

# A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EXISTENCE OF MADRASSA SYSTEM IN PAKISTAN

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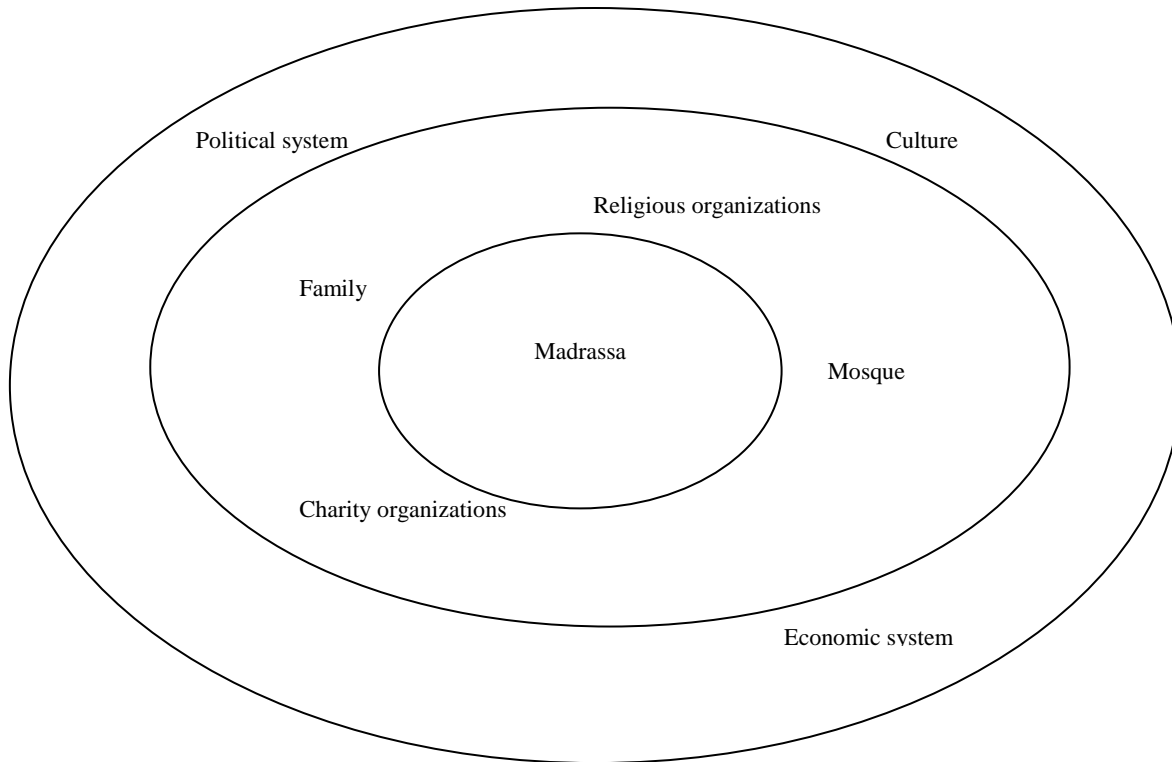
**ABSTRACT:** This paper presents an analysis how madrasa system is persistently competing mainstream educational structure in Pakistan. It examines the types of families and their motives of sending children to madrasa instead of mainstream schools. The study investigates what madrasa students are prepared for, and what social role madrasa graduates perform in society. The discourse has been endeavoured to understand in the light of some sociological theories like vicious cycle theory, rational choice theory, and religious market theory. The study arrived at the conclusion that incapacitation of state to effectively deliver social security services, including education, to the masses, creates space for the role of madrasa; and madrasa is effectively delivering socially approved services that justifies its existence in society.

**KEY WORD:** Madrasa; Society; State; Poverty; Education; Religion

**INTRODUCTION:** All human societies need to preserve their culture for their existence. For that, societies inculcate their cultural values, norms, customs, and traditions to the younger generations. Societies also need to enable their youth to accompany with the continuous process of change. In order to achieve the objectives of cultural transmission and accompanying social change, societies organize their systems of education. Since culture varies from society to society, therefore, education system also varies from society to society.

Pakistan, like any other society of the world, has its own system of education according to its own cultural needs. All segments of society find space in this education system. This

system has three educational streams: private schools, public schools, and madrasa schools. Resourceful parents send their children to expensive private schools for modern education. Middle class people get benefit from government schools with low fee structure. And, the poorer population, that cannot afford mainstream education, sends their children to madrasa: where education, accommodation, food and other necessities of life are provided free of cost. In this context, madrasa in Pakistan is a part of larger educational system of the society.



**Figure 1: Supportive factors for the existence of madrasa system in Pakistan**

Madrasa system is established by community on self-help basis, without any assistance from the state. Community provides funds and logistic support to this system. Almost all the madrassas in the country are run by the active support of

community and its institutions like family, mosque, religious organizations and other private charities. This relationship has been shown in figure 1. The figure indicates that family institution is supportive to madrasa system in a way that

poor families send their children to madrasa for education: whereas rich families provide funds to madrasa for education of these children. Mosque is the place where families get motivation to assist madrassas. Mosque and madrasa are two adjacent entities indispensable for each other. Religious organizations protect madrasa system and show their strength against any hazard for this system. Charity organizations are working in various sectors including religious education that promotes madrasa system in the country.

In the outer sphere of the figure 1, there lies a culture and political and economic systems compassionate to madrasa system. Like, culture supports to madrasa because religion is dominant feature of Pakistani culture. Mostly the people help madrasa, in cash or kind, under religious emotions. Similarly, political system in Pakistan is also conducive to flourish madrasa system in the country. Political system remains always under pressure of religio-political parties: and madrasa is the power hub of these parties. Economic system in the country also creates space for madrasa system. Economic constrains and absence of proper social security services by the state instigate marginalized population to get benefit from madrasa system where education, shelter, clothes, books, and food etc everything is provide to students free of cost.

#### MATERIAL AND METHODS:

This paper is based on theoretical discussion to look for the reasons of existence of madrasa education system parallel to the formal education system of society. This intends to explore the strength of madrasa that it consistently competing the mainstream system of education, and survives without assistance of the state. In this regard, for theoretical understanding, some existing sociological theories have been applied to see the phenomenon. Theory, being a search light in darkness to brighten the things around, is an effective tool in social research. In this study, rational choice theory and religious market theory have explained as to why madrasa system exists in society: whereas, vicious cycle theory has elaborated how social class of madrasa students is maintained as a result of madrasa education.

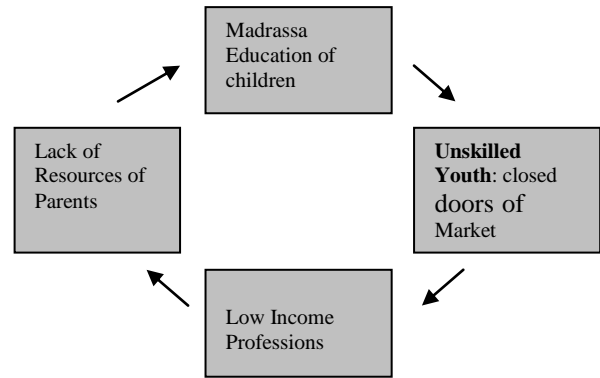
#### DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS:

##### Madrasa system in the framework of vicious cycle theory:

Generally, madrasa, within the social system, tends to cater to the needs of a specific population. Many people cannot send their children to private or public schools because of poverty and other reasons. To them, madrasa provides an alternative source of education and socialization. However, this process may also be seen as a vicious cycle of poverty.

Alcock worked on poverty and observed a vicious cycle in this regard. He noted that poverty is a result of complex operation of social forces, and is not a product of individual's weaknesses or failure. He ascertained that reasons of poverty are structural. Normally, the lack of resources incapacitates the individuals to avail the opportunities present in the competitive market. Finding the doors of high-income professions closed on them, they turn to low-income careers

Figure 2: Vicious cycle of poverty in madrassas system



where competition is comparatively less. Here, vertical ascending social mobility become impossible, and consequently, they maintain their social class [1]. This conclusion of Alcock has also been indorsed by various other scholars [2, 3, 4].

On the same pattern in Pakistan, children from a particular class come to madrasa. Madrasa is focused on religion, and does not impart skills compatible to the economic market of society. After graduating from madrasa, individuals find themselves standing nowhere in the job market, and have no potential to be absorbed in the market. So, they seek their livings in mosques where they lead congregational prayers and address Friday gatherings. Sometimes, they become a teacher in the same madrasa where they have been studying, or, in any other madrasa belonging to their own sect. Usually, their salaries are as low as the basic amenities of life are difficult to be bought for families. By this process, they maintain the social class from which they had come and joined the madrasa in the past.

This phenomenon can be better understood with the help of Figure 2. The figure shows how a vicious cycle of poverty persists in the case of madrasa, and how madrasa people maintain their social class a result of a cyclic process.

The figure leads to an understanding that the lack of resources of parents drives them to send their children to madrasa, because it provides free of cost education and amenities. Madrasa produces an unskilled youth to whom the doors of competitive market are closed in terms of employment. Therefore, they have to earn bread and butter from low income professions. And, when they get marry and become parents: they are economically weak parents: and their children have to face the same financial situation as they had been facing when they were young. Again, madrasa system may be the ultimate option for their children's education.

##### Madrasa in the framework of rational choice theory:

All human actions are rational and purposive: this idea is known as 'rational choice theory' or 'rational action theory'. Bilton et al has referred the concept of rationality as "the systematic pursuit of goals\_ finding the optimum means, to a specific end" [5]. This theory is a framework for understanding social and economic behaviors of people. Although the concept of rational choice was initially used in microeconomics; however, it is now central to almost all social sciences in the modern times. The disciplines like

Sociology, Psychology, Political science and many others, use this concept in different forms.

Generally, rational choice theorists focus on actors and it is assumed that actors have ends or goals to which their actions are aimed [6]. It is also impersonal and preoccupied with techniques, calculation and control [7]. The actors have also a hierarchy of preferences, and all their actions can be ranked in an order of preference. This hierarchy is made on the basis of three things: available resources; cost of action; and amount of likely benefit. For instance, if an actor has too limited resources against a high valued end, he will not persevere it, and would turn to the next most attractive end, present in his hierarchy of preferences.

Rational choice theory does not address what people choose, good or bad, right or wrong? Rather, it focuses on how people make decisions. Normally, people make decisions depending upon information they have. Inadequate information may lead them to unrealistic assumptions and miscalculations. This implies that the consequences of decisions and actions, largely depends upon the quantity and quality of information. So, the primary concern of this theory is not what action has been taken, rather is, how it has been taken, to achieve certain objectives.

Stark applied rational choice theory on religion and presented a 'Micro Foundation of religion'. He argued that people go about being religious in much the same way that they go about everything else, and "make religious choices in the same way as they make other choices by weighting the cost against benefits [8]". In their dealing with the gods, they bargain, shop around, procrastinate, weigh costs and benefits, skip installment payments, and even cheat [9]. The author has also explained why people want religion at all. "They want it because religion is the only plausible source of certain rewards for which there is a general and inexhaustible demand [10]".

In the context of this discussion, rational choice theory can guide as to why some people prefer to send their children to madrasa system instead of mainstream schools. Think of a person who finds himself in such an economic condition where there is no way to meet the expenditures against his children's education. Then, he hears of madrasa where education, books, food, accommodation, clothes, etc. everything is free of cost. He also comes to know that children memorize *Quran* (Holy Scripture) in madrassas; and the father of a child who has memorized *Quran*, would be respected with golden crown on the Day of Judgment. Now, his decision to get enroll his child in a madrasa, would be a rational choice. It implies that madrasa system has a rational justification of its existence in society.

#### **Madrasa in the framework of religious market theory:**

Max Weber initiated the concept of 'religious market'. He argued that religion also has a market, which works like a general market in society. He pointed out characteristics of a general market, and then applied them to religion. He exemplified that a general market runs on the basis of seller-buyer relationship. A buyer comes to the market to fulfil his need: where manufacturing firms endeavour to present their products attractive to the psyche of the customer. Customer, at the same time, keeps an eye on his pocket to create a

balance between the need and his resources. He also compares cost of the product with its likely benefits. [11]

There are also competing firms in general market. Each firm tries to engage maximum customers from the target population. This process may create professional jealousies, rivalries and even conflicts among the firms. Normally, the big firms in the market have more influence on the market process. These are able to keep market-flow in their favour. Sometimes these firms solely or in a group form try to monopolize the market for maximization of their profits.

Law of demand and supply also work in the market. If demand of a certain product is higher than its supply in the market, the product becomes more valuable. Likewise, if supply of a certain product is greater than its demand, the product can be purchased at low price.

Weber then discovered these characteristics of general market also in religion and named it 'religious market'. He described that the religious market is the one where religious firms sell their products. He noted that the religious organizations and their leaders function like religious firms. They sell 'salvation means' in the market. 'Salvation means' are the ways to achieve salvation goals. A salvation goal may be 'freedom from misfortune'.

Religious firms display their product in a way appealing to the customer. The big religious organizations with large memberships, become powerful, and their leaders act as 'authority units' in the market. These 'authority units' control the behaviours of their group members by giving, or not giving, them salvation goods. And by this way, they motivate their members to comply with the group demands.

Weber also argues that 'promises of religion' are actually 'salvation means', which are associated with hereafter rewards, and are not empirically certifiable in this life. He adds that the achievement of a reward largely depends upon the degree of belief one has on fulfilment of the promise of religion. As for competition among firms is concerned, one can see a variety of religious sects competing, even conflicting, to each other. Sometimes, the conflicts between these religious firms take the shape of violence in the society. Law of demand and supply is also at work in the market of religion; like, high valued rewards demand high sacrifices. This may imply that such rewards are limited in supply, thus they demand high costs.

In the framework of this discussion, madrasa in Pakistan represents a religious market in society. Various politico-religious parties and different sectarian organizations are primarily functioning as religious firms. These religious firms are competing with each other, and numerous events of sectarian violence in Pakistan are also reported. People buy the products of these firms and satisfy their socio-religious needs. They associate themselves with the religious market by entering their children to madrassas: and thus, they help to continue the system of madrasa education in society.

Sociologically speaking, specific societal conditions create particular markets in society. For example, in 2005, a high magnitude earth-quake in Northern Areas of Pakistan had created a market of social services for NGOs, philanthropists, charity organizations and others. Equally, certain socio-economic conditions in the country, and geo-political situation in the region, flourished in Pakistan a market of

religion. People buy the products of religious firms and satisfy their psychological need against the miseries of life. In societies like Pakistan, where a large segment of population is deprived of desired standards of living, market of religion has a good scope. Particular economic conditions transform into religious motives, and the system of religious education exists in society.

**An integrated Model:**

Principally, madrassa system in Pakistan has three-fold recognition: one, it imparts education and enhance literacy rate in society; two, it generates religiosity in society and maintains its supply; three, it provided all amenities of life to its students, which basically is responsibility of parents or the state.

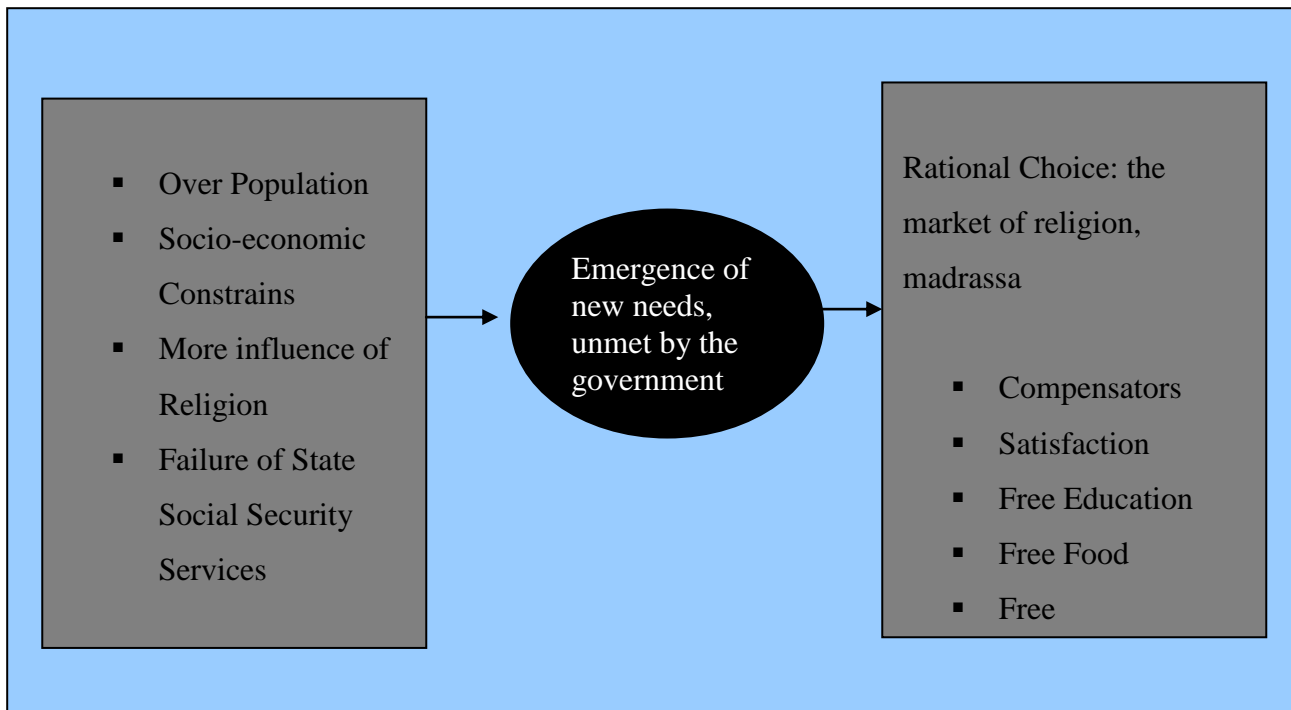
Poor people face uncomfortable situation in their lives. Felt deprivation, misfortune and sufferings lead them to seek compensation from any corner. They look for salvation goods that would promise to relieve them from misfortune and deliverance from evil. They come to the market of religion to buy compensators and salvation goods. Their socio-economic conditions motivate them to purchase salvation commodity, get confidence and feel satisfaction. It means, shopping from religious market and purchasing religious goods, is the rational choice of poor. That is why majority of customers of religious market comes from lower socio-economic stratum of society. This is mechanism of

religious economy by which religious market carries on its activities [12].

In this framework, the decision of parents to send their children to madrassa for religious education is their rational choice. Where the poor parents pushed by socio-economic constraints decide to take benefit of madrassa system, there the affluent people may send their children to madrassa for religious reasons: which again is a rational choice.

This discussion leads to the understanding that certain social factors create new needs in society; and when state does not address these needs, society seeks its own way to meet these needs. Almost, same is the case with education sector in Pakistan. The state could not establish such system of education that could cope with need of the entire population. Naturally, as long as the gap between population and state’s educational service exists, madrassa would be the rational substitute for the masses.

Basically, the parents get two-fold benefit by sending their children to masrassa. One, madrasa shares parental responsibilities, like, providing food, cloths, accommodation and education etc. By this way, parents get freedom from educational expenditures like tuition fees, stationary, books and daily transport etc. Two, parents satisfy their religious conscience as a psychological need. This discourse in Pakistan has been presented in the figure 3.



**Figure 3: Madrassa\_ the Market of Religion: A Rational Choice of Parents**

This theoretical debate may be summarized into the following statements:

- 1) Society establishes many social institutions so that the value system of the society could be transmitted to the up-coming generations.
- 2) Madrassa is a social institution that mainly transmits the religious values to the younger generation.
- 3) Madrassa also acts as an equilibrium institution in the social system, as it fulfills the needs of the poor population, which cannot afford mainstream education.
- 4) Madrassa works like charity organization that provides basic human needs like food, shelter, and education: free of cost.
- 5) Madrassa is established and run on self-help basis, without assistance of the state.
- 6) Madrassa is influenced by social systems and does not function exclusively.
- 7) Madrassas impart education with sectarian bends, and each madrassa is associated with a religious sect.
- 8) Madrassa does not impart skills or technical education to its students; so, they cannot be absorbed in general job market.
- 9) Because they cannot absorb in general market, they turn to low income professions. Thus, this system of education is not contributive, in a true sense, to enhance the quality of life.
- 10) Madrassa enrolment is a rational choice of parents when they have no other option for education of their kids.
- 11) Religious satisfaction is an edge of madrassa over mainstream educational institutions.
- 12) Madrassa flourishing indicates the failure of state services.
- 13) In the absence of state services, madrassa act as a welfare system.

### CONCLUSION:

Madrassa system in Pakistan indicates an educational crisis in the country and failure of state's education system to fulfil the need of all social strata. Principally, the compact between state and individual ensures all human rights of individual, including the right of education. However, when state fails to serve all parts of the society in this regard, the affectee part turn to pragmatism and make rational decisions as coping strategy.

In Pakistan, upper and middle social classes take benefits from exclusive educational setup in the country, but the state has never bothered about educational need of poorer segment of society. Accordingly, this part of society fulfils its

educational need from madrassa. Madrassa has dual identity: educational as well as religious. Where it increases literacy in the country, there it spreads religiosity in society. This spread of religiosity actually pays back to madrassa in kind of financial, moral and logistic supports from society; which ultimately helps to sustain the system.

Despite the fact that madrassa functions as a welfare system by providing food and shelter, and meeting educational needs of the marginalized social class ignored by the State, the type of education it imparts is of no use in terms of employment in open job market. Madrassa graduates usually possess no skill except leading congregational prayers or delivering religious sermons. Therefore, their education puts no positive effect on their economic conditions; and consequently, they maintain their social class. Nonetheless, parents rationally decide to send their children for madrassa education because: 1) they have no other choice; and 2) religious education satisfies their religious conscience as psychological need. This strength of madrassa system keeps it survived in front of mainstream educational structure.

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