

**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR MINORITY EDUCATIONAL
INSTITUTIONS**

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTRODUCING MODERN
EDUCATION IN MADARSAS
AND FOR SETTING UP A
CENTRAL MADARSA BOARD**

**Report of the Commission submitted by Justice M.S.A.
Siddiqui, Chairman to Ministry of HRD**

The context:

India is a land of diversity; a mosaic of many castes, communities, languages, religions and cultures. In exercise of our freedom, we have chosen to be a socialist, secular, democratic Republic. The essence of secularism in our country is the recognition and preservation of different groups of people with diverse languages and beliefs integrating them into a whole and united India. Our Constitution reflects the pluralistic essence of the Indian society and the right of each segment to self development, but as an integral part of a nation in the making. Article 30 of the Constitution, which is an instrument of protective discrimination furthering substantive equality, confers a special right on the religious and linguistic minorities to mitigate their numerical handicap and to instill in them a sense of security and belonging.

We live in a competitive world today, where education in general, and professional education in particular, are in great demand. The common people are aware of the advantages of modern education and even the uneducated aspire for modern standard of living. India is today a booming and burgeoning economy, moving gradually to centre stage

in the comity of nations. However, a larger percentage of Muslim children in the age group of 6-13 are out of the school and remain under-privileged as compared even to SC\ST children. Due to poverty, the percentage of Muslim students in higher education falls at a faster rate than it does in respect of any other community. The indices to the educational backwardness of Muslims in India are alarming. As per the Census of 2001, only 55% of Muslim men and 41% of Muslim women in India are literate; whereas the corresponding figures for non-Muslims are 64.5% and 45.6%. Only one in 101 Muslim women is a graduate, whereas one out of 37 women in the general population is a graduate. What is even more worrisome is the fact that the drop-out rate for Muslims rises steeply as they move up the pyramid of education. Muslims are 53% worse off as compared to the national average in respect of higher education. Muslim women at the graduate level are fewer by 63%. For the Muslim community to be brought on par with the rest of the society educationally, 31 million more Muslims have to be educated by 2011. Particularly alarming is the anomaly that the greatest concentration of the educationally unempowered and unemployable Muslim youth are in urban and semi-urban areas. If the current state of affairs continues, a large proportion of Muslims could vanish from the map of India's educated workforce. Needless to add here that for an enlightened and inclusive democracy, it is necessary that all sections and classes of people are well educated and intellectually equipped to shoulder the

responsibility for a free nation. As the Muslim community has lagged behind educationally over the decades, it is necessary to advance, foster and promote the education of this community at a quicker pace and as a matter of priority.

Next to Indonesia, India is home to the largest number of Muslims in any single country in the world. But the significance of the Muslim community in the Indian context is not merely a matter of statistics. The contributions that Muslims have made to the art and architecture, history and culture, politics and polemics of India are so integral that it inspired the Father of the Nation to declare that Hindus and Muslim are like his two eyes. To see the big-picture, we need to see with both and in tandem. We cannot afford to be a one-eyed nation! The educational empowerment of a sizeable community, like the Muslims, heirs to one of the most intellectually vibrant cultures in history, is an issue of crucial significance, hence, for the country as a whole. Thanks to a confluence of geo-political and cultural sensitivities, Madarsa education is today a major international and national concern.

The index of the educational development of a community is, perhaps, the most significant factor in shaping public perceptions about its participation in nation building which, in turn, defines its image and respectability in public life. The obverse of participation is alienation. To fail to promote integration and empowerment is to invite, albeit unwittingly, developmental paralysis and emotional alienation. Education has been widely recognized as a

powerful tool for integration, especially in a religiously, culturally and linguistically plural society like ours. The current educational backwardness of Muslims portends a double loss. Members of the community lose out in terms of the emerging, unprecedented opportunities of a globalizing world. The country loses in terms of the inability of a substantial segment of its population to participate gainfully in its forward march to greater prosperity and quality of life.

Role of Madarsas:

Madarsas are centers of free education. They are also bastions of social service, where knowledge of humanism and universal brotherhood, which is one of the basic tenets of ISLAM, is imparted and human values are taught. They are the nucleus of the cultural and educational life of Muslims. These Madarsas, as an invaluable instrument of traditional education, have played a vital role in spreading literacy among the down-trodden segments of the Muslim society.¹ Madarsa education is, hence, an emotive issue of deep resonance for Muslims. They are found even in the remotest rural areas, where often no other educational facilities exist. The contribution of these Madarsas has been so important that one cannot strategize the educational development of

¹ According to the Sachar Committee Report: “Madarsas (though not a substitute for regular schools) is necessary for Muslims as, apart from providing basic education, they serve as an important instrument of identity maintenance for the Community. Many a time Madarsas are the only educational option available to Muslim children, especially in areas where no schools have reached the Muslim masses. Very often children go to the Madarsas not out of choice but due to non-availability and inaccessibility of other schools, (p 17)

Muslim community by neglecting or overlooking their services to the community. Needless to add here that, as of today, only the poor segment of Muslim community is resigned to sending their children to Madarsas which not only offer them free education but also free boarding and lodging.² Those who establish Madarsas, or with whose financial help these Madarsas run, however, seldom educate their children in them. On the contrary, they prefer convent schools and modern secular-scientific education for their children.

In recent years, Madarsas have become targets of a sustained campaign of hatred and vilification. Unfortunately such campaigners are not familiar with the Madarsa education. To some extent, the promoters of Madarsa system are also responsible for this state of affairs as they have done nothing to foster interfaith understanding for consolidative co-existence in an inclusive society. These Madarsas form a parallel education system which completely blocks the roads of economic growth and prosperity of the Muslims who resort to it. Some of the clerics want Madarsas to flourish on account of their vested interests. Madarsas have had the lamentable effect of keeping the down-trodden segment of the Muslim community ignorant and exploited by the privileged.

² According to Sachar Committee Report Muslim identity tends to stand in the way of getting Muslim children to good schools. This means that the poor among the Muslim face a double disadvantage. First, their economic backwardness keeps good schools out of reach for their children. Second, even when they are able to afford the cost, they are handicapped by a negative and prejudice-ridden identity imposed on them. Both factors get aggravated further in respect of the education of Muslim girls. It is no wonder that they are the most educationally under-privileged today. (see p 12 of the Report)

Most of the Madarsas are averse to the introduction of modern education. Some of the books taught in this system are antiquated and others have become irrelevant to the global society we live in. The curriculum of majority of Madarsas is exclusivist, which could give rise to fundamentalist tendencies among the students. It is a welcome trend, however, that some of the Madarsas have introduced modern education complemented with religious education. In majority of these Madarsas, though, the students have no access to modern secular education. This not only breeds a sense of alienation, but also isolates them from the inclusive society that India is. General secular education will open the doors of perception and act as the natural light of mind for our people to live pro-actively in the total contest. If modern education is introduced in these Madarsas, it will certainly create conditions for promoting modern and secular outlook among students and empower them to participate as equal partners in an inclusive society. These Madarsas should serve as a vehicle for articulating the Islamic cultural heritage and universal values that are deeply embedded in the tradition, consciousness and identity of the Muslim community.

Caricaturing Madarsas:

Orchestrated attempts have been made, and are still being made in certain quarters, to discredit Madarsa education with an arbitrarily ascribed and factually baseless association with terrorism. Not a single instance has been

established in which Madarsas have motivated, aided or abetted terrorist activities or propagated hostility to the nation, a community or a group. The Madarsas are not the training grounds for ideological violence. Rather, they fill a vacuum created by the inability or unwillingness of the State to provide educational facilities commensurate with the needs of the community. The magnitude of this failure forced a thinker like Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen to say that illiteracy must be deemed a national tragedy. Surely, the step-motherly treatment of Urdu as a language of culture and a medium of education and enlightenment is a crucial factor in this regrettable situation. There is, however, a crude logic to the gross and growing prejudice against the Madarsas. The system of education followed in them is outdated and out of tune with the present-day environment of expertise. What is outdated seems strange and, in an ambiance of anxiety, what is strange gets readily misunderstood. The Madarsas should no longer continue to be like a fixed stone in the midst of the flowing river of life. Change is the only constant in temporal life. No community can live gainfully today ignoring humankind's march to progress in diverse areas of knowledge and know-how. Nor should anyone want to live in a secular, pluralistic society in gross neglect of the prevailing climate of perceptions, assumptions and expectations. A community cannot be a human island without self-exiling itself from the mainstream to its own disadvantage. Read positively, the anxiety about the current Madarsa education is seen best as a cry to modernize and mainstream the Muslim

community. The proof of the spiritual vitality of a community is its ability to profit from adverse criticism and antagonistic circumstances.

At present, the Madarsa system is moving in the reverse gear and the outcome can only be suicidal for the Muslim community. Muslims can redeem their destiny and preserve their identity by providing quality education to their children. Muslims students should strive hard to acquire knowledge of the modern world. They have no option but to wake up from their slumber, and exert themselves to compete in the field of education. In the words of Sir Winston Churchill: "The stern compression of circumstances, the twinges of adversity, the spur of slights and taunts in early years, are needed to evoke that ruthless fixity of purpose and tenacious mother wit without which great actions are seldom accomplished." Attainment of peace and prosperity for the individual and society is the ultimate aim of education. The purpose of education is to equip and empower students to cope with the world in which they live, benefiting from available opportunities as well as contributing to the common good. When a person or community fails to do so, the problem of self devaluation and disempowerment becomes real and acute. What was once an asset ceases to be so and threatens to become a liability. The problem is not so much with the Madarsa education per se; the problem is that it has remained anchored in the dim and distant past, developing a crisis of relevance in respect of the tools and skills relevant to the society in which we live. This issue goes beyond the

question of modernization and the anxiety it awakens in certain quarters mistaking it as 'westernization'. The crucial question is whether or not Madarsa education should empower or disempower those who resort to it.

Crisis of relevance:

It is significant to mention here that at present the managers of Madarsas are wholly confused about the definite aims and objectives of Madarsa education. There is no uniform or scientific curriculum for Madarsas. In most of the Madarsas, even the basic infrastructure needed for a primary school, including proper building and teaching equipments is not available. The Madarsas subsist on small donations and charities and are cash-strapped at all times. These Madarsas have outdated system of examination and evaluation. What students learn in Madarsas is very largely based on religious instructions that fail to equip them with the skills required today. Muslims in India must realize that they are actually scraping the bottom of the education barrel in an era of internationalism. Information Technology and further cultural transmission through the electronic media has brought the international community very close to each other. In order to attain integrity, peace and prosperity and basic security of their life, the Muslim community must concentrate their efforts on the task of restructuring their system of education in general and Madarsa education in particular.

History and nature warn us that what does not adapt to the changing milieu becomes obsolete or extinct. Adaptation

is a creative enterprise that seeks newer and appropriate means for fulfilling the original purpose. The vision must endure, whereas the means and norms must change in tune with the emerging scenario. In respect of the Madarsa education there is a need, on the one hand, to preserve the delicate balance between the emphasis on the religious underpinning of the community, on which the Muslim community lays special and wholesome emphasis, and the need to make education a powerful tool for empowering the community to claim its legitimate place within the educational and developmental mainstream of the country, on the other. Indian Muslims are proud and patriotic citizens, capable of contributing as substantially in the material development of India as they have in its cultural development over the centuries. For this to happen, a major initiative in upgrading Madarsa education to bring it on par with the best on offer in the educational horizon of the country is an urgent national imperative.

The urgency for streamlining Madarsa education towards providing comprehensive education is evident from the following fact alone. The educated elite in the Muslim community belong, almost wholly, to the stream of modern and secular education. A virtual split has come into being between them and the products of Madarsa education. The Muslim community is, thus, fragmented, ironically, through education. This is ironic because education is the foremost means for integration, not fragmentation. This regrettable

phenomenon has inter-community not less than intra-community ramifications. There is a need to foster technological competences as well as awareness of multiculturalism through Madarsa education.

Though it is true that there is still residual opposition from certain pockets of Muslim orthodoxy, for whom preserving the vestiges of the past is more important than engaging the opportunities of today and equipping oneself for the challenges of the future, there has come about a radical change in the outlook of the Muslim masses in India. The common man among Indian Muslims, who actually represents the majority of the community, is today more positive towards, and informed about, the larger context in which he lives. Truth to tell, the Muslim masses are in a state of anxiety, bordering on bewilderment, about the accumulating evidence of their backwardness and disempowerment and they realize that quality modern education holds the key to a brighter and empowered tomorrow for them. Sensing this, the Indian Express, in an incisive editorial, wrote: "Indian Muslims are falling so fast behind in key modernization processes that even those addicted to politically correct platitudes and vote-bank politics must wake up to the need for substantive remedial action. . . . The government must first encourage the emergence of a Muslim vox populi unmediated by clerics. Government leaders meet clerics and assume they have met the community. . . . Politics needs to be sensitized to real problems affecting the Muslim community and that can

happen only if politicians start hearing real Muslim voices.” Commenting specifically on the significance of Madarsa education the editorial goes on to say, “ A good example of why clerical pronouncements are not good guides to policy is the Madarsas. It is possible for Madarsas to provide the basics of modern education and yet retain their essential character. . . . Madarsa reform, as many Muslim scholars have argued, is sensible because it works on existing infrastructure. It can be time-and-cost-effective: provided the government is ready to politely ignore the usual lobbies that claim to speak for Indian Muslims.”³

In view of the endemic anxieties that pertain to the reform of Madarsa education, the proposed scheme for the Central Madarsa Board incorporates adequate provisions and safeguards against governmental interference in the Madarsas and guarantees the autonomy of the Central Madarsa Board. This leaves no margin whatsoever for any reasonable anxiety on the part of the clerics and the self-styled custodians of Islam in India. Affiliation to the Central Madarsa Board is purely voluntary and an affiliated Madarsa can pull out of affiliation at any time. The Central Madarsa Board will not have the power to dictate the theological content of Madarsa education.

Education as Liberation:

³ Voicing a similar concern, Arshad Alam, a Muslim scholar and author, wrote in the Hindu on 25. 9. 2006. “What these children learn in Madarsas is very largely based on outdated religious texts that fail to equip them with the skills required in contemporary times. . . . What kind of a social service is this that does not make its own products capable of making decent life-choices and perpetuates a regime of ignorance?”

Education is a potent tool for human development and empowerment of the people. Education is also a national wealth crucial for the nation's progress and prosperity. The Noble Laureate Amartya Sen, who has advocated the concept of development as freedom, deems illiteracy and poverty as the twin-faces of unfreedom. Education must, therefore, impart knowledge or information, and help to develop capabilities for its profitable use. According to "India – Vision 2020" published by the Planning Commission of India :

"Education is an important input both for the growth of the society as well as for the individual. Properly planned educational input can contribute to increase in the gross national products, cultural richness, build positive attitude towards technology and increase efficiency and effectiveness of the governance. Education opens new horizons for an individual, provides new aspirations and develops new values. It strengthens competencies and develops commitment. Education generates in an individual a critical outlook on social and political realities and sharpens the ability to self-examination, self-monitoring and self-criticism."
(Page 250)

"The term 'knowledge society', 'information society' and 'learning society' have now become familiar expressions in educational parlance, communicating emerging global trends with far-reaching implications

for growth and development of any society. These are not to be seen as mere clichés or fads but words that are pregnant with unimaginable potentialities. Information revolution, information technologies and knowledge industries, constitute important dimensions of an information society and contribute effectively to the growth of a knowledge society.” (*ibid.*, p. 246)

“Alvin Toffler (1980) has advanced the idea that power at the dawn of civilization resided in the ‘muscle’. Power then got associated with money and in the 20th century it shifted its focus to ‘mind’. Thus the shift from physical power to wealth power to mind power is an evolution in the shifting foundations of economy. This shift supports the observation of Francis Bacon who said ‘knowledge itself is power’; stressing the same point and upholding the supremacy of mind power, in his characteristic expression, Winston Churchill said, ‘the empires of the future shall be empires of the mind’. Thus, he corroborated Bacon and professed the emergence of the knowledge society.” (*ibid.*, p. 247)

Urgent and determined attention needs to be paid to the need to bridge the educational gulf between boys and girls in the Muslim community. It is appropriate to quote from the Sacchar Committee Report in this context. “Women in general are the torchbearers of community identity. So, when community identity is seen to be under siege, it naturally affects women in dramatic ways. Women, sometimes of their

own volition, sometimes because of community pressure, adopt visible markers of community identity on their person and in their behaviour. Their lives, morality, and movement in public spaces are under constant scrutiny and control.” (p 13) The standardization, up-gradation and modernization of the Madarsa system hold immense potential for mitigating the identity-induced burden of handicap that the girls in the community face.

Basic to the philosophy of education both in the East and the West is the idea that the knowledge and skills gained through education must be employed in solving the problems of the given society. If this is not the case, the educated will become parasites on the society or roadblocks to national progress and not partners in nation-building. It is imperative, hence, that education assumes a spiritual character. Spirituality involves a proactive engagement with the given context with a sense of accountability to God who is not only all-powerful but also merciful, compassionate and loving. A capacity for love, compassion, truth and justice must be deemed basic to being educated and education is incomplete without fostering these values in students. This humanizes and spiritualizes education. Such an intention or spiritual view of education underlay the Madarsa education in its inception, even though this got diluted, even misplaced, in practice over the decades. Madarsa education, if it is sensitively re-organized in the light of the needs and challenges of our times, can offer a timely corrective to the soullessness of the educational transaction at the present time. It is important,

therefore, that the spiritual nuances of the Madarsa tradition are preserved. But true spirituality is not a mindless perpetuation of orthodoxy but a re-appropriation of the original vision within the given secular-scientific matrix so as to fulfill the authentic core of the original vision. The need of the hour is not to preserve, like in a museum, the trappings of orthodoxy but to fulfill the universal spiritual vision of Islam as harmonious, on the one hand, with the constitutional mandate to propagate and consolidate secular, democratic culture and, on the other, as responsive to the challenges and opportunities of a globalizing world.

A Century of Knowledge:

This is the century of knowledge. Knowledge makers are the richest assets of the modern world. The purpose of education must be to empower knowledge makers. Youth in the form of intellectual capital is becoming the richest intangible asset and human development index is now the indicator of a nation's progress and ranking. The Madarasas will need to be revitalized to meet the challenge of the modern world. Strong emphasis will need to be laid on quality of education and expanding the base of science, information and technology. But we must bear in mind that advancement of science and technology without the element of spirituality has a dehumanizing effect which is to be eschewed. An education that confines itself to mere imparting of knowledge is no education. Gandhi ji held knowledge without character and science without humanity to be deadly sins. To Albert

Einstein, 'science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind'. Swami Vivekanand had said in 1839 that with the development of science and technology, if humanity is to survive, there should be a synthesis of science and spirituality. Accordingly, the Madarsas must focus on the relevance of Islamic teachings to modern pluralistic, secular and inclusive society. There is a need for an integrated curriculum combining traditional Islamic themes and subjects as well as the contents of the subjects according to national syllabi.

Madarsas : Need for Standardization:

There is a need to standardize the system of Madarsa in tune with the emerging global scenario without compromising the basic principles of Madarsa education. It is possible for Madarsas to provide modern education and yet retain their essential spiritual character. They can safeguard their autonomy and remain free from interference by the Government. Standardization of Madarsa system and mainstreaming of the Madarsa education has its relevance in our country which is fast emerging as a Super Power. Educational institutions are the instruments for the conversion, discovery and distribution of knowledge as well as for the creation of knowledge makers. The Madarsas can create an inclusive environment to promote social justice as a step towards creating a fair and just society, free from discrimination and fragmentation. Every educational institution, irrespective of its community affiliation, belongs to

the melting pot of our national life. Schools are the ideal nurseries for breeding respect and tolerance for the culture and beliefs of others. There is a lack of interfaith literature in educational institutions of Hindus and Muslims. At present, introduction of interfaith literature in educational institutions has assumed importance as there is a need for creating a sound knowledge base and appreciation for each others' religion, history and culture for the consolidation of an inclusive society. There is a need to sensitize managers of Madarasas about the role of education in resolving conflicts and evolving a peaceful society. There is also a need to inculcate a spirit of inquiry among the students, going beyond theoretical education that enables them to understand the issues of peace and justice in the proper perspective. In this context, the Madarsa education must promote an awareness and celebration of variety, diversity and plurality. It must reflect the reality of an emerging subaltern ferment in the national context, promote a positive attitude towards it and allocate due curricular space for it. Gandhiji has said, "If we are to teach real peace in the world, we shall have to begin with children."

Need for an Integrated Approach:

It is relevant to note here that Article 51A of the Constitution prescribes the duties of every citizen, which include the duties to develop the scientific temper, humanism, the spirit of inquiry and reform and to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective

activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement. Every action of the citizen and the State must, therefore, ensure observance of these constitutional values. That being so, there is genuine need for a comprehensive, systematic and integrated approach to the Madarsa education for the new millennium, based upon the universal teachings of Islam, free of polemics and sectarianism. In the backdrop of Article 51A, it is in the interest of the Muslim community to wake up to the need for a systematic transformation of its thinking and behavioral change as a desirable objective to be achieved through systematic and planned education, which must represent a vision of interfaith understanding, peace and prosperity for their community. The Muslim students need to be galvanized and they must be provided with every facility to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform as Article 51-A (J) exhorts them “to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement”.

The Prime Minister’s New 15 Point Programme for Welfare of Minorities consists of a component relating to modernizing Madarsa education. This comes under the broad heading of ‘Enhancing opportunities for education’ and is as follows:

“Modernizing Madarsa Education: The Central Plan Scheme of Area Intensive and Madarsa Modernization Programme provides basic educational infrastructure in

areas of concentration of educationally backward minorities and resources for the modernization of Madarsa education. Keeping in view the importance of addressing this need, this programme will be substantially strengthened and implemented effectively.”

National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 has adopted the concept of national system of education. It implies that up to a certain level all students, irrespective of caste, creed, location or gender, will have access to education of comparable quality. The policy lays special emphasis on removing disparities and equalizing of educational opportunities by attending to the specific needs of those who have remained educationally backward so far. Suitable incentives, therefore, have to be provided to educationally backward sections of the society. The Government has always shown concern for, and paid attention to, the education of such groups in the interest of equality and social justice.

Special focus on the education of backward minorities is a significant feature of the National Policy on Education and a number of schemes have been launched in the past to promote this objective. Area Intensive Programme for Educationally Backward Minorities, Modernization of Madarsa Education, Scheme for Appointment of Urdu Teachers and Part time Arabic/ Persian Teachers are some of them. It is high time that a new approach is attempted wherein all these schemes are implemented in an integrated fashion.

The importance of classical Indian languages including Arabic and Persian in preserving the cultural heritage, maintaining social harmony and national unity need no special emphasis. Traditional institutions like Madarsas and Maktabas have been playing an important role for centuries in preserving Arabic and Persian languages and the cultural heritage of the country is enriched by its synergy with Islamic traditions. The High Power Panel on Minorities, set up by the Government of India in 1980, while reviewing the Madarsa Education system, has emphasized the need for its modernization. It stated “Religious institutions like Maktabas and Madarsas can play a useful role in imparting general and elementary technical education to their students”. Introduction of modern education in Madarsas will help in the balanced growth of a student’s total personality and lead to the creation of a tolerant and inclusive society.

THE CENTRAL MADARSA BOARD (CMB)

From what we have considered so far, the need for re-invigorating and modernizing Madarsa education becomes compellingly clear. But, if such a challenging goal is to be attained, it is imperative that an instrument commensurate with that task is created. Given the dearth of coordination among the stakeholders of Madarsa education, and the corresponding absence of any standardization of Madarsa education, it is proposed that the Central Government, through an Act of Parliament, establish a Central Madarsa Board as an autonomous body, duly insulated against

governmental interference, given the extreme sensitivities and anxieties that lurk in this domain.

The Central Madarsa Board is an idea whose time has indeed come. Educational and religious leaders of the Muslim community who participated in the various consultations convened under the auspices of the NCMEI have endorsed this initiative wholeheartedly.* The revered spiritual leaders of the community, who have been visited and consulted, have offered their support. Even more significantly, the awareness is rising among Indian Muslims that the current educational profile of the community needs to change if the community is to regain its pride of place in the national mainstream. Of late, they have started realizing that “a hand caught between an anvil and a hammer has no choice” and they have to cope with the new challenges of the modern world for safeguarding their religious and cultural heritage. In the wake of globalization, they have to give up their antiquated attitudes and accept the challenge to change their outlook for the sake of a better future. They can redeem their destiny by acquiring excellence in their chosen fields. The Holy Quran declares that “God never changes the condition of people unless they themselves want to change it”. It is not that Indian Muslims are ghettoized or self-exiled, but that members of the community could, by default, fail to take advantage of the emerging exciting opportunities of today and tomorrow. Standardization of Madarsa system with integrated

* A selective compendium of such endorsements, reflecting the wide spectrum of the stakeholders of Madarsa education as well as the spiritual leaders of the Muslim community is appended to this Report.

curriculum of Madarsa education will enable students of Madarasas to pursue studies in other academic and professional areas in colleges and universities.⁴

The need to establish a Central Madrasa Board for the co-ordination and standardization of Madrasa system of education and also for its integrated development and mainstreaming was examined in detail in a series of consultations held by this Commission with educationists, religious scholars and eminent citizens associated with Madrasa education. In order to elicit a wider spectrum of opinions and to facilitate a free interaction on the subject of introduction of modern education in Madrasas and the need to set up an autonomous body like Central Madrasa Board, a national consultation of the prominent spiritual leaders, educationists, intellectuals and religious scholars was held on 03rd December, 2006 in the auditorium of India Islamic Cultural Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi which was inaugurated by Sh. Arjun Singh Ji, Hon'ble Minister for Human Resource Development, Government of India. It

⁴ “Modernizing Madarsas by the government has been a very contentious issue with many differing viewpoints amongst the Community. While there is a general acceptance of an urgent need for the modernization of Madarsas, the modernization scheme of the government have not really provided much relief to the community as far as quality education is concerned. Promises made with regard to modernization have proved inadequate as nothing much has been done. Science and Mathematics teachers appointed under this scheme have not been paid their salaries regularly. Besides, the salaries fixed are too low. It is widely believed that the help given to Madarsas is “on paper alone”. Giving computers to Madarsas has not been perceived to be of great help to the Community. Rather, it was suggested, provision should be made for teaching science, mathematics and English. Provision of a recurring grant for Madarsas would help. However, Madarsas ‘modernization’ does not mean only having science/ mathematics teachers and installing computers.” (Sachar Committee p 17)

turned out to be one of the best attended and keenly participated exercises of its kind in which every one felt free to express their views without fear or favour. For obvious reasons it is neither possible nor necessary to belabour here a full account of the views and concerns expressed by so many speakers. Suffice it to say that an overwhelming majority of them endorsed the idea of setting up a Central Madrasa Board so as to standardise and mainstream Madrasa education, which has become a crying need today. It needs to be highlighted that eminent scholars of Barelvi School of thought, Ahle Hadis, Dawoodi Bohras, Imam Shefai's Sect, Nadvatul Ulma, Lucknow and a section of Deoband School of thought represented by Sheikhul Hadis and president of Tanzeem Ulma-e-Hind, Hazrat Maulana Anzar Shah Kashmiri have supported the proposal for establishment of a Central Madarsa Board. It is also significant to mention here that in an interview published in ALMI SAHARA (Urdu Weekly) dated 16th Dec. 2006, Maulana Syed Rabe Hasmi Nadvi, Rector Nadwat-ul-Ulma, Lucknow, and President of All India Muslim Personal Board has also supported the proposal.

A list of the main speakers and attendees of the Conference dated 3rd December, 2006 is appended to this report. Annexed herewith is a list of prominent Religious leaders/ Scholars/ Educationists/ Intellectuals, who have extended their support to the proposal subject to the following conditions:-

- a) The Board should be an autonomous body free from Governmental interference;
- b) The Board should be established through the Act of Parliament;
- c) The Board should not interfere with the religious curriculum of an affiliated Madrasa and;
- d) The affiliation with the Board should be optional.

Some of the representations received from the eminent Muslim/ religious leaders/ scholars and various Muslim organizations, articles published in All India newspapers in support of the said demand are appended to this report.

In 1980, Gopal Singh high power committee had observed that it is the responsibility of the Union and state Governments to provide grants for these Madarsas and maktabas without interfering in their academic and administrative affairs. This Commission fully endorses the said report and recommends to the Central Government for its early implementation. In this context, a reference to the report of the University Education Commission headed by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has become inevitable. This Commission was appointed on 4th November, 1948, having Dr. S. Radhakrishnan as its chairman and nine other renowned educationists as its members. In the report submitted by the Commission, in paras 29 and 31, it referred to autonomy in education which reads as follows;

“University autonomy- Freedom of individual development is the basis of democracy. Exclusive control of education by the State has been an important factor in facilitating the maintenance of totalitarian tyrannies. In such States institutions of higher learning controlled and managed by governmental agencies act like mercenaries, promote the political purposes of the State, make them acceptable to an increasing number of their population and supply them with the weapons they need. We must resist, in the interests of our own democracy, the trend towards the governmental domination of the educational process.

The respect in which the universities of Great Britain are held is due to the freedom from governmental interference which they enjoy constitutionally and actually. Our universities should be released from the control of politics.

Liberal education- All education is expected to be liberal. It should free us from the shackles of ignorance, prejudice and unfounded belief. If we are incapable of achieving the good life, it is due to faults in our inward being, to the darkness in us. The process of education is the slow conquering of this darkness. To lead us from darkness to light, to free us from every kind of domination except that of reason, is the aim of education.”

The aforesaid portion of the report of the Commission has been quoted with approval by the Supreme Court in the case of T. M. Pai Foundation Vs State of Karnataka [2002] 8 SCC 481]. It has also been held by the Supreme Court that Article 30[2] of the Constitution recognizes that the minority nature of the institution should continue, notwithstanding the grant of aid.

If the Madarsa system of education is to be transformed into an effective catalyst for activating an educational and developmental ferment in the Muslim community so as to promote the cause of national integration, it is imperative that the Madarsas are improved substantially in terms of infrastructure. It is there for all to see that, in the wake of globalization and privatization, there has come about an unprecedented emphasis on upgrading infrastructure in the educational sector. As compared to the secular schools in the private sector, the Madarsas are woefully substandard in this respect. The Muslim community, given its economic backwardness, cannot be expected to make the kind of investment it takes to upgrade and standardize the infrastructure of Madarsas without which the standardization of the Madarsa education will remain yet another goal of academic interest to which we pay only lip-service. It is relevant to note here that substandard infrastructure facilities, including non availability of toilets, has been a major factor for the abnormally high dropout rates from rural schools. Classrooms have to be adequately spacious, well-ventilated, hygienic, and comfortably conducive to sustaining concentration. Library, laboratory and computer facilities will have to be assessed, upgraded and made comparable to national norms. The students in this system must have access to a wider range of reading material so as to enlarge their mental horizon and eradicate their emotional ghettoization. The nature and scope of the required infrastructure up-gradation need to be determined in terms of

the envisaged paradigm shift in Madarsa education. From limiting the goal of Madarsa education to exclusive religious formation, the education offered through Madarsas must aim at the all-round and holistic development of the total person of every student. This is all the more important as the Madarsas are the nurseries for fostering the future religious leaders of the Muslim community. This would call for, among other things, laying emphasis on promoting a healthy physical culture through outdoor activities such as sports, games and community/social service.

Crucial to the regeneration and modernization of Madarsa education is the need to value and remunerate teachers. As long as the teachers in this network of education remain underpaid and ill-motivated, as long as their morale is made to languish in under-privilege, the educational empowerment of the Muslim community cannot take off with vigour and robustness. Paying commensurate salaries to teachers is a way of expressing the value we attach to education. As the familiar saying goes, 'if you pay peanuts, you will get only monkeys'. Surely, teaching is a sacred and noble vocation and teachers should rise above mercenary considerations. At the same time, the society must respond responsibly and ensure that circumstances conducive to their dignity and welfare are ensured, lest we abuse our rhetoric on pedagogic idealism as an excuse for exploiting and degrading teachers. It is imperative that teachers in Madarsas receive salaries comparable to their counterparts elsewhere. Alongside with this, there is a need to set up

adequate Urdu-medium teacher training colleges where competent and committed teachers with an appropriate vision and relevant expertise – both of the mind and of the spirit – are trained and motivated to serve as developmental clarion calls to the community. Arguably, a system of education is only as good as its teachers. Teachers comprise the most decisive link in the chain of education. Education is a fundamental element in the expression and preservation of a culture. Surely, the present plight of teachers in Madarasas does not send any positive signals about the Islamic culture to the society at large.

It is relevant to take note of the following excerpt from the Sachar Committee Report :-

The up-gradation of the Madarasas and the reformed standardization of the education in them, while it is of historic significance and profound symbolic resonance, this should not be taken as an alternative to, or adequate substitute for, the duty of the State to make modern, quality, affordable education available to Muslim children. The Sachar Committee Report lays a wholesome emphasis on this and we deem it appropriate to quote the relevant section here: “. . .it is the constitutional obligation (under Article 21A) of the Government to provide education to the masses. Aided Madarasas are often the last recourse of Muslims especially those who lack the economic resources to bear the costs of schooling, or households located in areas where ‘mainstream’ educational institutions are inaccessible..” (p 78)

Financial implications:

Modernizing Madarsa education and thereby facilitating the educational empowerment of the Muslim community, is a

cause that calls for a high order of financial commitments from the Government, if we are to attain the goal of empowering and mainstreaming the community. Providing financial assistance to Madarsas on regular basis through the Central Madarsa Board may be criticized by certain sections. Some of the premier Madarsas of the country are also averse to accepting financial assistance from the Government. Therefore, there is a need to make the Central Madarsa Board self-sufficient for providing financial assistance to Madarsas independently by mobilizing the resources from Muslims. This will enable Muslims to invest and participate more meaningfully in their educational activities. To that end, it is recommended that the Central Government make a one-time allocation of Rs.500 crores as seed money to the Central Madarsa Board, which could be augmented further by donations from benefactors, both within the community and from the wider society, to facilitate which such donations be brought under full income tax exemption under the Income Tax Act. The corpus thus created could be gainfully invested and multiplied further. Shariah prohibits Muslims from earning interest on their investments. The Central Madarsa Board can, therefore, invest moneys in industrial and agro-business activities. The Central Madarsa Board can use the crores of rupees generated through such investments for development of infrastructure and also for maintenance of affiliated Madarsas.

Appropriate provisions have been incorporated in the proposed draft of the Central Madarsa Board Act in this

regard. Thus, the Central Madarsa Board, in addition to being a body of management of affiliated Madarsas, would also be a financial institution for generating fund/finance, through judicious investments in conformity with the prescriptions of the Shariah in this regard for the benefit of Madarsas. The funds are to be invested based on Islamic principles.

For the reasons considered above, the Commission recommends to the Central Government to establish a Central Madarsa Board. It is reiterated in conclusion that affiliation to the Central Madarsa Board shall be purely voluntary and that the affiliated Madarsas shall have the freedom to relinquish affiliation, should they wish to do so, at any stage. The draft of the proposed Bill on establishment of the Central Madarsa Board is also enclosed herewith.

Before we part with this report, we would like to observe that this Commission has been constituted to protect and safeguard the educational rights of the minorities enshrined in Article 30 of the Constitution. The dictionary meaning of the word Madarsa is a school. Thus, a Madarsa being an educational institution is covered by Article 30 of the Constitution. It has been held by the Constitutional bench of the Supreme Court in Syed Azeez Basha, Vs. Union Bank of India AIR 1968 SC 662 that the words "educational institution" employed in Article 30 (1) of the Constitution are of wide import and would include a university also. Similarly it has been held by the Supreme Court, in T.M.A. Pai Foundation's case (supra) that "the expression 'education' in the article of the Constitution means and includes education

at all levels, from the primary school level upto the post graduate level. It includes professional education. The expression 'educational institutions' means institutions that impart education, where 'education' is as understood hereinabove."