, ends up imparting a denominational identity. The Muslim identity is not exempt from the possibility of further splintering. However, internal division of this nature are suppressed when a community is continuously marginalized (Mahajan, 1998).

Community rights in India have, at least indirectly, obstructed the pursuit of gender equality. As it was noted above, the Muslims are governed, in matters relating to family, inheritance, adoption, etc. by their personal law. Although

protection of Personal Law was not considered as the fundamental right of communities or its members, yet, the right to culture, granted to communities, has been used to advocate non-interference of the state in Personal Law of the communities. Religious and political leaders of the Muslim community, for instance, publicly opposed the suggestion of a uniform civil code, and the All India Muslim Convention in Delhi in 1970 wanted an assurance that no change would be made by the state in Muslim Personal Law (Mahmood, 1995). In so far as community personal laws are generally biased against women, the continuation of these laws has hindered the progress of ensuring gender equality for all sections of the population. Zoya Hasan has echoed similar views. She argues that "from the point of view of women the difficulty lies in the constant emphasis on the unity of community identity, defined in terms of family codes which restricts the articulation of gender interests within the terms of reference set by a specific identity discourse; whatever rights they might have achieved are thus sacrificed at the alter of Muslim identity" (1994: 63).

The way in which the state perceives the communities itself reifies community; in our case the Muslim community. It altogether negates the presence of castes and formation of classes within the Muslim community besides a failure to recognise gender differences. It assumes that the community is constituted by a distinct set of people who are clearly identifiable. Consequently, it attributed fixed and constant membership to the Muslim community. Indeed, the concept of community views the individual as the bearer of a determinate and unchanging identity. The Muslim community is, therefore, seen as the bearer of one single

identity. In fact, to give a single unitary form to the community the discourse of Muslims is supportive of those who speak of a true or pure Islam.

Further, the concept of community privileges the issue of representation. Thus, who speaks on behalf of the Muslim community becomes the core question in terms of which the validity and legitimacy of a democratic process is judged. Participation within the public sphere therefore gets linked to the question of authentic voice. Quite obviously, it is assumed that only the representatives of the community can legislate on issues that concern it and pronounce what is true. For the Muslim community, it has to be the ulema who are considered the authentic voice of the community. Their opinion becomes the most important on issues concerning the community.

We see that the principle of cultural autonomy granted by the constitution is pregnant with problems. On the one hand, in dealing with communities, it negates the individual as citizen; on the other hand, the state's conception of community has strengthened the hold of religious leaders particularly in the Muslim society. In most western countries, the question of cultural freedom was raised after gender and legal codes in almost all spheres of life had endorsed racial equality. Hence, in these countries, cultural autonomy could enhance cultural diversity without jeopardising the democratic principles. In contrast, in India cultural autonomy was ensured and protected before the principle of equality became the legally recognised norm of all social and political transactions. Consequently, here, the right to culture demanded by minorities becomes an obstacle in the path of democratisation. Culture came to be represented through the discourse of the ulema in the Muslim society. It was only a natural corollary to

this, that the madrasa which is a site for the social reproduction of *ulema*, would become the prized institution within the Muslim society. It also meant that the state would interact with the madrasas as it shares the conception that Muslims are primarily a religious community.

Chapter 4: A Repetition of Structures

The preceding chapter located the interaction between state and community in post-Independence India. It delineated the conditions under which the state had to negotiate with community identities rather than the individual. The conditions in the aftermath of the Partition were such that minorities such as Muslims had to be given the right of cultural and religious freedom. These rights were granted on a communitarian basis thus diminishing the space for individual dissent within the community. Such an approach towards the community also ossified the important articulations of caste, class and gender within the community. It was argued that this approach was a carry over from the earlier colonial state policy of non-interference in the religious affairs of a community. By focussing on the Muslim Personal Law, an attempt was made to understand the ways in which the Muslim elite tried to bargain with the state to hive off the private sphere as an arena of their own influence. The assumption of the state that the Muslims are primarily a religious community served to enhance their influence even more. The chapter problematized the concept of community and tried to show how it negated the articulations of caste, class and gender within the Muslim society. The madrasas as the institutional networks of the religious elite, played a leading role in the reification of the community.

This chapter shifts the focus from state policy to its actual application in the sphere of madrasa education. The state would obviously interact with the madrasas as they are perceived as institutions, which bind the community together. As such, it has generously granted funds and recognition to the

madrasas. The community's responses to these measures have been ambivalent. While a section has favoured state intervention, the other has been critical about it. However, both these responses have assumed that the madrasas provide the moral foundations of the Muslim community. The statist measures have not reached the entirety of the mdarasa system. There exists a very large number of madrasas who just impart religious education based on the Quran and the *Hadith,* financed solely by the community leaders.

The present chapter tries to understand the mechanism within one of these madrasas by the help of interviews. Though this madrasa is recognized by the Delhi state, yet it does not get any financial assistance. As such, it is purely run on communitarian efforts. The interview taken here raises questions of the integration of the knowledge system and thereby questions the statist measures at the madrasa reform. The chapter tries to show the similarity between the post-colonial and the colonial times in order to show the little change that has come about in the Muslim society and understands it as the fallout of the partition in which the Muslim middle class fled to Pakistan. It argues that in the post-colonial times there has been a unity of interest between the secular and the religious elite within the Muslim society. Madrasas can be seen as sites where their interests coincide which have further led to the reification of the community. However this does not mean that other articulations have altogether been absent from the Indian Muslim society. There have been challenges to the authority of the traditional elite. However, the state has only courted the religious elite in its attempt to define the community in a particular way.

The State and the Madrasa

After independence, extensive changes have come up in the organisation of the madrasaa and many of them have been brought under the direct supervision of the Madrasa Education Boards constituted by the state governments of Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh etc. Some traditional madrasas teaching the Quran and rituals of Islam through the medium of Urdu have agreed to modify their courses of instruction and introduce subjects such as Hindi regional language and arithmetic upto the elementary level. They have been provided grants. In the last fifty years, Madrasa Education Boards have come up in Assam, Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. In Bihar about 1600 madrasas are affiliated to the madrasa Board, in Orissa 78 are affiliated, in Uttar Pradesh 375 are affiliated and in West Bengal more than 400 are affiliated (Siddiqui, 1991). Unlike in these states madrasa in Assam are affiliated to the state board of Secondary and senior secondary Education. Similarly in Maharashtra some madrasas have got themselves recognised by the Maharashtra Board of Secondary Education and their students appear in the common Senior Secondary Certificate examination of the Board. The certificates by all the above mentioned Boards are recognized and enable the certificate holder to join modern school system also.

During 1981-1982, the Central Wakf Council conducted a piloted project for a socio-economic survey and development in Delhi. It recommended a grant of 50 percent of the cost of training teachers for the madrasa syllabus, devised by the council at various institutions. It also recommended bearing the cost of refresher courses at Jamia Milia Islamia, Delhi, for the existing teachers of madrasas to enable them to teach the new syllabus. Because of such surveys and

recommendations of different conferences, the Ministry of Education asked the state governments to introduce a government prescribed syllabus in government-aided madrasas.

Furthermore, the national Policy on Education (NPE, 1986), states the following regarding the education of the minorities in para 4.8 of the document: some minority groups are educationally deprived or backward and hence greater attention will be paid to these groups in the interest of equality and social justice. This will naturally include the constitutional guarantees given to them to establish and administer their own educational institutions and protection of their languages and culture. Simultaneously, objectivity will be reflected in the preparation of textbooks and in all school activities, and all possible measures will be taken to promote integration based on appreciation of common national goals and ideals, in conformity with the core curriculum (NPE, 1986). The on-going programmes of the department of Education in 1986-87 included imparting technical education through the community polytechnics in the areas of minority concentration.

The on-going programs of the Department of Education in 1986-87 were imparting of technical skills through community polytechnics in the minority concentration areas and a program for the evaluation of textbooks which was being undertaken by the NCERT. Both these programs extended upto 1989-90. Efforts were also made to teach science, mathematics, English on voluntary basis in institutions imparting instruction in traditional schools including madrasas. A survey of the availability of textbooks in Urdu, a survey of availability of training facilities for teachers in minority languages and measures to enhance such capacity wherever necessary was to be undertaken. Each state government had

formulated a policy for generating recognition of minority managed educational institutions. The NPE 1986, also stated that the state governments will adopt liberal policies for the reformed madrasa schemes. The minority educational institutions including maktabs and madrasas were to be associated with various Education Boards and Advisory Committees at various levels (NPE-POA, 1986).

Thus, it can be said that the state has taken measures to bring the Muslim traditional religious institutions, more particularly the madrasas, under the supervision of the Education Department or the Madrasa Boards constituted specially in Bihar, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. They have also tried to introduce secular courses in these madrasas wherever possible. However, many of these measures taken by the state had ambivalent repsonse for the Muslim community (Kaur, 1982). While the English-educated section welcomed the move, the class of ulemas saw in it a danger to their hegemonic position in Muslim society. Though rhetorically they voiced the need for reform in madrasa system, yet at the same time they were vociferously against any alliance with the state. The state intervention has been severely curtailed in the sphere of purely community-funded madrasas towards which we now turn.

The Community and Madrasa

Parallel to the initiative of the state to bring madrasas within the ambit of secular education, was the initiative of the community to start madrasas of their own. These madrasas were both purely religious schools as well as those that had a modicum of secular subjects within its curriculum. As a consequence post independent India saw a phenomenal growth of such madrasas. It is difficult to

produce any reliable figure of the actual number of madrasas in India inspite of some surveys having been conducted by organisations like Hamdard Education Society, Institute of Objective Studies, NCERT, etc. Still from the varying estimates on the number of madrasas provided by these organizations, one can deduce that there has been a marked increase in the number of madrasas in last forty years. For example, in 1969, according to Maqbool Ahmad, there were about 4000 big and small madrasas in the country (quoted in Siddiqui, 1991:75). In another Directory of Madrasas in India published by Centre for Promotion of Science established in 1985 at AMU, a comprehensive list of 2890 madrasas was produced (ibid). Later in 1990, Manzoor Ahmad claims that there are around 30,000 big and small madrasas functioning in the country (1992: 35). This vast variation in the figures of madrasas quoted by different sources indicates that so far no comprehensive and systematic effort has been made at any level to compile data on the number of different types of madrasas in India. However, they do indicate that in the last forty years, a large number of big and small madrasas, ascribing to one school or the other, have been founded on the Indian soil.

The community activity has also led to the opening up of some non-affiliating non-examining supervisory sort of voluntary organisations also. For example in Uttar Pradesh there is a *Deeni Talimi Council* which has about 15000 madrasas attached to it. These madrasas provide for education in Islamic and contemporary subjects and prepare students for admission to middle or upper primary schools. Similarly in Bihar there is a *Madarise-Islamic Council* which voluntarily oversees the activities of the attached madrasas in Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. There are about 13000 additional primary and secondary level madrasas

scattered in different parts of the country which operate either under the supervision of *Jamat-e-Islami-Hind* or on the lines of the curriculum developed by the *Jamat*. All these voluntary associations and the madrasas attached to them have to manage their expenses through raising funds from within the community.

The Community and Structural Repetition

The community pressure was also at work when the *Deeni Talimi Council* was formed in Uttar Pradesh for organising and opening *Deeni* Madrasas throughout the state. This educational movement which was started by Qazi Mohammed Adeel Abbasi deserves a detailed description because it throws up a number of observations. The main aim of the *Deeni Talimi Council* was to fight against what was perceived as Hindu based education being imparted invarious government institutions. According to Nomani (1960), it also aimed to achieve the following:

- To attach with each *Deeni* madrasa a primary school so that the students can also study those subjects taught in the government schools;
- A primary institute for religious education should be set up in each of the existing Islamic colleges and schools;
- As the Muslims have realised the necessity of Islamic schools, they must also realise the importance of establishing madrasas, in every locality right up to the village level, to provide basic knowledge in the fundamentals of Islam, teaching the Quran and a few secular subjects;
- Arrangement must be made in the mosques of the locality to impart deeni talim to those boys who prefer to go to government schools. It was further

proposed that Muslims alone must take up this task and that the Madrasas must not in any way be connected to the government at all.

In one of his important speeches in 1960, Md. Abbasi enunciated three important functions for the men, women and *ulema* (A. Hussain, 1960). While outlining the virtues of education, he emphasised that men and women both should help to inculcate Islamic virtues within the children. For this he laid special emphasis towards contributing in cash and kind for the sake of opening *Deeni* madrasa. He said that even the poorest must contribute part of his income for *Deeni talim*, if necessary by observing fast. The same remarks he reserved for the rich section of the community. But his high hopes were placed on the ulema for whom he said three things--firstly it was their duty to visit various villages and request the Muslims of the village to open *Deeni* madrasas; secondly, all their sermons must indicate the importance of religious education; and thirdly that if associated with any institutions they must send the teachers for training the district *Anjumans*[1]. It is also important to note that while concluding his remark, he again reiterated that the Deeni talimi Council must not be associated with educational department of the government (Abbasi, 1960).

The initial stages saw the activities of the Deeni talimi Council getting popular with the Muslim masses. Its success is evident from the fact that during the fifties and early sixties, it started a network of madrasas and their members exceeded more than 12000 (Shakir, 1972). Moreover, the Deeni Talimi Council also worked to provide for secular education to those students who came to these

[1] Anjuman means any kind of organization, in this case, it means voluntary organizations.

madrasas. The council thus made efforts to combine religious and secular education at the primary level for the Muslim children. Md. Abbasi while criticizing the government of Uttar Pradesh stated that Muslim children were provided with an education which was against their tradition. To make up for these shortcomings it was incumbent on Muslims to open Madrasas of their own. Quoting articles 29(1), 30(1) and 30(2) of the Indian Constitution, he stated that Muslims have right to work for the defense of their religion and open their maktabs and madrasas (Abbasi, 1960).

Another important community initiative has been the All India Muslim Conference, which is now over a hundred years old. In 1972, it included the following objective in its constitution: 'to get religious education introduced in schools, to make arrangements for the publication of religious literature in Urdu, Hindi and other Indian languages: to establish madrasas for the religious education of the Muslims and to subsidize them adequately' (quoted in Kaur, 1982:208).

All other conferences held at different places and at different times have all voiced the same concerns repeatedly. Among the important concerns, include the revival of madrasas, introduction of religious education in government schools, the availability of textbooks in Urdu and recognition of Muslim-managed institutions as minority institutions.

The similarities with the colonial times are too prominent to be glossed over. We see a desire in the colonial as well as the post-colonial state to introduce reform in the madras education system. However both the variations of state fail

to do so as the recipient of reforms are the state--funded madrasas, and not those who derive their legitimacy from the community. We also see a similarity as far as the community initiative is concerned. Two of the similarities are particularly striking. Firstly, the diktats of Adeel Abbassi to keep away from the state intrusions in the madrasas echoes, the eight-point programme that the founders of Deoband madras had enunciated. There also the *ulema* had pronounced that any truck with the State would be harmful for the Muslim community. Second striking similarity is that though opposed to state intervention, yet they have not taken any anti-state position. Their nature has been one of bargaining for the insularity of the private share. It is fair enough to say therefore that the conditions have replicated themselves for the Muslims in India. The structural repetition becomes clear when we see that the education agenda of 1860s has resurfaced again in the 1960s.

One reason for the repetition of structures has been the partition of the country, which took away the middle class of the Muslim community. In short, it took away the class, which was the creation of English-education and which by its very location put a premium on such an education. According to Javeed Alam (1999), a recent estimate by Center for the Study of Developing Societies indicates that even today only 4% of the total Muslim population in India can be counted as falling in the middle class category. It is the absence of this class, which explains the proliferation of madrasas. There is yet another point that merits attention here. It seems that there is unison of opinion between the secular elite and the religious elite as far as the revival of madrasas is concerned. For not only the *ulema* but also the urban-based, All India Muslim Conference also wants the revival of the madrasas. This presents a stark contrast to the colonial times when

both these elite were engaged in intra contestations for the hegemonic representation of the masses. Today that contest has ceased due to the changed conditions. This ceasure of contest is also due to the inadequate middle class formation within the Muslim community. Moreover the fledging Muslim middle also does not have the support of state that it had during the colonial times. In this kind of a situation, it seems that the Madrasa today has become a symbol as well as a tool for the peaceful coexistence of both kind of Muslim elite. And it is in the interest of the elite to represent the Muslim society as a monolithic religious block.

However, this representation of the community should not blind us to the internally heterogeneous character of the Muslim society. An average Muslim apart from his religious identity also is a bearer of linguistic, caste and other identities. As Rasheeduddin Khan puts it," if one is talking about the bond of Islam, then one should remember that the bond is quite tenuous, like all religious bonds, it acquires salience when threatened; otherwise, it operates more at a sentimental rather than substantive level, and for real life issues it gets weak if not cancelled, once it comes into contact with other more basic bonds of socio-economic cohesion" (R. Khan, 1978: 1512). In the Indian situation, certain changes took place in the Muslim leadership and organization after 1947, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Foremost among these was the dissolution of the Muslim League which was the all inclusive Muslim political organization in the country, and the migration of the leaders of the League to Pakistan, leaving the community, particularly in the North, demoralized and leaderless. The abolition of Zamindari substantially reduced the influence of former Muslim landlords. The

introduction of universal adult franchise brought the lower classes of Muslims, who had hitherto never been organized electorally, into the vortex of the arena of power.

The involvement of the lower classes of Muslims led to the emergence of the backward castes of Momin, composed mostly of weavers, artisans, craftsmen and other menial groups. The tremendous expansion of the handicraft industry in the sixties and seventies was a major factor in the growing prosperity of the Muslim artisan and craftsmen. The employment boom generated in the Gulf during this period also proved a great boon for the skilled and the semi-skilled Muslim workers in particular. Thus, it is clear that in the process of social and economic change, while some sections of the Muslim community were adversely affected, other sections benefited.

Though initially the leadership belonging to this neo elite group of weavers, artisans and craftsmen could not effectively assert their interests, they gradually began to seek a new role in the social and political life commensurate with their economic prosperity. The persistent attempts of the traditional Muslim upper caste elite, to mobilise Muslim opinion around the old demands of Urdu, Muslim Personal Law and the Aligarh Muslim University in the late sixties and seventies increasingly began to be seen by the neo-elite as issues not very relevant to their circumstances. There was pressure to include more concrete economic demands which would suit the interests of the emerging classes. In fact the Muslim Convention at Lucknow in 1980 broke up primarily because the neo-elite rejected the demands of preservation of Muslim Personal Law, Urdu, etc. as quite irrelevant to their immediate needs, and stressed the need to include more pressing

economic demands, namely more facilities like sheds and looms for craftsmen, etc. (Aslam, 1989).

Thus, we see that a process of secularization was at work within Muslim society. However the state chooses to ignore the internal plurality and seeks to represent the community as a monolith. This is in the interest of the ulema who also represent the community as a monolithic religious entity. The madrasas represent this unity of interest between the state and a particular image of the Muslim community.

In this situation, the madrasas are multiplying. And one type called the *Deeni Madaris* more than the others. True that the state has attempted secularising them through various measures, but as indicated earlier that only forms a very small proportion of the madrasas structure in India. It is the *Deeni* madrasas that really forms the netwoks of community, that engage in hegemonic leadership and which seeks to represent the community in its own ways. It is but appropriate to turn to these madrasas.

Kuldip Kaur (1982), suggests that these madarsas are the better centres of learning as compared to the state funded ones. Solely run on community efforts they help in increasing literacy levels among Muslims. However, they are also the ones who are the most resistant to any innovation in the curriculum. The curriculum of these madrasas can broadly be divided into the *Dars-e-Nizami,* Deoband and Nadwa. They differ along the lines of fiqh. Shia and Sunni have different madarsas where books on fiqh, exegesis and hadith are different from one another. Deoband and its affiliates have been the most vociferous opponents of any curriculum change.

The students of these madarsas generally come from poor economic backgrounds who perhaps have no other option. By sending the children to these madarsas the parents are at least secure that they will be fed, clothed and housed properly and that religious education would make them good human beings. The madarsas that have introduced newer courses attract students who are economically better off. And it is the students from these madarsas who get regular jobs, once outside the institution. The number of students is on the rise in these madarsas. Thus while they constituted only 8.2% of the total students of madarsas in 1989; it shot up to 24 percent in 1994.[2] After passing out of these madarsas few students take admission in universities in Arabia etc. But the majority of them go back to their family profession or start their own madarsas. All this indicates the utilitarian aspect of the madarsa vis-à-vis social mobility within Muslim society.

In these madarsas there is no tradition of teacher training. The situation can be gauged from the fact that in Bihar only 16 madrasas have trained teachers out of 114.The products of theses madarsas become teachers later. Recently training programs for the madarsa teachers have been started by NCERT and various SCERTs. Consequently, some madarsas on their own have started short-term teacher training courses. These teachers get very low pay. For example in Uttar Pradesh the average salary of a madarsa teacher is Rs.820 while in Delhi it amounts to Rs.946.

The pedagogical process within these madarsas has come up for a lot of criticism. The teaching is book centred and uninteresting lacking an empathetic

[2] The figures used here have been provided by Hamdard Education Survey.

understanding of the student's perception and ability. In what amounts to making Islam just a ritual, even the understanding of Arabic in these madarsas is found wanting. Added to this is the stress on memorisation of the texts without properly understanding them. What happens is that the book assumes an independent position vis-à-vis the student. This is an objectification of the student's agency. This complete lack of creativity forces the student to locate the world as immutable and fixed. Added to this is the complete surveillance of the student's behaviour within the madarsas. This constant authoritarian gaze does not give a pedagogical space or opportunities for introspection to the student.[3] Moreover there is lack of integration between the secular knowledge and the religious knowledge. This gets resolved in the sense that modern knowledge is considered as an aid for the further refinement of religious knowledge.

The Voice of the Subject

These aspects become clear in the interviews that were taken in a madrasa of Delhi. The interview was conducted in a madarsa in Delhi near Okhla. This is a registered Madarsa that does not receive any funding from the Delhi government. It is divided into an Urdu based primary section upto class fifth and an Arabic based section for higher studies. Students are provided with free boarding and food. It is run by a trust, which ironically enough, also runs a modern school for both boys and girls. Since a proper fieldwork was not intended for reasons outlined earlier, only five students were interviewed. These interviews were conducted informally only to test the theoretical understanding advanced in the

[3]It should be noted that over 75% of these madrasas have boarding facilities.

text. The five students were selected randomly from various classes within the Arabic section. All of them were from the higher/Arabic section, which meant that they had already completed over five to six years of their education in some other madarsa. It was thought that students from the Arabic section would be better in terms of articulating their thought in response to the questions. Three students were from eastern UP, one from Nepal and one from Kashmir. They were mostly from rural backgrounds. They were all boys ranging from 18 to 21 years. The questions were not structured but were used in the format of an interview guide. They were asked the following five set of questions:

- What books do you read? Do you find a difference between the religious and secular books prescribed for you?
- Were you consulted before being admitted here? Who is the prime decision-maker in your home?
- What do you plan do to after leaving this madrasa? Would you like to be a teacher in any madrasa?
- How would you describe an ideal teacher?
- Do you find any difference between the pre-madrasa days and now? If yes, then in what way?

The first question probed the kind of books that they read, which books did they like most and why, whether they saw any repetition between the religious and the secular books provided for them, whether they would like to read other books or not. The objective was to find out the kind of tensions that they experience on receiving both religious and modern sciences. Their reply was that they mostly read Arabic and English. The Arabic studies included the study of Quran, Hadith,

Fiqh etc. but they could not specify as to which books they read for English. On further questioning it was revealed that for each year they had only one English text comprising mostly of stories and poems. This was a recent development and the objective of including English was to interact with the world better. They wanted to study science but due to economic reasons could not go to a regular school. One of them replied that he would like to study science but first he would study the Islamic principles so as to secure the foundations. He argued that the English were propagating false knowledge and that it should be countered by a correct understanding of Islam. Another respondent did not want to read anything else because according to him truth can only be had through the knowledge of Arabic. All the respondents did not see any difference between the secular and religious books prescribed for them.

The objective of the second question was to find out whether they had any say in getting this kind of education and also to probe the informal networking that operates in recruiting students to the madrasa. All the respondents replied that they were not consulted before being admitted to the madarsa. All of them averred that their father or some close relative either brought them. They were equally in unison in replying that if they had been given a chance they would have liked to study in a government school. Thus there is no will of their own involved in studying here. The answers highlight the informal pattern of networking through which the madrasas get a regular supply of students. In a sense therefore this education is not acquired by the own free will of the individual but rather the education reaches out to the individual and engulfs his whole being.

The third question focussed on the perceptions of the madrasa student regarding their social mobility via the madrasa education. To this question, three replied that they would join higher studies at Jamia or Aligarh and would never like to become a teacher in madrasa. Two replied that they would either become a teacher or join the family profession. It should be noted that the respondents who did not want to become madarsa teachers came mostly from the business class, while those who wanted to become teachers were mostly from agricultural backgrounds. The respondents who did not want to become teachers gave various reasons such as there are too many teachers, Islam could be served through other means also. Those who wanted to become teachers gave the reason that their own religious education will become more refined and for the promotion of *din*. What comes out in the answers of these is that madrasas are still regarded as vehicles of social mobility within the Muslim society. Knowing fully well that survival in the outside world is difficult without modern schooling, they are also not unaware of the utility of madrasas to fall back upon. Moreover it also confers on them the added advantage of being religious scholars thus adding to their prestige.

The fourth question probed them regarding their conception of an ideal teacher. The objective was to know the similarities between the authority pattern that obtains in home as compared to the authority pattern that obtains within the madrasa institution. Students were of the opinion that a good teacher should be able to probe the instincts of the students to know whether the student is able to understand the knowledge being imparted to them. They opined that the teacher should throw up such questions in the class that exercises the mind of the students. One respondent wanted the teacher to teach him everything in the class itself. All

the respondents highly praised the teachers of their own madrasa. However the teacher for them was a father figure with unquestionable authority. They were vehement in rejecting the idea of a teacher as someone who shares his experiences with the students. The teacher could not be a co-learner in the endeavour of education according to their conception of a good teacher. This authoritarian conception of the teacher only means that the hierarchical relationship within the family gets reinforced in the madarsa system.

The fifth question asked them whether they found any difference between their pre-madrasa days and now, as to how they spend their time whenever they go home now, etc. The objective of the question was to find out as to what extent this kind of an education makes an impression on the mind of the students. The respondents agreed that they find a lot of change between their pre-madrasa days and their situation now. They think they are more knowledgeable now and that they can understand things much better. They said that when they go home they try o follow the *deen* (faith) in its minute details. While for the students coming from the business class there work back home meant spreading the din especially among women; for the students coming from agricultural background said that they lead the ritual prayer during the month of *ramadhan*[4].

Thus we see that our discussion in the previous chapters gets largely reinforced through the interviews conducted in one madrasa of Delhi. However, our impression that only poor students come to study in madrasas is perhaps a little misplaced for we find that even the upwardly mobile business class also send

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[4] Ramadhan is the Muslim month of fasting and is considered the holiest of all months.

at least one of their sons to study in these madrasas. All the five students interviewed had expressed the view that it was their father or some close relative who had sent them here. While it is understandable in the case of the farmers but it cannot be the same reason for the business class. The important question that comes up here is whether adequate formation of middle class within the community brings about drastic changes in the madrasa system? If the failed attempt at democratisation in Pakistan is any example to go by, the situation does not portend too well for Indian Muslims also.

There has been end number of debates in India regarding the reform within the madrasa system. The moot question which these pious pronouncements fail to address is whether there can be an integration of two knowledge systems which rest on different premise altogether. As we have already seen in our discussion, modern secular education only has the status of 'tool' for the further refinement of religious knowledge. Both the initiatives, of the state as well that of a section of the community, fail to consider the effects of integrating the modern knowledge system with the religious knowledge embodied in the Quran and the *hadith.* Attempts at reforming the madrasas, therefore, may have to bypass the madrasas system altogether and search for other alternatives.

Conclusion

The madarsas are engaged in the hegemonic representation of Muslim society. Contrary to the popular perception, this hegemonic activity of the madarsa does not create a monolithic Muslim community. Rather it creates denominational identities within the Muslim community. This is because the madarasas themselves belong to different ideological orientations, and as such, each of them seeks to perpetuate their own version of the community. Their image of community is dependent upon what they consider 'true Islam'. Thus the Deobandi, Nadwi, Barelwi and the Ahl-i-Hadith madarsas have their own notions of 'true Islam' and consequently fashion a community in accordance with this notion. Despite the differences between them, they share important characteristics.

One of the shared characteristics is the way in which the *ulema* of all these denominations imagine the Muslim community. Gilmartin (1991), describes the *ulema* understanding of community as one defined in its essence by the *shariat* and controlled personal behaviour. To quote Gilmartin 'With the colonial state providing no symbolic definition of Muslim community in India, the assertion of community solidarity required that individual Muslim himself bring his/her inner life and sense of identity under self-conscious personal and rational control....To many of the ulema, the internalized control of behaviour that increasingly defined the community was fundamentally modeled on triumph of individual rationality

over emotions, a process that went hand in hand with the triumph of shariat over local custom and localized kin and caste based identities' (1991:128-129).

Gilmartin's understanding of the ulema's conception of community as shariat-bound, is similar to what we have called Islamization being carried out by madarsas. Islamization can be seen as a movement to make 'Islam' a relevant source of power and social control. Clifford Geertz viewed the movement as an effort to make Islam 'A universal, in theory standardized and essentially unchangeable and usually well integrated system of rituals and beliefs....Not merely as a religion but a complete and comprehensive way of life' (1971:14). Madarsas in this context play a pivotal role in reproducing 'Islamic culture' and promoting the ideological goals of Islamization. They seek to 'purify' the person from his/her social milieu and inculcate in them the 'objective' reliance on scriptures. Thus they purge, an average Muslim, from all his customary distinctions and seek to impart an identity solely based on derivation from the Quran and the *Hadith.* In the case of India, the hegemonic activities of the madarsas sought to purify the Muslims from the syncretism that they practiced as part of the inherited Indian tradition. Anderson (1993), has noted the importance of customary law by which an average Muslim was governed during the pre-colonial times. Recently Kaviraj (1997), has argued that pre-colonial identities were 'fuzzy' in the sense that there was no rigid religious consciousness among the masses. The identities were blurred to the extent that at times it was difficult to make out a Hindu from a Muslim. The madarsas of various denominations attacked all such 'fuzziness' and imparted an identity to the average

Muslim believer. This average Muslim was generally a lower caste, peasant/artisan Muslim who was taught the various versions of 'true Islam'. Generally, their tutors were mostly the high caste *ashrafs* whose 'adab' often became the high point where the process of Islamization would eventually culminate. The concept of adab has been described by Barbara Daly Metcalf (1984), as a characteristic specific to South Asian Islam. It is the embodiment of moral standards and personal excellence that would normally be expected from an average Muslim. Adab as it has been formulated in South Asia is also characteristic of the moral conduct of the upper caste Muslims. As the fourth chapter indicates, today, there is active tension in the madarsa system between this high caste 'adab' and the aspirations of upwardly mobile lower caste Muslims. The consequence of this tension within the sphere of madarsas yet remains unexplored.

Yet, another characteristic, which the madarsas of various denominations share, is the active resistance of any attempt at reform. The *ulema* of all the denominations have rejected that the madarsas open themselves to modern sciences and, more generally, that religious education be integrated with the educational mainstream. They believe that a mixed curriculum, with something from both the religious and modern sciences, will not produce men who combine the medieval and the modern. Rather the products of such a system would be useless equally for religion and the world. This was the critique of Deoband against Nadwa, which was seeking a middle ground between Aligarh and Deoband. In British India it did not perhaps take much imagination for the *ulema* to see government initiatives to reform

madarsas as a conspiracy to do away with the *ulema*. However, similar sentiments have continued to be expressed in post-independent India. The *ulema* have often defended their madarsas by pointing to the prestige, influence and authority of some of the most distinguished of religious scholars educated in them. If madarsas can produce such scholars, then the argument goes, there can hardly be anything wrong with their system of education; and those who insist on changes in the curriculum can have no purpose but to undermine the madarsa, to prevent the role this institution has historically played in the life of Muslims.

Reform can and does connote a variety of things. Many madarsas, like Deoband, are reformist in the sense of seeking change in existing styles of religious beliefs and practices. It can be argued that their claim to religious authority is rooted, in part at least, on their reformist credentials. However, reform in this context does not mean striking out a new uncharted path; rather it signifies changes that would bring religious doctrine and practice into conformity with whatever is conceived of as 'true' or 'original' Islam. Reform in the sense of actively integrating modern with classical knowledge is suspect, however; for it is perceived as undermining the unity and integrity of madarsa education and as devaluing the credentials of those trained in it. Such suspicion is the reason as to why madarsas have hesitated in introducing modern sciences. Even where an attempt at integration has been made, the results have been far from promising. Nadwa today is purely a theological seminary though it started with a promise to blend the classical with the modern. The introduction of modern curriculum in state-funded madrasas, which are

few in numbers, may as well end up with similar results. The problematic here is whether there can be integration of modern knowledge with religious knowledge. This problematic arises in part due to the ambiguity over the notion of *ilm* in Islam, which was detailed in the first chapter. There is strong possibility that modern knowledge would end up being adjunct to the religious knowledge which would form the core. What is perhaps need for such a reform is a radical rupture within the Islamic epistemology.

However, such a rupture would come only through the efforts of the state in alliance with the middle class of the Muslim community. We have already noted that the state is not interested in effecting such a reform. On the contrary, it strengthens the authority of the *ulema.* The fledgling middle class of Muslims in India cannot doe much without the support of the state due to the overbearing power of the *ulema.* This class of *ulema* is in alliance with the upper caste traditional elite who also want the continuation of the madarsas. The madrasas therefore become the site of mutual coexistence between both these elite. In the process, the lower caste, lower class Muslims continue to flood the madrasas. Recently, Nita Kumar (2000); has argued that it was fully rational for the lower caste weavers (*Ansaris*) of Benaras to 'opt' for madrasa education. She argues that the *Ansaris* feared that modern education would destroy their traditional handicraft occupation, as an English-educated boy would not like to work at the loom. Kumar's imputing of rationality and utilitarian motive to the weavers is correct, but she ignores the fact that that the 'options' of the *Ansaris* are themselves conditioned by the objective factor of their

class position. She fails to recognize the fact that these lower castes constitute the 'public' for the *ulema*; a public, who is in need of 'true Islam.' The madrasas can be seen to reach out to this class for promoting the ideological goals of Islamization. And it is students from this class who come out of madrasas with bleak life-chances in an increasingly competitive world. They can only aspire to become *ulema*, promote the ideological concerns of their denomination and open more madrasas; thereby making the circle complete.

Glossary

adab: etiquette, proper behaviour; in India generally the way of the upper caste Muslims.

alim (pl. *ulema*): a learned man, in particular one learned in Islamic legal and religious studies, on whom rests the interpretations of the *sharia.*

anjuman: association.

ashraf: the well-born in India comprising the four castes of *sayyid* (the descendants of the Prophet); *shaikh* (descendants of his Companions); Mughal and Pathan.

bidat: reprehensible innovation as opposed to the *sharia.*

dars-i-nizami: a syllabus of religious education current in much of South Asia from the eighteenth century.

fatwa (pl. *fatawa*): opinion of a *mufti* on a point of law.

hadith: the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad based on the authority of a chain of transmitters.

ijma: the consensus of the scholars, which with Quran, *hadith*, and *qiyas* constitutes one of the four bases of Law.

ijtihad: literally striving, effort, independent inquiry to establish the ruling of the *sharia* on a particular matter.

ilm: literally meaning knowledge in Arabic.

maktab: a writing or primary school, as opposed to a *madrasa.*

manqulat: the "transmitted" or "copied" subjects, Quran and hadith.

maqulat: subjects which are the product of man's reasoning.

maulud: the anniversary of Prophet Muhammad's birth.

shariat: the whole body of rules guiding the life of a Muslim, in law, ethics, and etiquette; sometimes called Sacred Law. The provisions of the *shariat* are worked out through the discipline of *fiqh* on the basis of basic sources of legal authority. For the Sunnis the basic sources are Quran, *hadith*, *ijma* (consensus of the community) and *qiyas* (legal analogical reasoning). The Shias

commonly substitute *aql* (reason) for *qiyas* and interpret *ijma* as consensus of the *imams*.

sunnat: literally the 'trodden path' as shown by the example set by the Prophet.

tatbiq: drawing things together face to face; here, resolving and uniting religious approaches and interpretations.

Umma: community of Muslims.

Urs: literally 'marriage' with God. It is the celebration held on the death anniversary of a saint who is supposed to have united with the God.

zikr: Sufi practices designed to foster the recollection of the name of God as a spiritual exercise.

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