



Cite Us

Samreen Mahmood<sup>†</sup>Saira Shereen<sup>†</sup>Madeeha Murad<sup>†</sup>

## Religious Education: Contribute to Social Cohesion or Lead to Social Disparity?

**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of madrassa education in building up a religiously cohesive society. The queries and questions which this research study addressed were: To investigate the social cohesion and disparity in the society. What are the key factors, which contribute to social cohesion or lead to social disparity? What is the understanding of madrasa administrators about social cohesion and social disparity? The study was qualitative in nature; an ethnographic case study was conducted to investigate the research problem, in order to investigate the research questions, administrators of all the 5 madrassa boards were interviewed, Semi-structured interview was conducted from the teachers and students of different school of thoughts to find out the different factors affecting social cohesion.*

**Key Words:** Social Cohesion, Religious Institutions

### Introduction

#### Religious Education

The third stream of available education is the Madrassas or religious schools. The primary aim of Madrassas in the development of future religious scholars, Mushtaq, Sadiq, and Ijaz 2014. Almost all the madrassas are built and run by various religious groups and sects; hence these madrassas primarily fulfil the religious needs of the society by offering religious education to the masses. The kind of religious education these madrassas offer is directly linked to the owner or management who builds and run these madrassas. The majority of the madrassas offer religious education only, while few of them also provide formal education as well. The size and number of students in these madrassas vary from place to place and sect to sect. The bigger madrassas are usually residential and offer their students boarding, meals, etc. as well. The smaller ones mostly cater for the needs of day scholar and are usually based in rural areas. Different sects and religious groups have different madras. Some of the madras is based in Masjids and are run by the Pesh-e-imams. Another kind of madrassas that have recently been introduced is the ones that are run by women inside their homes. The extent of religious education varies from the type and size of madaris. The large size madaris, which are mostly based in urban centers and are run by major sectarian groups, provides more advanced learning of Islam, including Quran, Hadith, Fiqah and Sharia couples with Arabic language education and formal school and college education as well. The medium size madaris are mostly teaching Quran, Hadith and Fiqah and partially formal education as well. The small size madaris, which are based in Masjid and homes, are usually limited to Nazira Quran, thajweed and translation only. There is very limited data available as to what extent this madaris are effective in delivering Islamic teaching. However, in the recent past, we have seen a large number of Mufti graduating from large size madaris, Ulama from medium size madaris and Reciters, Hufaz and translator from all type of madaris. It is quite evident that the number of people getting religious education to a various degree has increased significantly and that the amount of religious knowledge that is available now has increased significantly. We can say that the knowledge and clarity on religious practices have enormously improved. Now more people are enjoying access to religious knowledge, and the amount of knowledge that is available has also increased enormously, Khalid Rahman and Syed Rashad Bukhari, 2006.

#### Statement of the Problem

It is a truth that every person need a peaceful and harmonious environment to live in; educational institutions play a key role to maintain and aid to achieve a harmonious environment. Religious education has its own importance towards maintaining a peaceful society; it is important to know about social cohesion and the

<sup>†</sup>Assistant Professor, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, KP, Pakistan.

<sup>†</sup>M.Phil Scholar, City University, Peshawar, KP, Pakistan.

<sup>†</sup>Lecturer, Department of Education, University of Chitral, Chitral, KP, Pakistan.

role of religious education and understanding of religious education professionals towards building a cohesive society.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To investigate the social cohesion and disparity in the society.

### **Research Question**

1. What are the key factors, which contribute to social cohesion or lead to social disparity?
2. What is the understanding of madrasa administrators about social cohesion and social disparity?

### **Significance of the Study**

The basic aim/purpose of this ethnographic case study was to define, describe, investigate and analyze the opinion, principles, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and experiences of the main/key members, participants in one case of madrasa education and about their concerns addressing social cohesion and to examine role education professionals who have experiences with the madrasa education system.

### **Literature Review**

Islam is the religion of harmony and peace. In Islam, generating social disharmony or disorder, rioting, pillage or plunder, breach of peace, bloodshed, and killing of innocent persons anywhere in the world are all considered the most inhuman crimes. There are numerous verses in the Holy Quran that severely prohibit the breach of peace. "Do not spread disharmony on Earth after it has been set in order" Surah Aaraf, V. 56, in another place the Holy Quran says, "When he [the mischief-maker] turns his back, his aim is to spread mischief everywhere on earth, to destroy crops and cattle but Allah loveth not mischief" [Surah Al-Baqarah V. 205](#)" in another place the Holy Quran says that "and do not spread discord on the (face of the) earth" [Surah Al-Baqarah V. 60](#).

### **Religious Education and Social Cohesion**

Allah's word surpasses all. "And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. And remember the favor of Allah upon you, when you were enemies and, He brought your hearts together, and you became, by His favor, brothers. And you were on the edge of a pit of the Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus, does Allah make clear to you His verses that you may be guided" AL Quran Surah Aal-i-Imraan: Verse 103. In another place in the Holy Quran, Allah says, "Indeed, those who have divided their religion and become sects you, [O Muhammad], are not [associated] with them in anything. Their affair is only [left] to Allah; then He will inform them about what they used to do" AL Quran [Al-An'aam: Verse 159](#).

### **Research Methodology**

The intra religion tolerance is an example of a complex social process shaped by the beliefs, attitudes, and experiences of the parents and educators. "Ethnography is the study of a group provides an understanding of a larger issue" Creswell p. 462 fourth edition. Religion is the largest part of the cultural setting where it occurs and is best examined within the cultural setting.

"Ethnography when you have long-term access to a culture-sharing group so that you can build a detailed record of their behaviors and beliefs over time. You may be a participant in the group or simply an observer, but you gather extensive field notes, interview many people, and collect letters and documents to establish the record of the culture-sharing group. The culture-sharing group may be narrowly framed (e.g., teachers, students, or staff members) or broadly framed (e.g., entire schools and their success, innovation, or violence)" [Harry et al., 1998](#).

### **Setting**

An understanding of the setting within which the events and experiences of the community, parents, students and educators take place is integral to data collection and data analyses in ethnographic research. In this study, the procedures that followed were experiences of the parents, students and community regarding religious education.

## Participants

For this study, a total of 5 people were interviewed. The individual interviewed included one policymaker from each board of Madaris (5 boards). All the participants described below are identified by pseudonyms. Thomas & Hodges debated pseudonyms in a research write-up as “This includes, but is not limited to, using pseudonyms or false names to preserve anonymity” [Thomas & Hodge, 2010](#).

## Key position holders in boards/ Madrassas

- Rabta-tul-Madaris-al-Islamia
- Tanzim-ul-Madaris Barailvi
- Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al-Salafiya
- Wafaq-ul-Madaris Deobandi
- Wafaq-ul-Madaris (Shia) Pakistan

## Procedures for Data Collection

The following procedure was adopted for the collection of data.

## Semi-Structured Interview

“In qualitative research, interviews are commonly used to obtain data. The type of interview conducted by the researcher is determined by the type of information that the interviewer wishes to obtain. Three types of interview structures are possible: 1) a highly structured or standardized mode, 2) the semi-structured mode, and 3) the unstructured or informal mode”, Seidman, 2006; [Taylor & Bogdan, 1998](#).

My interview guide comprised detailed demographic questions, a request to define a term or concept, and semi-structured open-ended questions. Sufficient time was allocated time for the interviewee to share any other thoughts she or he might have on the topic. So managed to fully participate the interviewee in a conversation about the topic.

## Data Analysis

[Creswell, 2007](#), divides data analysis in an ethnographic case study into five parts: 1) data managing, 2) coding and developing themes, 3) describing, 4) interpreting and 5) representing. The researcher engages in the process of moving in analytic circles that spiral upward, in a process that allows him or her to produce a continually more detailed analysis. The researcher enters with data as text and exits with an account or narrative, [Creswell, 2007](#). In qualitative analysis, the most important thing is to continue the process of undeviating dissimilarities.

## Group Discussion

**Question 1:** What, in your opinion, is the role of Madrassas in building a peaceful place?

Table 1

ITEM	THEMES	RESPONSES/CATEGORIES	INTERVIEWS
What, in your opinion, is the role of madrassas in building a peaceful place?	The role of the madrassa is too positive; the madrassa education promotes peace, unity, brotherhood, love and makes the society peaceful. These madrassas are working for the promotion of peace and unity among the Muslims. These madrassas give us religious scholars, religious preachers, and diligent students.	The very positive role, promotion of peace. Promotion of unity, making of a peaceful society, the teaching of unity, brotherhood and peace, producing religious scholars, education of unity, brotherhood, human rights, rights of parents, sisters,	A

The role of the madrassas is very much positive; it produces religious scholars, it is the source of creation of peace, unity, brotherhood; in madrassas, we learn the human rights, the rights of parents, sisters, brothers, wife, daughters, sons, relatives and even of neighbors. The madrassas are not the source of hatred and differences; the actual source of this is the print and electronic media; it creates hate and differences through negative propaganda, only one percent of the population are getting admission in the madrassas, majority of the public is watching the media. The curriculum of madrassa is based on peace; the madrassas are only teaching and working for the promotion of peace; the teaching of peace is the main objective of its curriculum, provided that if we teach and promote this curriculum in its true letter and spirit. When a system of education prohibits you from abusing or hurting and slapping someone, then how we can say that it preaches disharmony, disparity, war, terrorism and inequality? You will not find such kind of material in the madrassas curriculum. But at the same time, this is also a fact that some sects are preaching social disharmony, social disparity and sectarianism apart from their curriculum. In our madrassas, we cannot think of any curriculum, which is based on sectarianism; in my view, the other madrassas curriculum is also free from sectarian education, we had differences in Fiqah and religious dogmas with one another to some extent, which become the cause of the social disparity, social disharmony, and social differences. If I say that the role of the madrassas in our society regarding peace and harmony in the society is a hundred percent, it will be wrong and misrepresentation, here I would like to say that there is also a negative role of the madrassas as well which needs to be stopped further. If I say that there are no

brothers, wife, daughters, sons, relatives and neighbors, not the source of hate and difference, source of hatred and differences in print and electronic media, majority population watching media, positive curriculum, based on peace, main peace objective of madrassa curriculum, true implementation is needed, some sects are preaching social disharmony, social disparity Sectarianism, the curriculum is free from sect education, Fiqah, Sharia and religious dogmas, the negative role, differences between the religious scholars, the prominent role, harmonious society, the establishment of peace

B

C

D

differences in madrassas or in between the religious scholars, then where it is? But associating all the negativity with the madrassas or religious scholars is not true; there are also other elements responsible for this social disparity, social disharmony, and social differences. The student of madrassas had a moderate level of tolerance as there is no such provocative element in our curriculum which directly affects their level of tolerance. The madrassas are playing a positive role in society and contributing to making society peaceful; the biggest example of it is that those who are qualified from the madrassas took control of Mosques, on the other hand, the qualified from the universities become teachers and Professor, but they have no ability to run the affairs of a Mosque, from this we can conclude that these religious scholars had a very prominent role in our society, without the help of him the thinking of harmonious society will be a dream.

E

Table No 1 shows that respondents **A, B, C, D** and **E** all were agreed upon that madaris are playing a positive role in society by promoting peace and harmony in society.

**Question 2:** Islam is a religion of peace then what basic factors/differences exist which contribute to disharmony?

**Table 2**

ITEM	THEMES	RESPONSES/CATEGORIES	INTERVIEWS
ISLAM IS A RELIGION OF PEACE THEN WHAT BASIC FACTORS/DIFFERENCES EXIST WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO DISHARMONY?	Yes, in fact, Islam is the religion of peace; this division and differences are due to the interpretation, the basic issue is in obtaining the exact and correct meaning of the wording of Quran and Hadid. For example, the Ahl-e-Hadid is of the view that to know the exact meaning of the Hadid; there is no need of going to the interpretation of the companion or four imams; on the other hand, the Deobandi sects go to the interpretation of the companion and four imams, so both of them had differences on it, further the way of thinking different. Hence their main	the religion of peace, division and differences led us to disharmony, interpretation of Quran, issue of four Imams, differences in thinking, differences in the main objective, the division into sects and tribes, identification of people, interpersonal war, reason, lack of awareness, lack of education, lack of proper religious knowledge, hatred, prejudice, villages are more sensitive, the emergence of various sects, negative role	A

objective is different; for this reason, we are divided into religious sectarianism.

of media, involvement of external forces, main issue is Fiqah, differences in beliefs. Differences in dogmas

The division into sects, families and tribes are just for the sake of identification of people, differences and war based on it is a terrible thing, harmful for the society. The social bond between the Muslims are too much strong within and outside Pakistan; the interpersonal war weakens our social bond and needs to be stopped; the reason for this interpersonal war is lack of awareness, lack of education, and lack of proper religious knowledge. The second reason for this is the hatred and prejudice based on sectarianism. The religious scholar has no prejudice with each other; this prejudice can be seen in the lower class mostly.

B

Yes, of course, Islam is the religion of peace; it teaches us unity and brotherhood, but the emergence of various sects and sub-sects within the Muslim community had badly affected the true spirit and meaning of peace, but not only this sectarianism is the cause of social disharmony, lack of education, the negative role of media and the involvement of external forces is also one of the biggest factors which are leading the society towards disharmony".  
Yes, Islam is a religion of peace, and it teaches harmony and brotherhood, but a division of Muslim on the basis of religion is not good; we all agree on the unity of God, Muhammad as a Prophet and Quran etc., the main issue arises from the Fiqah, in my

C

D

view, the Fiqah is the main factor which led us to social disharmony”.

The differences in beliefs and dogmas of these Maslak are the reasons which contribute towards disharmony; for example, Maliki’s, Hamble’s, Hanafi’s and Shahfies are the same in basic beliefs, but there are differences in certain religious issues, but in my view, these are not sects, the further division in these maslaks are basically sects like Deoband is a sect, Deobandies are basically the followers of the Hanafi school of thought, but Deobandi had created a sect within the Hanafi school of thought, these people are proudly calling himself as Deobandi instead of calling himself to be a Muhammadi.

E

Table 2 shows, respondents **A, B, C, D** and **E** were agreed upon, that differences exist within the Muslim due to interpretation of Quran, Hadid, differences in Fiqah and Sharia and the issue of four Imams are the major cause which ultimately contributing towards social disharmony.

**Question 3:** How do you think madrassa are perceived in our society? Source of cohesion or disharmony?

**Table 3**

ITEM	THEMES	RESPONSES/CATEGORIES	INTERVIEWS
How do you think madrassa are perceived in our society? Source of cohesion or disharmony?	The people trust the madrassas system of education, during General Pervez Musharraf era, efforts were made to close the madrassas system of education, but the government failed. The madrassas education is becoming known in public; students are increasing day by day. In 2000 there were a total of 2900 registered madrassas in Pakistan, but with the grace of Allah now its strength reaches 18000/-. Similarly, the strength of the students reached 315,000/- from 700,00/-. The media is against the madrassas according to a pre-plan, and they are busy showing the negative picture because this media is not owned by the	people trust madrassas strength increased, popular among the public; media is against, negative propaganda, showing negative picture, pre-plan, foreign elements, reforms of the society, produces good and educated people, the role is positive, teach peace, love, brotherhood and unity, blind trust on media, source of cohesion, teach religion, external attack, internal attack, respected worldly, reputation outstanding, trusted by people, the majority view, producing terrorist, creating disharmony, differences in society,	A

Muslims, nor it is in the control of the Muslims, it takes dictation from the foreign sources and forces, they are busy to attach all terrorism and wars with madrassas, however, not a single terrorist has been arrested from any madrassas. The basic objective of madrassas is to educate people, our policy is to teach true religious education; these teaching consist of the Quran Hadid and Sunna; furthermore, we work for the reforms of the society and produces good and educated people for the society. It is evident that the people of Pakistan are more religious than other countries of the world because madrassas are playing a positive role in it, therefore in my view, the madrassas are the source of social cohesion and not disharmony.

The role of Madaris is positive, the teaching of peace, love, brotherhood and unity; however, to associate social disharmony with the madrassas is wrong, Infact the madrassas are not the source of hate and difference among us, rather the actual source of this hatred and differences in a print and electronic media and we all had a blind trust on media, one percent of the population are going to madrassas and mosque, and the majority of our population are watching media, in my view the basic source of this social disparity, sectarianism and internal war is the media. The entire population of the country is not getting admission in madrassas; if the governments want, they can utilize the services of the media in a positive direction, and the results will be the unity of the people in the society with peace, love and brotherhood".

B



The madrassa is perceived in our society as a source of cohesion because it teaches us religion and nothing else.

However, there are certain external and internal elements that are busy changing the mind of the people through various sources, but in my view, it is an established fact that madrassa in our society is a source of cohesion.

C

Madrassas are playing a positive role in our society, the Muslim across the world are giving respect to the madrassas, their teachers and students, the reputation of the madrassas in our society is outstanding, people trust on madrassa education; therefore, the enrollment in madrassas system of education is increasing day by day. So in my view, it is a source of cohesion and not of disharmony

D

In respect of madrassas, the majority of the people are thought that the madrassa is producing terrorist and creating disharmony and differences within the society, they think that there is no peace in a madrassa or its curriculum, but this is not correct. But if we go twenty years back, we will find love, brotherhood, peace and harmony in the madrassa and its education; if we look into the teaching of Alama Muhammad Iqbal, they had complimented the madrassas when he went to Undalus, on his return, in his address he stated that leave the madrassas on his current position and keep him going on to work because I have seen that the madrassas in the west become the stabled of horses, meaning thereby, that we are treating the madrassas in a manner from which Alama Muhammad Iqbal had forbidden us. He stated that treat the

E

madrassas in a polite manner and facilitate them.

Table 4 shows that respondent **A** stated that people trust madrassas system of education, enrollment is increasing day by day, respondent **B** stated that Madaris role is positive, teaching peace, love, brotherhood and unity, respondent **C** stated that madrassa had perceived in our society as a source of cohesion because it teaches us the religion and nothing else, respondent **C** stated that, madrassa role is positive, its reputation in our society is outstanding, people trust on madrassa education, respondent **D** stated that, the role of madrassa is positive in our society.

**Question 4:** What do you think are the main reasons behind this perception?

**Table 4**

ITEM	THEMES	RESPONSES/CATEGORIES	INTERVIEWS
What do you think are the main reasons behind this perception?	Regarding the reasons behind the perception that the madrassas are creating social disharmony and social disparity in the society is due to the presentation of the bad image of madrassas by the media within and outside Pakistan.		<b>A</b>
	The internal and external print and electronic media are responsible for the negative propaganda and lowering down the reputation of the madrassas.	Bad image, print & electronic media, negative propaganda, lowering down the reputation,	<b>B</b>
	The trust of the parents over the madrassas system of education, that's why the new admissions are increasing day by day.		<b>C</b>
	The reason behind this perception, in my view, is the trust of people in the madrassa education system and the affiliation of the public with religious education.	Parents trust, increase in admission, public affiliation with religious education,	<b>D</b>
	The Barelvi scholar responded that, in my view, the media is responsible for creating the bad image of madrassas in the eyes of the public; however, this is also a fact that the external forces are also involved in damaging the image of madrassas.	External involvement	<b>E</b>

Table 4 shows that respondents **A, B** stated that it is due to the presentation of bad image of madrassas by the media within and outside Pakistan; respondent **C** stated that, due to the trust of parents, the admission is increasing day by day, respondent **D**, stated that, the affiliation of the public with the religious education, respondent **E** stated that, the negative propaganda and the external forces involvement.

### Findings and Summary

The opinion of different stakeholders like religious scholars, madrassa students, teachers and other known figures of the society were obtained to clarify the perception regarding the madrassa system of education, whether it is an Institute of social cohesion or the nurseries of social disharmony.

Table 1 shows that majorities of the respondents **A, B, D** and **E** agreed upon that, madrassas role is much positive; only one respondent **C** stated that some madrassas are playing a negative role.

Table 2 shows that all the respondent's **A, B, C, D** and **E** were agreed to the statement that Yes, Islam is the religion of peace, but differences are due to interpretation of the Quran, interpretation of Hadid, differences in Fiqah, which led us to disharmony.

Table 3 shows that all the respondents **A, B, C, D** and **E** were agreed to the statement that the madrassas in our society are considered as a source of cohesion.

Table 4 shows that two respondents **A** and **B**, identified Print & electronic media; one respondent, **E**, pointed out external involvement, while two respondent's **C** and **D**, had quoted nothing.

## **Conclusion**

Keeping in view the above-mentioned facts, findings and the research work on Social Cohesion and the role of madrassas education, one can easily understand the importance of social cohesion in our daily life.

To live a peaceful and harmonious life, besides the other facilities and requirements, the most important one is that the society must be socially cohesive. To develop a strong and friendly relationship within the society, one must know the rights and duties towards other co-member of the society, which could be possible only if the members of the society be provided with a uniform curriculum in all the educational institutions regardless of their social, political and religious affiliations, without having uniformity in the curriculum within the educational institutions, thinking of social cohesion within the society would be a dream.

## **Recommendations**

Religious scholar, the respondent from the community, are agreed upon that, there is no social cohesion in our society and has quoted the reasons, i.e. differences in religious dogmas, internal and external enemies, the negative role of religious scholars, lack of education, weak writ of the government, advancement in technology, political grouping, class-based education, poor administration, lack of the rule of law. Hence it is recommended that the general public and madrassas student be educated, awareness sessions regarding social cohesion and peace education be held by the district administration with the help of Professors from the universities and religious scholars, the district administration is empowered to control the political involvement of madrassas students and politics be banned in madrassas.

The Print and Electronic Media be restrained from negative propaganda against the madrassas, furthermore to control external involvement, a check and balance system should be introduced specifically for funding purpose.

## References

- Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*, 3rd edn, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Harry, B., Day, M., & Quist, F. (1998). "He can't really play": An ethnographic study of sibling acceptance and interaction. *Journal for the Association of the Severely Handicapped (JASH)*, 23(4), 289–299.
- Surah Al-An'aam: Verse (6:159) Al Quran
- Surah Al-Araf (7:56). AL-Quran.
- Surah Al-Baqarah (1. 60). Al Quran
- Surah Al-Baqarah (3:205). Al Quran
- Surah AL-Imran. (3:103). AL-Quran.
- Taylor, S.J., & Bogden, R. (1984). *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: The Search for Meanings*. New York: Wiley.
- Thomas, D.R. & Hodges, I.D. (2010). *Designing and managing your research project: core knowledge for social and health researchers*, London: Sage.