Decolonizing Madrassa Reform in Pakistan

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Pakistan has been engaged in the project of madrassa reform since the early days of its nationhood. Since gaining independence from Britain in 1947, successive Pakistani governments have introduced a series of reforms aimed at regulating and reforming the madrassa sector, but the repeated failure of these efforts suggests the presence of some systemic barrier to reform. This article looks at the history of the madrassa in South Asia under British rule, and raises the question of how this colonial experience has shaped madrassa reform in post-colonial Pakistan. It highlights three key policy interventions of the British in the education sector, namely the 1835 Minute of Lord Macaulay, the 1854 Educational Despatch of the Court of Directors of the East India Company, and the formal institutionalization of higher education, to show that the cumulative effect of these policies was the creation of an ideological binary which bifurcated the education system. It argues that by institutionalizing a singular conception of education, this colonial legacy has impacted key madrassa reform efforts undertaken by Pakistan in 1962, 1979, and 2001/02. The article concludes with a discussion of the necessity of decolonizing future reform efforts such as the national curriculum reform—the introduction of the Single National Curriculum—that Pakistan is currently embarking upon.

Introduction

Depending on whom one asks, a madrassa is either a traditional Islamic educational institution with a venerable history dating all the way back to the dawn of Islam—or a hotbed of terrorist activity. Perhaps it is precisely this polarized conceptualization that has led today to madrassas being firmly embedded within the socio-religious fabric of Pakistani society while having become, at the same time, a politically-contentious entity. To be more precise, it is the issue of madrassa reform that forms the point of contention. Pakistan has been engaged in the project of madrassa reform since the early days of its nationhood. Since gaining independence from Britain in 1947, successive Pakistani governments have introduced a series of reforms aimed at regulating and reforming the madrassa sector, but the repeated failure of these efforts suggests the presence of some systemic barrier to reform.

This article looks at the history of the madrassa in South Asia during British rule and raises the question of how this colonial experience has shaped madrassa reform efforts in post-colonial Pakistan. It focuses on three key policy interventions of the British in the education sector, namely the *1835 Minute of Lord Macaulay*, the *1854 Educational Despatch of the Court of Directors of the East India Company*, and the formal institutionalization of higher education, to show that the cumulative effect of these policies was the creation of an ideological binary which bifurcated the education system. It argues that by institutionalizing a singular conception of education, this colonial legacy has impacted key madrassa reform efforts undertaken by Pakistan in 1962, 1979, and 2001/02. The article concludes with a discussion of the necessity of decolonizing future reform efforts, such as the national curriculum reform—the introduction of a Single National Curriculum—that Pakistan is currently embarking upon.

Background: The Madrassa Sector in Pakistan
The madrassa sector in Pakistan provides religious education and operates alongside the secular public and private sectors. The repeated failure of government-led reforms to register and regulate madrassas has resulted in the sector existing as a loosely-organized and under-documented network of institutions. Since 1983/84, madrassas have been required to affiliate themselves with one of five governing boards (*wafaq*), which are responsible for designing institutional curricula, conducting examinations, awarding *sanads* (diplomas), and representing the political interests of their madrassas. These boards fall under the purview of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan and are organized along strict denominational lines (Riaz, 2008).

The exact number of madrassas in Pakistan is unknown, in part because many madrassas remain unregistered and operate in an informal capacity. At the time of independence, there were reportedly less than 200 madrassas in the Indian subcontinent. The 2017-2018 Pakistan Education Statistics survey reported a total of 31,115 madrassas operating in the country, with a total enrolment of 4.099 million and employing 0.179 million teachers (NEMIS et al., 2021, p. 41). The growth of the sector can be attributed to factors such as the limitations of the public school system and especially the lack of schools in rural areas, and the influx of Afghan and other refugees into the country who are often excluded from the formal schooling system (Hunter, 2020). Another significant factor is the fact that these institutions provide free education, including boarding and lodging, because of which they have come to be perceived as "essentially schools for the poor" (NEMIS et al., 2021, p. 41). Although research on madrassa enrolment remains scant, recent survey data suggest that apart from a preference for religious education, the primary reason parents enrol their children in madrassas is economic hardship (Salahuddin, 2018, p. 43).

The majority of Pakistani madrassas offer either an eight- or sixteen-year course of study, usually divided into six stages, with some specialized institutions also offering a seventh post-graduate level of study. The medium of instruction in Pakistani madrassas is usually Urdu, with many also using provincial languages such as Sindhi and Pashto, and a special emphasis is placed on Arabic and Persian. The madrassas usually follow a variant of the *Dars-i-Nizami*, an 18th-century curriculum featuring predominantly medieval and classic Islamic texts. The *Dars-i-Nizami* offers approximately twenty subjects that fall into two broad categories: the *manqulat* (the transmitted/revealed sciences) or the *maqulat* (the rational sciences). Some madrassas also offer 'secular' subjects alongside Islamic education. Appendix 1. outlines the specific stages and curriculum of madrassa education. Madrassa teachers tend to have the *alim* (higher secondary) or *faazil* (Bachelor of Arts) madrassa qualifications but do not have any specialized pedagogical training.

A brief history of the key British interventions in the education sector and the madrassa response
This article will focus on the historical development of the madrassa during the two periods of British rule, from 1767 to 1857 under the dominion of the East India Company, and subsequently under the rule of the British Crown until the partition of the Subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947. Prior to the interventions of the British in the Indian education sector, higher education was organized informally, segregated by religious community and language, and in many cases, attached to local religious institutions. Examples of these include madrassas and other traditional South Asian schools such as *pathshalas*.

The British East India Company assumed political power in 1765 but did not directly intervene in the education sector until 1813 with the Charter Act. This lack of involvement was an explicit policy decision intended to reassure the Indians against interference or any conversionist ambitions on the part of the British. As such, the Company "maintained a distance from missionary activism [as well], opposed proselytizing, and restricted missionary activities within Company-controlled territory" (Riaz, 2010, p. 77). The 1813 Charter of the Company, however, marked a reversal of this policy as it not only included the responsibility for the education of its Indian subjects in its stipulations but also introduced the requirement for English to be taught in the Indian system alongside Indigenous languages. The "expectation was that English would coexist with Oriental studies as a means by which moral law could be reinforced" (Riaz, 2010, p. 78). This was the beginning of the civilizing mission of the Company, the impetus for which had come from a 1792 report by Charles Grant, a British politician, which included recommendations for a policy of 'downward filtration': through the use of English and the provision of education to local elites, the civilizing message would gradually reach the masses.

The Charles Grant report also formed the basis for the first key education policy of the British East India Company, the 1835 Education Minute of Thomas Macaulay. The approval of the Minute by Governor-General Bentinck took place against the backdrop of a broader ongoing debate in Britain about the value of the Western system of education and the use of the English language compared to that of Indigenous education systems and languages. The Minute effectively decided the debate in favour of the Western system and English, and its adoption resulted in the immediate discontinuation of government support in British South Asia to madrassas and other traditional institutions and for the publication of books in Sanskrit and Arabic (Macaulay, 1835). Instead, funding was now channeled towards Western academic subjects with English as the medium of instruction. The Minute of 1835 became "a watershed in the history of education in India" (Riaz, 2010, p.78), paving the way for policies such as the replacement, in 1835, of Persian by English as the official language.

The second key piece of legislation was the 1854 Educational Despatch, which was the result of an inquiry into the state of education in India conducted by the British Parliament in 1853 as part of the renewal of the charter of the East India Company. The Despatch found the policy of downward filtration to have achieved only limited success and instead proposed a new scheme for organizing education from the primary all the way to the post-secondary level. It recommended that "the government take responsibility for education at all levels, and proposed a transformation of the indigenous schools into Western-style institutions through grants-in-aid to private schools" (Riaz, 2008, p. 70). In effect, it formalized and Westernized education in India as English-language instruction proliferated, and the structure and organization of institutions changed permanently. Government-sponsored education became secular, with the inclusion of Christian moral texts. The Despatch was described as a "complete scheme of general education for all India" and "the climax in the history of education [in India]" (Qadir, 2013, p. 130).

The Despatch had a particularly significant and marginalizing effect on traditional institutions such as madrassas. It did not, interestingly, recommend the abolishment of traditional institutions as the Macaulay Minute had done. Rather, it established complementary modern and secular institutions and left it up to the market to determine their prospects (Qadir, 2013). Because the grants-in-aid were provided to institutions that met eligibility requirements such as the adoption of a curriculum focused on mathematics, science, and language, the removal of all reference to 'religion' other than as part of a

discrete 'religion' class, and formal teacher training and certification of educators, it altered the structure of grant-accepting madrassas. Teaching, for instance, shifted from being done by respected community figures to formally trained educators.

The Despatch thus institutionalized a 'modern' system of education, which proliferated further after India came under the direct rule of the British Crown three years later in the aftermath of the failed rebellion of 1857. In so doing, it paved the way for the third key intervention: the establishment of Western-style institutions of higher education. In the early nineteenth century, the University of London was founded in England amid a debate about secularism in higher education. In India, the colonial government established three universities at Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras in 1857, based closely on the utilitarian model of the University of London (Qadir, 2013). This intervention, in effect, formalized a secular model of higher education in India, even though these first universities were merely examining bodies and provided very little actual teaching. They "did little to promote analytic capacity or independent thinking and produced…graduates with a half-baked knowledge of English, but sufficiently Westernized to be alienated from their own culture" (Maddison, 1971, p. 40).

These three interventions cumulatively helped shape the nature, scope, and changing role of the madrassas in South Asia as they struggled to survive in the changing socio-political climate and navigate the rise of identity politics within the Indian Muslim community (Riaz, 2010). Until the 1870s, Muslim engagement had remained weak and confined mainly to the three universities at Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. This soon began to change, however, as Muslims began to establish their own institutions of higher education. In 1866, a group of religious scholars established a madrassa at Deoband, partly as a reaction to the growing interest of Muslims in European education and partly "as a centre of Islamic revival in India in opposition to British imperialism" (Qadir, 2013, p. 132). It rejected Western education and pedagogy and advocated a return to traditional Islamic higher education. At the other end of the spectrum, the Muslim-Anglo Oriental College, inspired by European-style education, was established in 1875 by Sayyid Ahmad Khan with the support of the British Government as a means of encouraging Muslim participation in, and integration into, the colonial project. The Dar' ul Uloom Nadwa, established in 1893 by Allama Shibli Nu'mani, rejected both these extreme views regarding Muslim education and attempted to take a more balanced view. These three influential madrassas, with their respective philosophies of Muslim education, became closely aligned with the spectrum of political positions the Muslim community came to adopt in an increasingly politically-charged colonial environment.

The colonial legacy: bifurcation of the education system
The establishment of these and other madrassas in response to colonial policy interventions and their active involvement in the contemporary political discourse is an example of a tangible result of, and reaction to, imperialism. There are, however, many other less tangible results of colonialism as well. Colonialism is more than just "physical violence…inflicted on colonized peoples" or their "natural wealth…extracted and their colonies locked into a relationship of dependency" (McCowan, 2015, p. 41). The colonized learning "to see themselves through the eyes of the colonizer and speak with the colonizer's voice" with "imposed language and frames of thought" is also colonial violence (McCowan, 2015, p. 41). The British also left behind a colonial legacy in the form of an imposed frame of thought. As scholars such as Qadir (2013) and Riaz (2008; 2010) also argue, perhaps the most significant effect of the British interventions in the Indian

education sector was the creation of an ideological binary that bifurcated the education system.

The Macaulay Minute, the 1854 Despatch, and the establishment of secular universities had the cumulative effect of casting education either as modern/Western/secular/true/useful on the one hand, or backward/Indian/religious/false/useless on the other. As the British policies established and funded a system of education that satisfied the conditions of the modern/Western/secular/true/useful half of the binary, religious and traditional education became increasingly marginalized. The public sector of education became secular, and religious and traditional institutions were pushed into the private sphere. The madrassa, specifically, was increasingly "consigned to provid[ing] religious education as opposed to general education" (Riaz, 2008, p. 71), and many ulema, or Islamic scholars, responded by coming to perceive, and fully embrace, their role to protect the religious sphere from Western intrusion and to transmit and preserve their traditions. This shift in perception was accompanied by a shift towards the 'revealed sciences' in the curriculum, away from the 'rational sciences.'

The most lasting effect of this binary, perhaps, was how the 'usefulness' of education came to be understood. The British conception of 'a useful' education, which they promoted and financed, was one based on the secular sciences, and which provided an individual with the requisite skills to participate meaningfully in public life and the formal economy. Under this conception, schools were agents of development and modernization, education systems were centralized, secular, and homogenized, and together they were able to achieve the vision of a secular nationhood (Riaz, 2008). All other education systems which did not subscribe to or promote, this singular, hegemonic conception of the 'use' of education were perceived as 'useless.'

Madrassa reform in post-colonial Pakistan
This bifurcation of the education system and the binary dividing secular public and private education on the one hand, from religious, madrassa education on the other, is the colonial legacy inherited by Pakistan. The education system of the nascent Pakistani state bore the signs of this duality that had emerged during colonial rule. The public sector was modeled on the Western, secular model of education, while the "exclusion of madrassas from formal economy and society, a process that started under British rule, continued in the independence period" (Bano, 2012, p. 43). Moreover, "[i]nspired by the economic progress of colonial rulers, the leaders of the newly independent [Pakistan] sought rapid economic prosperity and industrial growth" and to that end, "any platform averse to modern scientific inquiry was considered suspect" (Bano, 2012, p. 45). Thus began the process of madrassa reform, with the government introducing key reforms in 1962, 1979, and 2001. To date, however, this process remains incomplete.

These three reform efforts were complex and multifaceted, with local political factors playing a significant role in shaping their goals and trajectories. For one, these three organized efforts at reforming the madrassa sector were initiated by military leaders, who had a vested political interest in legitimizing their rule. Second, because Pakistan's *raison d'etre* as an independent nation-state is intimately tied to the interpretation of Islam and 'Muslimness,' the issue of Islamic education is a deeply political one. These reforms were also contentious because they were not always planned, initiated, and implemented by the government with the involvement and support of the ulema. A comprehensive analysis of these reforms and their effects is beyond the scope of this article. It will thus focus instead on a key theme that is common to all three: curriculum reform.

In 1959, a year after assuming power in a *coup d'état*, General Ayub Khan instigated the process of madrassa reform against a backdrop of intense debate on the role of Islam in politics and governance. The reform had two key goals: (1) bringing madrassas under government control by restricting their sources of funding, and (2) curriculum reform. The first goal was achieved through the nationalization of *awaqaf* or Islamic endowments in 1960 and was a success. It had the immediate effect of weakening madrassas, "forc[ing] a change to the ulama's cognitive environment, and pos[ing] a threat to their political vitality," thus creating an enabling environment to enact the second part of the reform, changing their curricula (Riaz, 2008, p. 194).

In 1961, a committee was established to examine the existing curricula used by madrassas and "make recommendations as to how the students of the madrassas could be prepared to meet the demands of employers" (Riaz, 2008, p. 194). It included eleven members, of whom three were affiliated with madrassas, six were from universities, and two were from the government. It included in its purview approximately seven hundred madrassas teaching the Dars-i-Nizami curriculum and was financed by the Asia Foundation, an American non-profit organization (Ali of Swabi, 2012). In 1962, the Report of the committee made a series of recommendations, including the introduction of new subjects such as mathematics, social sciences, and sports, as well as the substitution of unnecessary non-religious subjects with subjects based on undisputed sources of knowledge. It should be noted that the recommendations for reform were limited to the 'non-religious subjects,' although this term itself was a point of contention between the reformers and the clergy.

The specific recommendations of the Report included the extension of the curriculum to fifteen years, including five years of primary education determined by the Ministry of Education and compulsory for all students; the division of the new system into five stages; the use of Arabic and/or English as the medium of instruction at the secondary level and Urdu at the primary level; the introduction of mathematics; the introduction of examinations at the highest level in hadith, astronomy, and Euclidean mathematics; and the removal of logic and philosophy by virtue of being inessential to the study of religion. Additionally, a directorate of religious education was to be established with the mandate to supervise madrassas and in particular, the performance of teachers and students. The Report also called for special six-month training courses for the teachers in the new subjects (Ali of Swabi, 2012). General Ayub Khan's reform agenda was perceived as "an attempt at the 'colonization of Islam'" and unsurprisingly, "the ulema reacted to it" (Rahman, 1999, p. 75). These proposals for curriculum reform were not successful and were rejected by the majority of notable ulema.

The second key set of reforms was initiated by General Zia-ul-Haq, who, like Ayub Khan, came to power in a *coup d'état*, initiated reforms to gain legitimacy, and was responsible for a far-reaching Islamization of Pakistan. In 1978, Zia ordered the Ministry of Religious Affairs to prepare a report on the madrassas in the Sargodha district. This Sargodha Report was a pilot project which paved the way for the Halepota Report and the reforms of 1979 that the latter instigated. The Halepota Report was, in fact, near identical to the Report of 1962 and was produced under the leadership of Dr. A.W.J. Halepota, who was largely responsible for the Report of 1962 as well. Both reforms had the same essential goal: "integrating them [madrassas] with the overall educational system in the country" as "madrassa education was failing to prepare students for the requirements of the modern age and for careers, particularly in the public sector" (Riaz, 2008, p. 199). It found little uniformity in curricula or the system of examination and recommended the integration of the madrassa sector into the mainstream system of education. Unlike the Report of 1962, however, it reportedly did engage the ulema in extensive consultation

prior to making the final recommendations, although there was no ulema representation in the committee leadership. It also offered the madrassas unconditional financial support from the government for operational purposes as well as infrastructural upgrades. As well, the government promised to improve the employment prospects of madrassa graduates, especially in the public sector.

These recommendations included the introduction of new subjects to the Dars-i-Nizami syllabus, such as Urdu, arithmetic, and general science at the primary level; English, general mathematics, and Pakistan Studies at the secondary level; political science, political economy, and English as optional subjects at the baccalaureate and master's level; and comparative religious sciences as a mandatory subject at the master's level. One-third of the curriculum was to be composed of 'modern' subjects. A National Institute of Madrassas was proposed to supervise madrassas, revise and compile the new curriculum, administer standardized exit examinations up to the master's level to allow madrassa students to compete with other students, award diplomas, and promote the interests of the madrassas, their teachers and students. The composition of this institute was to ensure equal representation of all subsects from within the madrassa sector as well as representation of the government. Furthermore, the equivalence of madrassa certifications against the formal education system was proposed from the primary to the master's level (Ali of Swabi, 2012).

This second wave of curriculum reforms also failed to achieve its ends, despite the apparent concessions to madrassas. Although it found initial support, it was soon boycotted by almost all schools of thought within the madrassa sector as an attack on their autonomy (Ali of Swabi, 2012). Some madrassa organizations did adopt certain recommendations in later years to access the promised funding, but observers argue that this was largely a result of a quid pro quo between the sector and the government (Riaz, 2008, p. 200). As Pakistan became a frontline state in the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the late 1980s, in which the madrassas were actively supported by Pakistani as well as allied governments, the reform impetus was forgotten for almost a decade.

The third key set of reforms came under General Pervez Musharraf, yet another military ruler. These were enacted in three stages, and the circumstances which gave them impetus are strongly suggestive of neocolonialist forces at play. Musharraf came into power in 1999, and in 2001, promulgated the Pakistan Madrassah Education (PME) Board Ordinance. The Ordinance was aimed at integrating madrassas into mainstream education and proposed the establishment of a board to supervise madrassas. As well, it outlined a model curriculum including secular subjects for madrassas to follow and established three 'model' hybrid institutions, which were hoped to set an example of how religious and secular education may be combined in a single institution. These model madrassas offered English, mathematics, computer science, economics, political science, law, and Pakistan Studies in addition to Islamic education.

However, before this Ordinance could be fully implemented, the events of 9/11 took place. In their aftermath, Pakistan was under extreme international pressure from the United States and the European Union to curb militancy associated by some reports with its madrassas. In response, Musharraf introduced the Madrassah Registration Ordinance 2002, with immediate effect. This Ordinance was focused more on madrassa regulation than curriculum reform, requiring all madrassas to register with the Pakistan Madrassah Education Board and provincial boards at the risk of being fined or forcibly shut down. It also restricted funding from foreign sources as well as the admission of foreign students.

As far as curriculum reform was concerned, it promised funding to madrassas offering science, mathematics, English, and Urdu in these subjects.

This Ordinance was much more restrictive and rigid in its proposals than the PME Ordinance 2001, and this was due, in part, to the pressure from the West, and especially the United States, which led to a change in the government's stance on the reforms (International Crisis Group, 2002). The intent of the 2001 reforms was—at least ostensibly—to establish the model madrassas and not impinge on the freedom and autonomy of the sector, with General Musharaf emphatically clarifying that 'We do not aim to bring Madaris under the control of the State'" (Muhammad et al., 2011, p.316). The Ordinance of 2002 attempted to precisely do this.

Both "the United States and the military government of Pervez Musharraf concurred that *madrassahs* in Pakistan were the first and foremost source of terrorism and militancy in Pakistan and beyond, and that these had to be tamed, reformed, or simply uprooted and banned if need be" (Naseem, 2009, p.221). The state of Pakistan's education system, and specifically of the madrassa sector, was identified as "relevant to both immediate and longer-term U.S. interests in South Asia," and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) implemented a five-year, $100 million bilateral agreement in 2002 to increase access to quality education in Pakistan (Kronstandt, 2004, p. 1-2). The Western media kept the issue of madrassa regulation very much in the public consciousness. Under continued pressure from the U.S., the "bulk of U.S. aid for educational reform [was] diverted to fighting/reforming/controlling the *madrassahs*" (Naseem, 2009, p.220).

In mid-2002, the Musharraf regime introduced a third stage of reforms, which turned the focus back on curriculum. The five-year plan (2002/3-2007/8) aimed to support 8,000 willing madrassas in the adoption of curriculum changes in the form of the introduction of secular subjects such as English, mathematics, Pakistan Studies/Social Studies and general science at the primary to secondary levels, and English, economics, Pakistan Studies and computer science at the intermediate level. These curriculum changes were intended to integrate the madrassa sector with the formal education system, with the Ministry of Education providing the textual and instructional material and support. To facilitate this, the government offered to provide teacher training, incentives in the form of the cost of equipment such as computers and other infrastructure, and a one-time grant to equip libraries and buildings. Furthermore, it was willing to open the lines of communication with the ulema to facilitate this modernization scheme (Riaz, 2008).

Like its predecessors, these reforms faced a significant backlash. As early as the initiation of the first stage of reform, the ulema formed an association called the Ittehad-e-Tanzimat-ul Madaris-e-Deenia (IITD) to resist any attacks on their autonomy in either the administration of the madrassas or in the determination of the curriculum. Furthermore, international pressure, and especially that from the United States, simply served to add fuel to the fire. The ulema, as well as some sectors of civil society, perceived this as a hegemonic project of the West. In her analysis of the Pakistani madrassa sector, C. Christine Fair (2009) reports the sentiments of various madrassa leaders at the time: "no one has the right to interfere in our institutions," "it is pressure from the U.S. government," "the Pakistani government is not sincere" and that there is "no need to introduce worldly subjects [into the curriculum]" (p. 88). By the end of 2002, only 1,200 madrassas had registered themselves. The majority chose not to accept the curriculum reform or reveal their sources of funding. The nature and scope of the reforms remained divisive, and there was very little progress in the madrassa sector (Riaz, 2008).

Discussion: why did these reforms fail?
These reforms failed for many reasons. They failed because of poor implementation. They failed because of the complex political, economic, and cultural forces at play. Most importantly, they failed because of immense pushback and deep suspicion by the madrassas and the ulema. This reaction of the madrassas, and the roots of their resistance to reform, can arguably be traced back to the colonial interventions aimed at reforming the predecessors of these Pakistani madrassas. The bifurcation of the education system that the colonial interventions left behind, and the binary that their policies helped create and which shapes the conception of education to this day in post-colonial Pakistan is one contributing factor to the failure of these madrassa reforms. The binary of painting modern Western secular values as true and useful versus the depiction of Islamic values deemed as backward or false can be distilled down to the basic, underlying question of what is the purpose, and hence 'use,' of education? The British understood the 'use' of education as the preparation of the student to participate and perform well in the public and economic spheres of the colonial regime. In the contemporary era, those who subscribe to this view of the 'use' of education perceive a 'useful' education as one that equips a student for functioning in the modern capitalist economic system, and the subjects that are the most 'useful' are the secular, 'rational' ones such as science and mathematics, and those that teach English, the global lingua franca. As the proponents of neocolonialism and World Culture Theory are likely to argue, this conception of education, reflecting the values of Western liberal capitalism, has, in fact, become the dominant view of education around the world.

In post-colonial states such as Pakistan, this binary has in effect institutionalized a singular, hegemonic ideology of education which has been internalized by the colonized state and its peoples. This ideology frames how they think of education and is reflected in the education priorities of the government and the public system of education. From the outset, the Pakistani state has held madrassa education in disdain and perceived it as inferior; in the country's first election, it designated madrassa graduates as 'illiterate,' thereby barring them from the electoral register (Bano, 2012). In introducing the madrassa reforms of 1962, 1979, and 2001, the Pakistani government thus espoused this view of the 'usefulness' of education, with the result that all three reforms were integrationist in nature, aiming to integrate madrassa education into the mainstream, formal system with the intent to make the former more 'useful' for the needs of the twenty-first century.

The problem, however, was that the madrassas did not espouse this view of the 'usefulness' of education. The pushback and the resistance resulted from a clash of visions about what makes education 'useful.' Madrassas have a very different conception of the use of the education they provide. They perceive their role to be the preservation and transmission of the faith, imparting religious education with the purpose of making their students 'good Muslims'. As such, they argue, their curriculum should be judged according to how well it succeeds in achieving *this*. They have very little interest in preparing their students for the knowledge economy. In this capacity, they reserve for themselves the right to determine what makes a 'good Muslim' and design their curricula accordingly, resisting any impingement on their autonomy.

All three reform efforts can be seen to have this underlying clash of visions. In all three cases, the "goal of these changes…[was] to create equivalence between general education and that offered by the madrassas [and] to introduce non-religious, occasionally described as 'useful' subjects…, thereby rendering the madrassa students more employable in jobs" (Riaz, 2008, p. 191). The reforms of 1962 and 1979 sought to force madrassas to include

secular subjects in their curricula. The reforms of 2001/02 attempted to incentivize the madrassas, but with the same underlying goal.

The madrassas of Pakistan reacted to these reforms by clinging to their traditions just as the madrassa at Deoband had reacted to the colonial attempts at reform by espousing religious revival. They believed that integration into mainstream education would prevent them from imparting religious education and that the primary goal of the government has always been to curtail their autonomy and independence (Hadid & Sattar, 2019). Considering the Musharraf-era reforms, moreover, they argue that "[w]hatever was happening in the beginning of twentieth century at local level under British colonial rule is happening on a global scale under American colonial rule [*sic.*]" (Riaz, 2008, p. 208). The result of this has been the development of deep mutual distrust between the madrassa leadership and the government of Pakistan, with each party wary of the other's intentions and convinced that they will fail to honour their obligations (Johnson et al., 2006). This trust deficit will need to be overcome for reconciliation and any meaningful reform of the sector to take place.

The way forward: decolonizing madrassa reform
In 2019, the Government of Pakistan's federal education ministry announced plans for the development of a Single National Curriculum (SNC), which would be implemented across all provinces and territories and in public and private schools, as well as in the madrassas. The impetus behind this curriculum reform was ostensibly the need to "address the inequities in the education system, improve the quality of education, and provide equality of opportunity for all children" (Bari, 2021, p.139). With regard to madrassas, the government's goal is reportedly to bring "madrassas…within the ambit of formal schooling" so as to "help hundreds of thousands of seminary students get the same education as other students in the country and allow them to appear in board exams" (Hashmi, 2020). The first phase of this curriculum reform was implemented in August 2021, in which the curriculum and textbooks were developed for grades Pre-1 to 5 in all subjects. The second and third phases are expected to be implemented in March 2022 and March 2023, respectively.

The SNC was reportedly developed through extensive consultation with, and the involvement of, a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives from the madrassa sector. In 2020, it was reported in the media that an agreement had been reached between the Ministry of Education and the federation of religious seminaries that will see some 35,000 madrassas adopt the SNC, register, and have their bank accounts opened (Hashmi, 2020). In 2021, emerging reports suggest that the madrassas are backing out of this agreement and that the government is now giving them five to six years to adopt the SNC (The Current, 2021).

It remains to be seen whether the madrassas will concede and adopt the SNC. However, unless Pakistan looks back at its history of madrassa reforms, and indeed, the development of madrassas in the context of its colonial history, and derives lessons from these, these reforms are likely to take the same path as their predecessors. Pakistan needs to decolonize madrassa reform, which will require, first and foremost, a conscious shift in thinking. It will entail becoming aware of how its colonial history has imposed certain hegemonic frames of thought upon its collective psyche, which determine how it perceives education and its 'usefulness.' It will have to examine the ideological binary which has bifurcated its education system and historically marginalized its madrassas. By becoming conscious of how the binary continues to shape its framing of questions of

education and its 'usefulness,' it will be able to approach reform with a broader focus and a deeper understanding.

The framing of the SNC reforms reflects this binary at play. Prime Minister Imran Khan has called on madrassas to produce "better qualified students"— "engineers and doctors"—and to adopt a core curriculum with subjects like math, English, and science (Hadid & Sattar, 2019). Madrassa leaders, on the other hand, oppose the SNC reforms and continue to hold a different perception of what the goal of education should be (Hadid & Sattar, 2019). In response to criticism that the students at his seminary are learning little besides memorizing the Quran and learning Islamic law, one madrassa principal argued that his students "need little else": "[t]he seminaries deal with man's spiritual issues…They bless the communities around them" (Hadid & Sattar, 2019). If there is thus no agreement on what students need and will find 'useful,' there can be little agreement on reform.

The shift in thinking is thus necessary for the decolonization of future reform efforts. It is necessary to dispel the perception of madrassas as institutions providing inadequate education or as hotbeds of extremist ideology in dire need of government regulation and reform—a consequence of the ideological binary. This shift will require an understanding of the history of madrassas, and especially how they have evolved in response to external pressures and attacks on their autonomy. The Indigenous models of the madrassa and its traditional socio-political role and function will need to be revisited. For instance, madrassas have always functioned as centers of religious learning, advising individuals on how to be good Muslims and the state on how to develop administrations based on Islamic principles. Moreover, madrassas have traditionally operated in informal settings, where there was "no attendance register, no degree awarding system, and no fixed curriculum" and knowledge was transmitted through the deep and informal bonds of a teacher-student relationship (Bano, 2012, p. 25); this changed only after the establishment of the Deoband madrassa. Historically, there was a fine balance in the curriculum between 'rational' knowledge and 'revealed' knowledge, as evidenced in the 17th century Farangi Mahal madrassa. It was mainly in response to the colonial reforms that madrassas began to phase out the former and began to focus almost exclusively on religious education. This history and traditional model of the madrassa will need to be kept in mind.

Any attempt at reform of the sector also needs to understand that the institution of the madrassa has always had internally inspired reformist movements, and these should be explored to understand how the sector and its representatives themselves understand reform. Indeed, there have been a number of Islamic scholars who have realized the necessity of modernizing the madrassa curriculum. However, how they understand 'modernization' is arguably likely to be different from the Western conception of modernization, and it will be worthwhile to examine what entails the former. Similarly, Islamic theology and the writings of classical Islamic philosophers such as al-Farabi, al-Ghazzali, and Ibn-e-Sina, who all emphasized "the intimate relationship between knowledge, theoretical and practical wisdom, logical reasoning, ethics and the aesthetics of learning, loving and caring, and spirituality" (Riaz, 2008, p. 221) may suggest a way of modernizing the religious curriculum which is amenable to Islamic principles.

Armed with this understanding of the history and development of the South Asian madrassa, the concrete steps that a reform-oriented government can take towards decolonization and reconciliation include, first and foremost, engaging with the madrassa leaders—constructively, extensively, and in good faith (Johnson et al., 2006). The goal of the engagement should be consensus building—to understand the perspectives and

priorities of the sector and find common ground. The government should make a genuine effort to understand how the madrassa leadership perceives reform and modernization, for indeed, it is by no means oblivious to the need to do so and is very well aware that the survival of the institution in the twenty-first century depends upon it. Confidence-building measures should be adopted to overcome the immense trust deficit that has developed between the Pakistani government and the madrassa sector over the decades. Madrassa leaders should be full partners in the reform effort and be involved in every step of reform design and implementation.

In the case of a reform such as the Single National Curriculum, the core aim of which is to introduce standards of learning at every grade level, these standards—at least as they will apply to madrassa students—should be developed in full partnership with madrassa leadership. If it is not possible to develop a single set of learning standards that will apply equally well to the public, private, as well as madrassa education sectors, then a set of unique learning standards should be developed for the sector based on best practices from other Muslim countries and education systems (Johnson et al., 2006). Similarly, the textbooks for the sector should be developed in consultation with the madrassa leaders and de-center Western canons of knowledge and the assumptions and narratives of Western modernity. They should aim, instead, to give space to multiple, and especially Islamic, canons of knowledge.

Conclusion
The experience of colonialism has left an indelible mark on the conception of education in post-colonial Pakistan. It has led to the rise of a single, hegemonic ideology—inherited as a colonial legacy—that understands the primary purpose of education to be the imparting of the skills necessary for meaningful participation in public life and the formal economy. A 'useful' education is thus that which, in British colonial times, prepared individuals to participate in the colonial machinery as civil servants, and today, to participate in the global knowledge economy. Under the hegemony of this ideology, all other 'uses' of education have been discredited and overlooked, and nowhere is this more visible than in the case of the madrassa sector and the issue of madrassa reform.

The madrassa, holding steadfast to its own purpose of providing religious instruction and spiritual guidance, has always clashed with this dominant ideology. In colonial India, it was considered an opponent to enlightenment, rationalism, and scientism; in post-colonial Pakistan, it is considered an obstacle to progress and development, nation-building, democracy, and since 2001, a 'security concern' (Masud, 2021). The Pakistani government has been unsuccessfully attempting to incorporate it into mainstream education for decades through a series of failed reforms.

These reforms have failed because of a clash of underlying ideology—a clash of competing understandings of the purpose education should fulfill. Future reforms, including the implementation of the Single National Curriculum that Pakistan is currently embarking on, are also likely to fail unless steps are taken towards the decolonization of policy and reform agendas, and sincere efforts are made towards reconciliation in order to overcome the deep mistrust that currently exists between the state and the sector. These will require a shift in thinking—an understanding of the ideological binary bifurcating the education system, how it has affected the evolution of the madrassa sector, and how it continues to shape policy and reform agendas. These will also require concrete steps to involve the madrassa sector in full partnership in the development and implementation of any future

reforms so that the sector can modernize in accordance with its own needs and role as a central institution in Islamic societies.

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Appendix 1

Table 1
Stages of madrassa education in Pakistan and equivalency with general education

Level in madrassa system	Duration	Sanad (diploma)	General education grade/certificate	Notes
Ibtidayee (Nazara)	4-5 years	Sahahdatul Tahfeez-ul-Quran	Primary - 5th grade	May be offered by a 'maktab', not a madrassa offering higher stages of education Recitation of Quran; memorization of important verses
Mutawawassat (Hifz)	3 years	Shahadatul Mutawassat	Middle - 8th grade	Memorization of entire Quran Some institutions offer secular subjects such as history and geography; most do not have capacity to teach science
Sanawiya Amma (Tazvid, Qeerat)	2 years	Shahadatul Sanawiya ul-Amma	Matric – 10th grade	Modes of Quranic recitation Qeerat: comprised of 7 standardized modes of recitation. Completion makes one a Qari, a prestigious career option
Sanawiya Khasa (Tahtini)	2 years	Shahadatul Sanawiya Khasa	Intermediate - FA	
Aliya, Mohafequl (Khasa wa Sada)	2 years	Shahadatul Aliya	Bachelor's - BA	
Alamiya, Daura-e-Hadith (Sabia wa Saniya)	2 years	Shahadatul Alamiya	Master's	
Takmeel	1 year	Varies with specialization	Post-M.A.	

Table 2
Typical curriculum of a Pakistani madrassa

Year	Content
1	Biography of the Prophet; conjugation-grammar, syntax, Arabic literature, chirography, chant illation
2	Conjugation-grammar; syntax; Arabic literature; jurisprudence; logic; chirography, chant illation
3	Quranic exegesis; jurisprudence; syntax; Arabic literature; hadith; logic; Islamic Brotherhood; chant illation; external study e.g. Indian Islamic movements
4	Quranic exegesis; jurisprudence; principles of jurisprudence; rhetoric; hadith; logic; history; chant illation; modern sciences (sciences of cities of Arabia, geography of Arabian Peninsula and other Islamic countries)
5	Quranic exegesis; jurisprudence; principles of jurisprudence; rhetoric, beliefs, logic; Arabic literature, chant illation, external study (history of Indian kings)
6	Interpretation of the Quran; jurisprudence; principles of interpretation and jurisprudence; Arabic literature; philosophy; chant illation; study of Prophet's traditions
7	Sayings of the Prophet; jurisprudence; belief, responsibility, chant illation; external study (Urdu texts)
8	Ten books by various authors on the sayings of the Prophet