

---

**UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF MADRASSAH IN PAKISTAN:  
A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS**

*Rafi Raza Sanghro  
Pirah Zulfiqar  
Jalil Ahmed Chandio*

**ABSTRACT**

*The religious institutions i.e. Madrassah play vital role in imparting religious education in Muslim world throughout ages. After the worst terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 7/7, these institutions came under heavy attack by the west. The western and European thinkers, politicians and media linked religious institutions with the violence and Islam was considered as a violent religion that preaches not peace but hatred and violence. Therefore this paper is designed in order to analyze the role of religious institutions (Madrassahs) in providing religious education and their links with violence. The connectivity of Islam with violence will also be analyzed. Lastly, the paper will look deep into how does Islam promote education in society.*

---

**Keywords:** Madrassah, Violence, Religious Extremism, Terrorism, Jihad.

**INTRODUCTION**

The current crisis in international affairs that begins with the vivid incident of 9/11 terrorist attacks have shown the image of Muslims as violent and extremist and have sparked the debate globally and in public spheres regarding the connection between Islam and violence and madrassah were considered as militant schools (Fair, 2009). Some considered them as a factory of Jihad and promoted violence (Starrett Gregory, 2009:2). Does Islam teach violence? Are Muslims really prone to violence? Many social scientists such as Montesquieu, Samuel, P. Huntington consider Muslims are prone to violence (Fish *et.al.*, 2010). However in some cases researchers have attempted to look at the linkages to violence but have conflated with various variables in their analysis (Rahman, 2004).

The doctrine of justifiable violence in religious institutions has been debated in many ways. The Indonesian scholar Ahnaf (2005) analyzed different religious traditions and their invocations to violence and nonviolence in greater detail in comparison to Islam. He begins with primary causes of violence, provided by the just war theory (Ali, 2009:68). The theory is related to western philosophers and theologians. Western philosophers believed how and when Christians ‘*break the law for a higher cause*’ by activating violent actions for the just cause. The

first term used is '*bellum justum*' which means the war is waged to balance the great possible destruction, Another term *jus ad bellum* is used which consists of the authority and cause to start just-war. According to this, the war must be launched by the competent authority. The final term *jus in bello* refers to law that governs the way in which warfare is conducted (Ali, 2009:69).

Sectarian Violence is also associated with Jihad and militancy at the world level but basically it is not part of Jihad it is internal conflict between the different sects within Islam. This (sectarian conflicts) has affected the peace in the Muslim world. In Pakistan it has been gradually increased since the Soviet-Afghan war in 1979. This paper therefore will seek to assess what is the relation of Islam with violence. Does Islam exactly preach violence? And how does the Muslims are inclined towards violence as compared to Non-Muslim?

#### **MADRASSAH AND ITS LINKS TO VIOLENCE**

After the worst terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 7/7, Islam was projected as the symbol of violence at the world level. Due to this projection in the current environment of media (open/independent) the issue became very live in the minds of western world mainly. The role of religion (Islam) was and is openly debated in public and at every place, everywhere that 'whether Islam preaches hatred and what is the connection of Islam with violence? Are really Muslims prone to violence?' These were the most critical questions raised in media and academia in the west and in the east particularly after the terrible incidents of the 9/11. The religious schools i.e. Madrassah were targeted by the western and European countries, and was believed that they preach violence, militancy and terrorism. Although none of the 19 hijackers who confined passengers in plane and attacked on Pentagon and World Trade Centre (WTC) on 11th September, 2001, came from any of religious schools (Madrasahs) but the media projection turned the tide towards Islamic teachings in *madrasahs*.

The media projection especially after 9/11 relied on the media reports of Jeffrey Goldberg (2000) who called Pakistan's religious schools (*madrasah*) education as an 'education of the holy warriors and on the Jessica Stern's articles in Foreign Affairs in which she labels that these schools are the symbolic of 'Pakistan's Jihad Culture and are preaching hatred'. Commenting before the Senate Armed Service Committee, George Tenet, the CIA Director, stated that the "Basic education in Muslim World is under the control of intolerance and hatred against other" (Stern, 2000). Similar were the views of the Secretary defence D. Rumsfeld of US on the occasion in the month of October on

16, 2003, where he questioned “Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassahs where the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying terrorists against us?” (Riaz, 2005:2).

Apart from these statements by top brass US officials and writers there are many other statements in which the question of Islam’s relation to violence has been asked since then. Number of studies has been conducted up to so far but none could have concluded what people have been castigating since 9/11. However, few studies have shown links of madrassahs with violence (especially the sectarian violence) but if we look deep into the relation of Islam as a religion and its connection with violence we will find different result.

According to religious ideology as well as historically, Islam had not projected/promoted violence and intolerance. It is a universal religion of peace, love and harmony (Bin Mohamed Osman, 2009; Qasim, Ali Usman & Robb, 2017).

The history of Islam shows that all the prophets of God Almighty preached tolerance, peace, love and harmony of the people (society as a whole). The life of Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is a crystal clear example of tolerance and nonviolence. The Cordoba makes us remember the Islamic Civilization tolerant and peaceful of its era in Andalusia. From many years during middle ages it witnessed the pinnacle of religious freedom, in which Christians and Jewish lived side by side with Muslims. The Muslim ruler Akbar was a liberal in his views for religion. Bairam Khan, who was from *shia* Muslim. His tutor taught him peace and harmony that his liberal thinking can be attributed to his childhood teachings (Yadav, 2013).

From above discussion it is proved that Islam never promotes violence, but the question is raised that how Islam is the religion of peace. ‘In verse (Holy Quran, 2:208) the Quran categorically rejects the acts of violence and urges Muslims to live with peace and tranquility. It is clearly stated that human being in originality is non-violent and the basic aim is to follow God’s commands not the self-commands which are against the nature. Quran says that don’t fight with any one and do justice always. The Quran asks Muslims only fight for the God and not to be aggressor in any case. At various places it is mentioned in Quran that God never loves those who are aggressors (Holy Quran, 2:190). It is directed to Muslims that only fight for those who are weak. The Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah clearly speak of the struggle for the oppression, unjust laws and against the head of head of state who implement such laws. The concept of

greater Jihad and lesser Jihad according to Islam is not to preach violence in society but it is a struggle for the right path, so as to maintain peace and tranquility in society (Durrani & Dunne, 2010; Anzar, 2003). In the light of the Holy Book and the Sunnah it is generally believed that Muslims are duty bound to perform concepts of Islam. Instead people believe in greater Jihad over lesser Jihad (Fair, 2009).

The Holy Book warns Muslims of crossing the line of the religion. It says do not cross the boundaries of the religion and stick to truth about Almighty Allah (Holy Quran, 4:171). The Holy Quran tells us about the existence of the different communities in a society we live in and also recognizes them. It mentions the diversity of the society in which various cultural and religious aspects are promoted. It is not the duty of Muslim to use violence against any other in order to proselytize him/her. Islam strictly opposes the forceful conversion of the people to Islam (Holy Quran, 10:99). If we look at the Holy Prophets life which is an excellent example for every believer of Islam, we find that he has never used violence, hatred and intolerance in his whole life in Arabia. He talked to people with polite and love even to whom who opposed his message of Islam. Any concern or conflict can only be resolved through mutual talk, violence is not the solution of any problems.

The direct teachings of peace are clearly indicated and guided in the holy Quran, description is given as under. It is said religion Islam is the name of peace and it promotes peace. Allah dislikes any violence in the name of religion or any kind of base for violence, it is in the *ayats* of Quran, such as Holy Quran, 5:16 and Holy Quran, 2:205 where one can find how much strong relation Islam have with the peace and harmony. As the first verse of Quran is almost 114 times repeated it shows about mercy of God and beneficial how God is, the basic teaching of Allah from its starting is with mercy. One of the name of Allah means is 'peace'. In Quran (21:107), the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is sent as mercy to mankind. The *hadith* (sayings/acts of the Prophet) at many occasions has emphasized for the peace and harmony in the society. It prohibits the killings of any innocent person and resembles it as you killed the whole humanity. The Quran describes the society as the 'house of peace' (10:25).

Exploring deeper into the Holy Book we would be able to further clarify our ideas/beleifs about the war, violence, education and Jihad etc. The Holy Quran is divided into two types of *Surahs*: The *Madani Surrahs* (verses revealed on the Prophet during his stay in Medina city) and the *Makki Surah* (verses revealed upon the prophet during stay in Makka

city). Many religious scholars and historians believe that during the time period of prophet in Medina, Muslims were acting violently. The Quranic verses of this period urge believers (Muslims) on to fight however many scholars and historians are of the opinion that this emphasis on fighting was based on the contemporary events/occasions where Muslims were asked to fight back with the aggressors, the non-believers in Arabia. The Quran clearly prohibits killings of human beings. It says 'Don't kill living being (Soul) that is created by Allah (6:151). According to Khadduri (1984:10) there are 200 cautions/warnings in holy Quran against injustice and expressed in words as *zulum, ithm, dala*. For 'Justice' more than 100 expressions in words such as *adl, qist, mizan*. The lesson of love and peace promoted by Islam at every stage of life and Islamic history always promoted the nonviolence strategies to win and it is also primary obligation to fight against any kind of injustice.

From the above discussion it is clear that Islam does not preach violence but condemns any act of violence. It is said that not every Muslim is a terrorist but unfortunately all terrorists are Muslims, which compel people to think on the point that there must be something in the teaching of Islam as a religion that compels its believers to act violently and make them violent (extremists and terrorists). It depends on the approach of the believers' understanding of how they interpret Islam, and how they understand the concept of *Jihad*. The same could be applied to other religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism etc.

#### UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF JIHAD

There are several meanings of Jihad and it has different forms and can be done in different ways. The work and research done by scholars has provided great insight (Cook, 2005:39). The literally word Jihad means effort or struggle. In Islam it is a duty of every Muslim to do Jihad. The Jihad has four distinct meanings by which the duty of Jihad can be carried out, i.e. by tongue, by heart, by hand or by force (sword). The last two (Jihad by hand and sword) according Islam are to be carried out if you are capable enough of doing it otherwise follow the Jihad by tongue or by heart (Gregg, 2010).

The term has been very much famous during the time of ancient Islam as well as in the present world. According to Cook (2005) the term Jihad is very much loaded and misunderstood term in today's world. He thought contrary to the general accepting that Jihad does not mean 'divine battle'. Surveying technically and deeply the Islamic pious and sacred religious texts in today's world modern readings, he defines a critically

important perspective of Islam in modern world. Bringing the modern inventions and modern life style, the spiritual Jihad is more important in Islam to clean social evils today, first the inner to be cleaned but religion Islam clearly discourages violence. On other hand, the militant organizations run under the shadow of religion they justify the warfare and they support Jihad as fighting against Kufir by killing them with force, he calls that radical organizations have their own justification on jihad.

Fish *et al*, (2010:1330) believed that the concept of sacred war is not a new concept. Neither to the Christians where they fought for the control of their holy place in Palestine during the great crusades. Nor this concept (of holy / sacred war) is alien to the other religions. He believed that no other religion in the world has an ideology of the just war (jihad) as in Islam, due to that Muslims have more inclinations to the violence compared to non-Muslims. This can be confirmed from the fact that since many years the acts of violence been made by the Muslims throughout the world.

In his research Marshal (2008) on political violence from 1946-2007 describes that there has been 326 incidents, where as 235 incidents of violence were interstate in nature and give a total percentage of 27 % appeared to be in Muslim countries. Some writers are of the view that many Muslims recognize Jihad in a non-violent connotation and believed both cannot be considered as a same entity (Al-Ghannouchi, 2000; Lawrence, 2000; Lukens-Bull, 2005).

The Al-Qaeda is believed to have followed this ideology as its leadership always presses upon the weak and corrupt politicians in the Muslim world and their association with the west. They believe that it is the only way out to build and strengthens the Muslim power throughout the world. The only way Al Qaeda, found, which it believed is the right path, which is attainable only through armed struggle of (Jihad) by eliminating corrupt Muslim leadership and fight with foreign forces that supports them.

Muslim scholars have also pressed upon the reasons of their decline in the world, such as, not choosing the right path and foreign domination. These views have been vividly expressed Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt by Syed Qutub and Maulana Maudoodi during foredoom movement in Indian subcontinent. The AlQaeda is believed to have copied the very idea of 'Back to Islam' policy of Muslim thinkers of twentieth century in which they called for the Islamic revolution in order to establish a new world order of Islam (Gregg, 2010). During the struggle for freedom movement Muslim scholar Maudoodi sketched how the new Islamic

political order can look like (bin Mohamed Osman, 2009). Many believed in caliphate system as the role model for establishing the unity in Umma and implementing Islamic system (Abdullah, 2007).

The Islamic teachings through holy Quran are clear about peace in the world. Islam promoted education the basic theme behind promoting education is to change the militant minds and for this purpose one may get education without any hesitation either male or female, though education is not related with topic but religious education and worldly education promotes peace and harmony the best example among them is that well educated people will prefer to do Jihad by tongue and by virtue of their knowledge.

#### **RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS (MADRASSAHS) IN PAKISTAN**

The concept of religious institutions dates back to the time of advent of Islam in Arabia. Gradually the process of imparting religious education continued. In Indian subcontinent the first madrassah was established by *Darul uloom Deoband* in 1867. Beside religious education such as teachings of Holy Quran, Hadith, Tafseer and Islamic jurisprudence other subjects such as philosophy, astronomy mathematics etc are being taught. The religious schools produced number of religious scholars throughout the Muslim world. In Indo-Pak subcontinent they served as source of uniting community and protecting and projecting Muslims rights (Ahmed, 1999:2). In Indo-Pak subcontinent they served as the symbol of backbone for the Islamic culture (*Ibid*). After the creation of a separate Muslim state in subcontinent in 1947, the religious groups continued the task of providing religious education in all parts of the Pakistan. In 1950s there were 137 *madrassah* which rose to 900 in 1971. It is generally believed in Pakistan that the tremendous growth was seen under the military government of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-88). Thus the religious motivation by the state of Pakistan through foreign supporters in the Soviet Afghan war strengthened the growth of religious educational institutions. It is said the number grew from 1745 to 10000 between 1979 to 2003 (Lillah, 2014:45). Other researchers estimate their numbers to much more however we are not going into that detail.

These religious institutions have played important role in rural and urban areas of Pakistan. The national curriculum use religious rhetoric for the unity of vast ethnic groups of Pakistan (Durrani & Dunne, 2010). With their own financial support (religious circles) they put all responsibilities of boarding and lodging facilities. The state of Pakistan has done little to support these institutions and it is therefore they look to foreign donors such as the rich Arab countries. These religious

institutions served the greater cause of *just war* during the Afghan war and was supported by the secular regimes of the US and Europe during 1980s.

#### **SECTARIAN VIOLENCE**

Internationally the image of Islam is promoted as religion of violence but if we look in the matter deeply Islam never promotes act of violence, unfortunately there is violence in Muslim countries. This however is a result of conflicts within the various sects of Islam. The little knowledge of religion is dangous when one person imposes his own thought over another religious sect obviously the result will be confusion, tension and aggressiveness depending on the power of the people. Moreover these are politically immersed. Thus we can say that the violence in Syria, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Palestine etc is not the instinct of violence within the Islam, however, it has nothing to do with Islam. This could be differentiated on the basis of sectarian violence. The sectarian divide thus leads to the conflict in society and promotes violence. The fighting in Syria, Egypt, and the Iraq-Iran war etc can be attributed with this task.

Muslims are living in Europe and United States with same sects but they are living there peacefully and they never fight with each other and other parts of the world. This is because western governments control violent activities within the state. However, unfortunately in Muslim countries, governments are blamed to incite extremism in the society i.e. sectarian divide. The incidents of 9/11 and 7/7 in which perpetrators happened to be Muslims does not mean there is problem within the Islamic teaching rather these acts were individually motivated. It is interesting to note here that if Muslims are prone to violence due to the teachings of Islam and they committed violent activities on foreign soil due to their government wrong doings in Muslim countries then why the Muslim masses do not act violently in their own countries. The violent activities are also a result of the western policies towards political Islam. The popular thinking in the Muslim world is almost the same.

#### **CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the above historical analysis it can be concluded that religious institutions i.e. Madrassahs played vital role in the imparting religious education in Pakistan. They are not preaching hatred in Muslims mind because lessons that they profess is of Islam which is the religion of peace and harmony. The Quranic verses in favour of peace, tolerance and brotherhood are vivid. Muslims Holy Book forbids Muslims to act



violently and militantly. However there are verses in Quran that asks Muslims to fight in the name of Allah which are for the protection and self-defence. The Quran never allows any Muslim to kill, harm and make fun of non-Muslims rather it teaches peace, harmony and love. There are evidences of sectarian violence in Pakistan that does not mean Islam preaches violence. If it is so then one could say about the Christianity as there are also differences and conflicts between the Protestants and Catholics.

That established ideology will take time to reach Islamic teachings. So one can ask what is the solution, the solution is simple 'Islam is the only solution', as Maulana Maudoodi has rightly proclaimed. The Islamic vision of knowledge should be propagated and teachings of non-violence be promoted throughout the Muslim world. The current militant extremism in Pakistan is particularly the outcome of the foreign domination in the Muslim world (Lillah, 2014:10). The state of Pakistan has to play its positive role in promoting religious harmony among the religious institutions. It is the only way by which peace can be achieved and bloodshed could be buried. The religious teaching of intolerance (of any sect) should be avoided in religious institutions. The state should monitor the regulations of religious institutions so that they should not deviate from their right path as it has been done in various developed countries. The religious scholar's ulama also have to play very important role in making a conducive conditions so that the generation of good Muslims be generated in Pakistan. A separate and fully independent research is still required to look deeper in subject.

The world community should play very important and positive role in order to pressurize the allies of Muslim world so that a soft corner could be developed. The secular, modern and technological education should be encouraged from primary level so that that generation could come up with secular, fresh and new ideas. Together, this would not only benefit country but will create a good image in the world through their tolerance, honesty, dignity and trustworthy.

#### REFERENCES

- Abdullah, R. A. (2007). Islam, Jihad, and Terrorism in Post-9/11 Arabic Discussion Boards. *12*, 1063-1081.
- Ahmed, M. (1999). *Continuity and Change in the traditional System of Islamic Education: The case of Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Cook, D. (2005). *Understanding Jihad*. University of California Press.
- Fair, C. (2009). *The Madrassah Challenge: Militancy and religious Education in Pakistan*. Lahore: Vanguard.

- Gregg, H. S. (2010). Fighting the Jihad of the Pen: Countering Revolutionary Islam's Ideology. *Terrorism and Violence*, 22(2), 292-314.
- Jahanbegloo, R. (2010). Is a Muslim Gandhi possible? Integrating cultural and religious plurality in Islamic traditions. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 36(3-4), 309-323.
- Khadduri. (1984). *The Islamic Conception of Justice*. New York: Johns Hopkins University press.
- King, A. (2009). Islam, Women and Violence Feminist Theory. *17(3)*, 292-328.
- Lillah, H. (2014). *Religious Extremism in Pakistan*. Monterey California. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.840.5696&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- M. Steven Fish, F. R. (2010). Islam and Large-Scale Political Violence: Is There a Connection. *Comparative Political Studies*, 43(11), 1327-1362.
- Naureen Durrani, M. D. (2009). Curriculum and national identity: exploring the links between religion and nation in Pakistan. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 42(2), 215-240.
- Osman, Bin Mohamed (2009). The Ulama in Pakistani Politics. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 32(2), 230-247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856400903049499>
- Qasim, Ali Usman & Robb, M. E. (2017). *Muslims against the Muslim League: Critiques of the Idea of Pakistan*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rehman, T. (2004). The Madrassah and the state of Pakistan: religion, poverty and potential for violence in Pakistan.
- Starrett, G. (2009). Islam and the politics of enchantment. *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15, S222-S240.
- Vaiani, M. (2011). *Frontier-Gandhi*. Retrieved from <https://pakistanisforpeace.wordpress.com/tag/frontier-gandhi/>
-