



Challenges Of Socio-Economic Marginalisation: A Study Of Madrasa Education In Kishanganj District Of Bihar, India

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Abstract

Madrasa community as a marginalised group within the minority communities of India face extreme socio-economic and low literacy challenges. Madrasa teachers and students, because of being vulnerable on accounts of their low socio-economic status, lack exposure to mainstreaming and training and development opportunities for seeking gainful employment despite Govt. of India's policy of modernisation and universalisation of education. Yet, they continue to function in relative isolation. Against this backdrop of Covid-19 pandemic issues, this paper reports the inequalities stemming from social-security and welfare issues, in addition to digital remote learning challenges and disparities faced by the madrasa community.

Keywords: Marginalised institutions, Mainstreaming, Employment, Covid-19, Madrasa Education.

1.0. Introduction: Context of the Study

In India, madrasa education is widespread among Muslims' lower-middle and underprivileged sections (Pandey, 2018). Madrasa performs a prominent role in education and serves as the most convenient literacy centre for Muslims. Madrasas are educational institutions, as well as an identical symbol of Indian Muslims (Sachar, 2006). Madrasas provide incentives and maintain retention as part of the Government of India's Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Universal Elementary Education (UEE) program. At present, 36 % of Muslim children between the age group of six to eighteen are getting an education in Indian madrasas. Madrasas nearly educate 1.5 million students yearly (Fahimuddin, 2004). Madrasas across the country provide elementary education to lakhs of children that fill the gap of elementary education where the government fails. Madrasas

are primarily dependent on charity (Pandey, 2018). Most Muslim parents send their children to marginalised institutions, particularly maktabas, for the essential learning of Islam, such as recitation or memorisation of the Quran. It promotes the teaching of the Quran and Hadith¹ and caters to the spiritual needs of Muslims and the bastions of their faith (Rahmani, 2010). These children also attend private or public schools as well. These students are comparable to Christian children who attend Bible or Catechism sessions and Jewish youngsters who attend Hebrew schools (Fair, 2012).

Human Development Index

After the division of Purnea district of Bihar, Kishanganj became an independent district on 14 January 1990. Kishanganj comes under the Seemanchal region. Kishanganj had a population of 1,690,400 in 2011 (District census, 2011). Kishanganj is the only Muslim-majority district of Bihar, where Muslims share 68 % of the total population. Kishanganj is an economically, educationally and socially the most underprivileged, deprived, and marginalised district of the Seemanchal region. Due to the high number of Muslims in Kishanganj district, marginalised institutions such as maktabas and madrasas are found in more numbers than others, and 54 % of all aided madrasas are located in Seemanchal districts of Bihar. In Kishanganj, the total number of aided madrasas is 337 out of 1937, consisting of 17 %. (<http://bsmeb.org/Madrasaper cent20details.HTML>). Despite a high number of maktabas and madrasas in Kishanganj, the literacy rate is meagre. It is only 27 % (Alam, 2011).

The majority of Muslims of Kishanganj belong to the hinterland, and they are primarily agricultural labourers, daily wagers, and low paid service sector employees. Because of poverty, the majority fail to utilise educational opportunities. At the same time, the condition of the state's educational infrastructure is in shambles, and families avoid sending their children to state-run schools and also the rising cost of education and shortage of public institutions have encouraged the parent to send their children to madrasas (Alam, 2011; Blanchard, 2007). Most Muslim parents have no option except to send their wards to religious schools like maktabas and madrasas due to low or almost free education (Sachar, 2006; Shazli & Asma, 2015). More than 90 % of madrasa learners in India belong to poor families (Salam & Parvaiz, 2020).

2.0. Literature Review: The History of the Madrasa Education in India

In India, madrasas came with the advent of Muslim rule and played a central role in the economic-cultural life of Muslim society. While the darkness of illiteracy continued in the past, madrasas imparted knowledge, morals, and religious education. Madrasas promoted faith and knowledge in this country, trained the young generations, contributed to local culture and civilisation, broadened the vision of the country and inspired people to serve the country (Agha, 2017).

Before the British education system came, madrasas were the only educational institutions in the country (Rahmani, 2010). Hassan (2020) notes 'Madrasas were providing a wide range of courses from theology to science, philosophy and philology, history and literature, and also music and lessons of adab, polite

culture'(08). They were not only places for education but also provided fooding and lodging for mushtahiq (needy) students (Hassan, 2020). In the early nineteenth century, Lord Macaulay encouraged the British government to establish an education system to secure the British's interests and changed the old education system entirely by replacing some modern subjects in the curriculum (Evan, 2002).

With the fall of Muslim rule and the introduction of the new education system, Muslims perceived it as a threat to Islam and considered it harmful to values and culture (Jhingran, 2010; Rahman, 2019). They assumed British education as a vehicle for the Christianization of Indian Muslims and a threat to the integrity of their religion and culture (Hashmi, 1989). British arrival brought a sea change in the curriculum of the madrasa education system. The famous and renowned Dars-e-Nizami changed, and some new subjects were added, i.e. history, geography, general knowledge, civics, economics, English and Hindi (Kaur, 1990). Muslims opposed that education system, and they established various madrasas such as Darul Uloom Deoband in 1865, Madrasa Mazahirul Uloom in 1866, Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh in 1875, Nadwatul Ulema at Lucknow in 1898, Madrasatul Islah and Jamiatul Falah at Azamgarh (Jhingran, 2010). It marked the apolitical movement for preserving the heritage of knowledge and started to cater to the needs of the religion of the Muslim community, especially to the lower classes who lagged behind (Agha, 2017).

In the post-partition period, Muslims started projecting their religion and maintaining identity through madrasa education (Jhingran, 2010). According to the 1950's census, there were 88 Arabic madrasas in the traditional style (Kaur, 1990). In 1950, the Indian Constitution came into force; it became easier to build their institutions as Article 29(1), 30(1), and 30(2) of the Indian Constitution states, 'Muslims have a right to work for the defence of their religion and open makhtabs and madrasas' (Abbassi, 1961:40-41, cited in Kaur, 1990:205).

According to the Third All India Educational Survey by NCERT in 1973, there were only 1033 madrasas. Another study in 1985 conducted by the Centre for Promotion of Science at Aligarh Muslim University showed 2890 madrasas were running on. Human Resources Development figures that the number was 12,000, and according to the Home Ministry in 2002, the number of madrasas was increased by 31, 857. A considerable number of madrasas and makhtabs were established in the last fifty years, especially in those places where a large number of the Muslim population resided (Sikand, 2005).

3.0. Issues and Challenges of Indian Madrasa Education

Socio-economic conditions are challenged by the following issues:

(i). Madrasa community is a marginalised community within the minority community. Because of their relative isolation and economic deprivation. Their interaction is confined to their own community. There is significantly less exposure to interaction with other communities of the country. It creates a wall of alienation that has led to building phobia among the non-muslims about the madrasa community (Neha, 2020). Madrasa community live like frogs in the well: read, learn, memorise and repeat (Salam & Parvaiz, 2020). However, they are somewhat handicapped in contributing to their vital role in their community due to ignorance of contemporary secular/ modern education (https://jamiat.org.in/masters/pdf_download/13).

- (ii). Most madrasas are located in the hinterland (Nehal, Salma & Husain, 2016). Therefore, there are hardly any social activities related to their self-esteem and cultural interaction.
- (iii). Each year, madrasa students pass out from their respective madrasa to illuminate our society and become alms-seekers instead of productive citizens.
- (iv). One view is that madrasa students failed to contribute to the development and growth of the nation because of their religious centric education system and orthodox mindset. Upadhyay (2003) says, 'it is a fact that Indian madrasas have produced a number of world-famous Islamic scholars, but lakhs of Muslim educated from these madrasas are deprived of the job opportunities because of the ignorance of career-oriented education' (5).
- (v). Unaided madrasas oppose governmental grants because Mohammad Qasim Nanotawi, the founder of Darul Uloom Deoband, insisted that madrasas should not accept any state grant. For states, budgets are followed by interference in the madrasa system, and there is an apprehension that the government interference will be disastrous for madrasas (Rahmani, 2010:43). Justice M.S.A. Siddiqui, who served as the National Commission for Minority Education Institutions chairman for ten years from 2004-2014, says that grants generally lead to fraud and corrupt the reputation of marginalised institutions. Therefore, over 90 % of madrasas stay away and run on donations (<https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/india-news-new-moon-sighted-winds-of-change-quietly-blowing-across-madrasas-in-hindi-heartland/305072>). Despite mainstream challenges, this apprehension is not baseless compared to Govt. aided madrasas (https://jamiat.org.in/masters/pdf_download/13). This is because even the conditions of some of the govt aided madrasas are not good.
- (vi). Some madrasa education systems remain confined to theological value and knowledge and avoid looking to the outside world for professional knowledge and skill development. Unfortunately, they limit the scope of learning and acquiring knowledge about science, art, engineering, business administration, and humanities (Wani, 2012; Shazli & Asma, 2015). As Sikand (2005) states, 'the Deoband madrasa, for instance, still insists that the sun revolves around the earth, and it has special seating arrangements for invisible Jinns²' (xxvi). It is totally ill-suited to modern and plural society.
- (vii). Poor infrastructural adequacy is another challenge to overcome. Lack of funds is the biggest obstacle for the madrasa from procuring the necessary upgrades to resources, facilities, and infrastructure (Nehal, Salma & Husain, 2016).
- (viii). Lack of education for mainstreaming and employability.
- (ix). Lack of uniformity in syllabus, subjects, specialisation or duration of multiple degrees. (Qasmi, 2005). According to Justice M.S.A. Siddiqui, 'Many students who pass out of madrasas face difficulties in getting admission in government recognised higher education institutes' (<https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/india-news-new-moon-sighted-winds-of-change-quietly-blowing-across-madrasas-in-hindi-heartland/305072>). Madrasa authorities are apprehensive about linking their

degrees to the university system; they fear their students will become careerists and give up their calling as pious faith teachers (Moosa, 2015).

(x). Lack of regular assessment of the students. Most Indian madrasas follow a bi-assessment pattern; half-yearly and annually.

(xi). Most madrasas hire only one teacher to teach multiple subjects such as English, mathematics and other modern subjects at different levels due to financial crunch (Fahimuddin, 2004).

(xii). Most madrasa teachers do not get an opportunity for training. The lack of training and modern teaching methods affect students' learning outcomes (Rizvi, 2019).

(xiii). Prevalence of rote learning and memorisation is helpful for relevant pedagogy. Teachers hardly get any chance or opportunity to learn and apply new methods and pedagogy of teaching. Classrooms are teacher-centric, and teachers are knowledge bearers rather than facilitators or trainers (Neha, 2020).

(xiv). Employment is a significant cause of concern for madrasa educated students. The majority of the students come from economically weaker sections of society. They are usually the most needed for quality education for availing career and employment opportunities. In recent years, madrasa stakeholders also recognised that job is a fundamental concern for madrasas students because their parents hope to earn a livelihood after completing madrasa education. Traditional employment shows limited opportunities as an imam³, muazzin⁴ in a masjid or a teacher in maktab. Therefore, training for new employment prospects is necessary (Sikand, 2005).

4.0. Objectives

- I. To examine fundamental socio-economic issues and challenges in the selected Kishanganj madrasas.
- II. To identify the financial and survival issues in the selected Kishanganj madrasas during the pandemic.

5.0. Madrasa Education in Bihar

The private madrasas of Bihar have different patterns of education and curriculum, and there is a wide disparity. They lack uniformity in syllabus, subjects, specialisation or duration of multiple degrees. In contrast, aided madrasas of Bihar are recognised by Bihar Madrasa Board⁵, and their degree holders can quickly enter mainstream education (Alam, 2011).

5.1. Some Prominent Madrasas of Kishanganj

I. Madrasa Jamiatul Imam Al-Bukhari

It came into existence as an Islamic institution in 1988 under 'Tauheed Educational Trust'. It follows an educational pattern of the Al-Jamia-Tus-Salafia, Varanasi. There are almost 700 students and 55 teachers. It entails a thirteen-year study program which is divided into the following stages:

- A. Primary stage; It takes three years. It offers religious education as well as modern/secular subjects.

- B. Middle stage; It is also a three-year program. Morphology, syntax, basics of theology, translation of Quran, Arabic language and literature, biography of Prophet Muhammad, science, social science, Urdu, Hindi, Bangla and English languages are taught.
- C. Secondary stage; It is another three-year course in which advanced levels of morphology, syntax, theology, Islamic jurisprudence, Hadith, Quranic translation, science, social science, mathematics, Arabic language and literature and English are part of the curriculum. After completion, the students receive the degree of Almiyat.
- D. Kulliyah stage; It is the final educational program, and the students get a degree of Fazilah after completing the course. It takes three years of rigorous analysis of advanced levels of Quranic exegesis, e.g. Tafseer, Hadith, Fiqh (jurisprudence) and allied subjects, to be the powerful thirst at this level. In social sciences, history and languages, such as Arabic and English, are taught. Computer instruction is also imparted in this programme.

II. Jamia Aisha-Al-Islamia

Under the Tauheed Education trust, it was established in 1992 to give Islamic education and modern subjects to the girls students. In the beginning, there were only 50 girls in this madrasa. In recent, there have been more than 1000 residential girls and 200 non-residential girl students having 65 teachers.

III. Madarsa Ashrafal Uloom

It is located in a rural area. It was established in 1987, and now it is an aided madrasa from Bihar Madrasa Board. Yet, it lacks basic amenities such as electricity, playground, boundary wall, computer, library, etc.

IV. Madrasa Nasiria Ashrafia

It has been actively involved in educating the poor children of the district of Kishanganj and other areas of India since 1973. The Bihar State Madrasa Education Board aided in 1978. Since then, hundreds of poor students have been educated up to the secondary level of education. Madrasa also runs professional courses sponsored by the National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language, MHRD, Govt. of India, for deprived children.

It is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD), Department of Higher Education, Government of India.

7.0. Methodology

The mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) are adopted for this study, and primary data are collected from administrators, teachers, and students of selected madrasas of Kishanganj. The survey research⁷ survey and interview have been used for data collection in order to measure the madrasa community's perceptions. Normative survey has been conducted to collect detailed information regarding the socio-economic issues and challenges of madrasa education in Kishanganj. The selection of the madrasas is based on the purposive

sampling technique, whereas the selection of teachers and students is based on the random sampling technique. A cross-sectional study of random samples 180 has been collected from administrators, teachers, and students of 10 madrasas of Kishanganj (see table 1). The interview, primary survey, field notes and documents have been triangulated to formulate the findings of the study.

Table 1. Sample Description

S.No.	Name of Madrasa	No. of Administrator	No. of Teachers	No. of Students
1	Madrasa Jamiatul Bukhari, Khagra, Kishanganj	1	20	50
2	Madrasa Jamia Al-Aishha (Girls), Halim Chowk, Kishanganj	1	10	15
3	Madrasa Fatema Tuzzahra (Girls), Kishanganj	1	05	15
4	Madrasa Gausia Darul Uloom, Noorpara, Kishanganj	1	03	10
5	Madrasa Anjuman Islamia Subhas Palli Kishanganj	1	03	5
6	Madrasa Amjadia Ashrafia, Kadam Rasool, Kishanganj	1	02	5
7	Madrasa Darul Uloom Hanfia, Halim Chowk, Kishanganj	1	02	5
8	Madrasa , Darul Uloom, Bahadurganj, Kishanganj	1	02	5
9	Madrasa Islamia Gausia Sufia, Khagra, Kishanganj	1	02	5
10	Madrasa Talimul Banat, Chakla, Kishanganj	1	01	5
	Total	10	50	120

Source: Primary Survey, (2020-21)

8.0. Findings of the Study: Real Issues and Challenges of Madrasa Education in Kishanganj District of Bihar

Infrastructure

Most of the madrasa of Kishanganj are not having basic amenities or dormitories for their students. Classroom, playground, boundary wall and washroom are inadequate in most rural madrasas. During the field visit, the library facilities are not adequate enough to support the learners. Electricity, internet connectivity, and other related digital resources are either not functioning well or are not available.

Teaching Methodology

Most madrasa teachers do not get an opportunity for proper training, nor do they have a resource for appropriate teacher training. The disruptive nature of digital tools has thrown a great challenge to madrasa teachers. Most madrasa teachers work in isolation (Aleaz, 2005), and they are poorly aware of their needs. This is because they have adjusted to the poor working conditions.

Financial

State Madrasa Board funds aided madrasas, but private/unaided madrasas are deprived of proper funding. The research data shows that there is no transparency in the funding of madrasa for the welfare of the madrasa stakeholders. Some of the government-aided madrasas have been recorded only on paper. They are getting benefits from the Minority Welfare Department of Bihar in the name of the development fund for their madrasa infrastructure. At times, the flow or release of funds is possible only when political influences are exercised.

During interaction with the parents of madrasa students, it is found that most of the girls' parents do not motivate to enroll on their wards in those madrasas where madrasa is running on Sadaqah⁷, Zakat⁸ and Fitrah⁹ (almsgiving) or any other sources. They are hardly ready to pay their daughter's food and lodging fees.

Curriculum

The madrasa community and ulema¹⁰ want reform in the curriculum because they are convinced that teaching modern or vocational subjects up to the highest level is instrumental in meeting the current societal and employment needs. They emphasise the need for scientific and technological education. They suggest that the madrasa curriculum must be modernised without any changes in Dars-e- Nizami¹¹ syllabus. Some prominent Muslim scholars, academicians, and influencers feel the system needs reform and must be updated. It is crucial to bring the products of the marginalised institutions to the mainstream and enable them to compete for their career (Outlook, 2013; Sharma, 2021). As a member of the Delhi Minorities Commission's advisory committee, Masoom Moradabadi states that secular/ modern subjects can be taught, but the primary curriculum of madrasas should not be touched (<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/free-textbooks-for-schools-including-madrasas-if-they-adopt-curriculum/story-En5ScRb9wKOaHIJ6jYp4O.html>).

Lack of Awareness

Most madrasas of Kishanganj are unaware of the aims and objectives. This actually hinders the career option of their students. The study shows that most of the madrasas in Kishanganj are located in rural following which they are less exposed to modern and virtual education prevalent in the urban area. Most of the madrasa teachers and administrators of Kishanganj do not know how to benefit from the state and central governments' schemes, such as to name a few, Scheme for Providing Quality Education to Madrasas/Minorities (SPEMM) covers Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrasa (SPQEM) and Infrastructure Development of Minority Institutes (IDMI). Most of the madrasas are non-government aided madrasas in Kishanganj, and they are operating without any registration for the trust.

9.0. Limitations of the Study

The present study is delimited to the teachers and students of madrasa situated in the Kishanganj district of Bihar. Fieldwork and data collection were challenging because of gender and Covid-19 pandemic related factors.

10.0. Impact of Covid -19 pandemic on Madrasa education at Kishanganj

(i). Due to the pandemic Covid-19, madrasas, especially unaided madrasas, are poorly affected. Private madrasas (unaided) have lost their financial network and failed to collect donations from almsgiving (fitrah/zakat) sources. Administrators (mohtamim) of various madrasas face the financial crunch, and they admit that it will be a big challenge to run un-aided madrasas in the long term. They do not have enough food stocks to feed their students, and they cannot provide blankets to keep them warm in winter (Salam, 2021).

(ii). The students of the Barelvi¹² school of thought who have returned to their respective madrasa are moving in the different parts of the local area of the Muslim community to recite the Quran and doing Fateha¹³ ceremony only for their survival because there is no source of income in their madrasa. Administrators are unable to provide free food for their students.

(iii). Since the nationwide lockdown has been imposed, most parents are unable to pay the fees of their ward because of the enormous financial problems they are facing.

(iv). Most of the students of private madrasa have gone to their homes during the national lockdown since March 2020. So, 50 % of the enrolled students have not returned to their respective madrasas since reopening in November 2020.

(v). There has been no adequate funding for madrasas during the Covid-19 pandemic. The following psychological impact on madrasa students may be briefly summed up as under:

- a. Lack of confidence
- b. Low morale
- c. Fear and chaos
- d. Feeling of insecurity
- e. Low status
- f. Lack of exposure
- g. Emotional instability

11.0. Madrasa and Covid-19 Experience

The products of madrasas lag far behind mainstreaming levels because the learning levels are low on literacy and numeracy skills (Nehal, 2021). Their learning outcomes hardly get measured. The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres says that 156 million students are still affected by school closures due to Covid-19, and 25 million may never return (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/world-is-going-through-an-education-crisis-due-to-covid-19-says-un-chief/articleshow/84963948.cms>). Covid-19 pandemic has badly affected the learning of madrasas and maktabas and made them more vulnerable and disadvantaged. Covid-19 has accelerated the issue of livelihood and survival challenges besides creating a vast digital gap. Students face low morale and confidence due to the financial crunch. This has made them more insecure and has caused a severe blow to their emotional stability and wellbeing. Also, it is a big challenge for administrators to run a maktab and madrasa in such conditions where financial support have collapsed, and nobody has come forward

to finance them (Salam, 2021). Madrasa institutions are highly pessimistic about financial aids from any source, particularly when the Covid-19 wave was at its peak. There is a big drop in income level, national employment rate when commodity price and retail inflation have increased (The Hindu, 2021). Employment opportunities have worsened, income levels have decreased, and price levels have increased, following which there is a complete breakdown of confidence level and fund flow in madrasas. Mental health issues are a cause of great concern. They have hardly got charities and government aids and are unable to pay the salaries of the staff and other necessities of learners such as fooding and lodging etc.

Online Education in Madrasas

Since the nationwide lockdown, all physical classes have been suspended, and educational activities have stopped. The enormity of the Covid-19 crisis hit hard the private unaided madrasas most. Madrasas failed in transition from offline to online education due to inadequate infrastructure, unstable internet connectivity, lack of digital resources and digitally trained teachers. Bashir & Sadath (2021) add '265 million schoolchildren have been taught exclusively through so-called "remote learning", the highest number in any country' (06). But we need to re-examine if the 'so-called' remote learning really worked in the context of online teaching at madrasas in Kishanganj. The Hindu reports 'the present situation has exacerbated the learning crisis that existed even before the pandemic with the marginal and vulnerable children adversely affected (2021:10). Recently, Supreme Court had taken cognisance of the stark consequences of children of the economic weaker section this huge growing digital divide, 'during the course of the pandemic...Children of belonging to the Economically Weaker Sections [EWS]/Disadvantaged Groups [DG] had to suffer the consequence of not having to fully pursue their education or worse still drop out because of the lack of access to Internet and computers'(Rajagopal, 2021:01).

Skewed level Playing Fields

Most madrasas are facing the challenges of illiteracy in Kishanganj. Seen from the historical perspective, female literacy has risen to 65% in 2011(Dreze, 2021), yet from a madrasa female literacy perspective in Kishanganj, it is not so impressive. It reflects educational inequalities more in the madrasa underclass. Disparities in learning differences are skewed in favour of privileged class within the madrasa community as well. The post-pandemic has pushed the community to lower ebb of most the marginalised and underprivileged. Among the different madrasas, there exists a sharp level of inequality, and this inequality is also evident when they are compared with mainstream educational institutions in the country. Therefore, by the same token of inequality, some madrasas in Kishanganj are stand-alone marginalised madrasas heavily dependent on local aids and charity much distanced from the well-off madrasas. They are doubly removed from the mainstream institutions and disproportionately distanced from these institutions. Covid-19 has exacerbated these social and educational inequalities and disparities, highlighting crucial socio-economic diversity on issues such as health, economy and gender equality that needs further empirical investigation for bringing out much needed comprehensive reforms.

Differences by SEDG's (Socially Economically Disadvantaged Groups) might have fallen when it comes to enrolment in higher education and reservation policies (Kishore, 2021). But this has not guaranteed a level playing field across madrasa and mainstream institutions. Skewed educational fundings and the government's apathy towards madrasa institutions look like skirting around the mainstream needs of the madrasa stakeholders. Unsurprisingly, the elite class in the madrasa community gets an advantage in accessing education and professional courses, while large sections of the socially economically deprived madrasa community are only to get a small share of the education that is of little help in the current job market. Among various discriminations, patriarchy is quite entrenched in Indian society. A mental roadblock to information access makes it difficult for Madrasa SEDGs to compete on an equal footing in the professional world.

12.0. The socio-economic condition of madrasa teachers in Kishanganj

Socio-economic marginalisation and poverty make madrasa people vulnerable and susceptible to abject and pathetic living conditions. The extreme socio-economic marginalisation has raised concern for livelihood and survival. They cannot access employment opportunities as they feel deprived of requisite education, skills, and social security. The teachers of the government-aided madrasa are hired under a modernisation scheme in 16 states. Bihar is one of them, and they receive their salary from the government. Still, they have not received a salary from the Union government for almost five years (Ara, 2021). They have to tackle day-to-day structural problems of impoverishment related to basic food, clothing, shelter, health and essential amenities. The conditions of madrasa teachers in Kishanganj are not different from the rest of Indian madrasa teachers. They are overwhelmingly, vulnerable and devastated because of salaries are not paid since long. This impacts living conditions, their work efficiency and morale. Since the outbreak of the pandemic Covid-19 in India, madrasas are on the verge of closing down because of such financial difficulties. Madrasa teachers are on the verge of starvation. They even could not earn rupees 3000 in a month, which has caused immense mental stress. As a result, madrasa communities suffer marginalisation and alienation from the real world (Ara, 2021). By contrast, the condition of unaided/autonomous/private madrasas is far worse. A large section of them is reeling under severe economic collapse. This economic collapse creates a social fabric, a tale that remains untold. They feel ashamed to tell their miseries and woes. They can not reach out to the large, affluent section of their society in general, including civil and NGO groups, who can be requested to bridge this huge gap (Ara, 2021).

13.0 Conclusion

But, like anywhere else in madrasa in other parts of India, in Kishanganj, also there are conflicting views of schools of thoughts¹⁴ in madrasas. Some drift apart from each other on the issue of autonomy, nature of government funding and governance systems, structure of proposed Central Madrasa Boards under MHRD (Rahmani, 2010). Some await financial aid and strategy decisions for meeting the survival needs of the stakeholders. Yet, all hopes are not lost for requisite financial packages or relief from the government and other agencies. While the discussion on madrasa reforms are on, the dilemma, myths and realities of education steeped in ignorance, orthodoxy, conservatism, traditionalism, stereotypes and superstition have aggravated the

socio-psychological impact on the madrasa learners limiting the capacity building of the teachers. Unfortunately, a comprehensive madrasa reform is yet to roll out despite that there is a growing awareness that modern subjects, particularly English is occupying a significant position in the overall Indian higher education. Many of madrasa courses have got recognition based on the equivalence provided to them by Govt. of India and most of the state governments. As a result, the pass-outs from madrasas get admissions to various courses in Indian universities and colleges. Aligarh Muslim University for instance, admits madrasas products to Bridge Course and +2 programs, BA, MA and BUMS etc. In addition, students appear as private candidates while some join open and distance learning modes. But most of the private unaided madrasas are still struggling for recognition, and they require 'bridge courses' or remedial courses for mainstreaming as they need to make up the loss incurred informal learning. They need an exclusive curriculum in a bilingual medium that too in consultation with national and international boards of school and higher education (Langa, 2021).

Notes

¹The narration of saying and doing of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are Hadith.

²Jinn is an intelligent spirit of lower rank than the angels, appearing in human and animal forms and possessing humans.

³Imam is a leader of prayers in a mosque.

⁴In Islam, a muezzin is an official person who proclaims the call to prayer on Friday for the public worship and the call to the daily prayer five times a day, at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and nightfall. He stands either at the door or side of a small mosque or on the minaret of a large one (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/muezzin>).

⁵Bihar madrasa board is an autonomous body under the state government and fully funded by the Govt of Bihar. The Bihar madrasa board has over 4,000 madrasas affiliated, including 1,942 government-aided, with over 15 lakh students. Students enrolled in the Bihar board, and madrasas prescribe SCERT textbooks until Class 10 and NCERT 11 and 12. Religious education remains a part of the curriculum from classes 1 to 10 (The Indian Express, 2020).

⁶The survey questionnaire was translated into Hindi because teachers, students, and administrators were unfamiliar with the English proficiency level needed to fulfil the questionnaire. Hindi language would facilitate better eliciting the desired responses.

⁷Sadaqah is a kind of charity. According to Quran, it covers all types of charity.

⁸Zakat is a payment made annually for charity under Islamic law on certain kinds of property. It is one of the five pillars of Islam.

⁹Fitrah is a kind of charity. Before the Eid-ul-Azha prayer, every well-off adult Muslim must pay. Generally, the head of the family pays Fitrah of their dependents such as children, servants and relatives.

¹⁰Ulema is a body of Muslim scholars with specialist knowledge of Islamic sacred law and theology.

¹¹It is a curriculum used in madrasas and was developed by Nizamuddin Sihalivi.

¹²Barelvi is a Sunni revivalist movement following the Hanafi school of jurisprudence. It emphasises personal devotion to God and the Islamic prophet Muhammad, adherence to Sharia, and Sufi practices. Ahmed Raza Khan Barelvi had developed the Barelvi movement in opposition to contemporary revivalist Deobandi and Ahl-i Hadith movements.

¹³In the Indo-Pak subcontinent, the recitation of Surah Al Fatiha followed by Surah Al Ikhlas three times is called doing Fateha for the departed soul/dead soul.

¹⁴There are mainly five schools of thought in madrasa. These schools of thought were founded considerably after the death of the Prophet. Sunni jurists like Imam Abu Hanifa established the Hanafi school of jurisprudence. Barelvi and Deobandi follow the Hanafi school of thought. Imam Malik ibn Anas, who created the Maliki school of jurisprudence. Imam Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi

headed the Shafi school of thought, and Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal headed the Hanbali school of thought. Jafar as-Sadiq, popularly known as Imam Jafari, established the leading Shia school of jurisprudence called Jafari.

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