



Role and Relevance of Madrasa in Modern Education: An Indian Perspective

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Abstract

In India, madrasas are crucial for teaching moral education and basic literacy, particularly to impoverished and rural students who lack easy access to public schools. Many first-generation students and young females are able to continue their education because of the free education, food, and housing provided by these institutions. However, since its traditional curriculum often excludes contemporary courses like fundamental physics, mathematics, computer skills, and functional English, madrasa students confront significant challenges in the modern world. Many graduates struggle to get normal employment since mainstream colleges and companies often do not acknowledge their degrees (Sanads).

This theme paper examines the significant challenges as well as the benefits of madrasa education in India. It looks at important concerns such as the absence of actual vocational training, out-of-date teaching techniques, inconsistent teacher compensation under government modernization initiatives, and degree equivalency. In order to enable madrasa students to participate in mainstream economic growth without losing their cultural and ethical roots, the paper proposes solutions like connecting madrasas with the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), offering university bridge courses, and establishing actual skill training centers.

Keywords: *Madrasa education, modern education, curriculum integration, educational inclusion.*

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I. Introduction

Madrasa education is frequently viewed as outdated or cut off from mainstream society in conversations about India's educational progress, but when we examine the actual situation in each of the country's states, we find that millions of children continue to receive their basic education from these establishments (Alam, 2011; Sikander, 2026). A local madrasa is not only an option for many impoverished families, particularly in rural or socioeconomically disadvantaged areas where government primary schools are either nonexistent, understaffed, or too far away; it is frequently the only accessible route to basic literacy (Sachar Committee, 2006; JETIR, 2022). Additionally, many residential madrasas in regions like West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh provide free textbooks, daily meals, and dormitory accommodations for children and orphans and kids from low-income families (IJCRT, 2021). Because of this crucial social welfare function, we cannot simply ignore or dismiss their presence when evaluating India's literacy targets or constitutional commitments under the Right to Education (RTE) Act (Sikander, 2026).

At the same time, Indian society and the job market are changing very fast due to rapid urbanization, digital growth, and new vocational requirements. Because of this, educational experts, policymakers, and community leaders often ask whether the traditional syllabus taught in traditional Indian madrasas is still fully relevant for a young student's future career in 21st-century India (Sikander, 2026). Many express concern that madrasa children are falling behind in essential modern subjects prescribed by national and state boards—such

as basic science, mathematics, computer applications, and functional English (ClearIAS, 2024; Sikander, 2026). When a student completes their Alim or Fazil degree without proper exposure to these modern fields, they often struggle to clear entrance tests for mainstream Indian public universities (like JNU, AMU, or JMI) or secure regular jobs in corporate, administrative, and technical sectors (ClearIAS, 2024; Sikander, 2026).

However, if you visit many state-recognized and private madrasas across India today, you will notice that a slow but real change is taking place inside their classrooms. Many management committees, young scholars, and community leaders are realizing that religious knowledge and modern scientific knowledge do not have to contradict each other (Alam, 2011; Sikander, 2026). Many madrasas are establishing computer laboratories, offering English in addition to traditional topics like Arabic and Islamic jurisprudence, and implementing NCERT or state board textbooks under state madrasa boards (such as in West Bengal, Bihar, and Kerala) (ClearIAS, 2024). They want their pupils to develop strong moral principles and become competent Indian citizens who can actively support the country's economy.

The purpose of this study is to examine this precise equilibrium: the function and applicability of madrasa education in the contemporary Indian educational system. We are examining the real-world challenges that instructors and students at Indian madrasas experience on a daily basis, going beyond prejudiced public discussions. We will examine both perspectives: first, the important role madrasas play in promoting moral character development, grassroots literacy, and social safety nets for underprivileged communities; and second, the actual structural challenges with regard to degree recognition (Sanad equivalency), insufficient government funding, inadequate infrastructure, and antiquated teaching techniques (JETIR, 2022).

This research looks for methods to integrate old madrasa networks with contemporary Indian formal education, rather than seeing them as two parallel streams that would never intersect. Our main question is straightforward: how can Indian madrasas update their curricula to stay current, and how can state and federal educational policies assist them so that every student can smoothly transition from Madarsa to higher education and the contemporary workforce?

II. Historical Context and Structural Evolution in India

We must examine the historical development of madrasas across the Indian subcontinent in order to comprehend their current status in India. Madrasas were not specialized theological institutions in medieval India during the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal eras. Along with religious scriptures, they served as the main educational institutions for state administration, the judiciary, philosophy, medicine (Unani), mathematics, and court languages like Persian (Alam, 2011). Because information was addressed holistically and there was no strict division between secular administration and religious instruction, great historical institutes like Madrasa-i-Muizzi in Delhi or Firangi Mahal in Lucknow trained both academics and state officials.

However, this conventional structure was removed during the British colonial era. The British government implemented an English-medium education system in response to Macaulay's Minute on Education in 1835 with the goal of producing clerks and administrative personnel for imperial authority. European languages, colonial legislation, and secular topics were the exclusive emphasis of modern government and missionary schools. Sensing a danger to their cultural, linguistic, and religious identity under colonial control, Islamic scholars formed autonomous institutions like Darul Uloom Deoband (1866) and Nadwatul Ulama (1894) (Alam, 2011; Sikander, 2026). These institutions deliberately broke out from the colonial state education system in order to protect traditional traditions without intervention from the government. They placed a strong emphasis on theological preservation and classical texts (Dars-i Nizami).

This historical split created a parallel educational structure in post-independence India that persists today:

- The Mainstream Board/University System: Aligned with CBSE, CISCE, or State Boards, focusing on modern sciences, commercial skills, technology, and national entrance exams, but often lacking deep moral or value-based learning (evidence).
- The Traditional Madrasa System: Focuses heavily on moral grounding, Arabic literature, classical texts, and spiritual discipline, but frequently operates in isolation from state board curricula and modern market demands (Sikander, 2026).

In post-independence India, this gap became a point of major policy concern, especially after landmark government assessment. The Sachar Committee Report (2006) highlighted that while only a small percentage (around 4%) of Muslim school-going children in India attend full-time madrasas, these institutions remain crucial access points for children from socio-economically backward backgrounds who have no alternative schooling options. However, because many independent madrasa degrees (Sanads) were not recognized as equivalent to 10th (Matriculation) or 12th (Intermediate) certificates by central and state boards, graduates faced immense difficulty in getting admission to a general degree colleges or applying for public sector jobs (Sachar Committee, 2006).

In response to the government policies, madrasa education providers are splited into two distinct patterns across Indian states:

1. **State-Recognized Board Madrasas:** States like West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Assam established official Madrasa Education Boards and allow the madras education providers to come under education boards. These madrasas are being funded by state governments to provide modern education (Science, Math, Social Studies). These madrasas provide Dini-Talim as well as modern education to students. Students were granted recognized modern education certificates that are equivalent to regular high school certificates which provides further gateway to higher education.

2. **Independent/Unrecognized Madrasas:** Another set of madras are the private ones operated independently (traditional seminaries) on community donations without state funding or government curriculum intervention, prioritizing purely traditional Islamic studies.

Over the last two decades, central schemes like the Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrasas (SPQEM) were introduced to fund science teachers, computer infrastructure, and library resources in traditional madrasas (Alam, 2011). Community leaders and madrasa administrations in India are increasingly seeking ways to modernise their syllabus while preserving their core character—trying to ensure that madrasa graduates are equipped to navigate both spiritual life and modern economic requirements (Sikander, 2026).

III. Thematic Analysis of Madrasa Education in India

3.1. Grassroots Access and Educational Inclusion

When we examine the spread of education in India, especially in remote rural belts and congested urban pockets across states like Bihar, West Bengal, and eastern Uttar Pradesh, madrasas play a very real grassroots role that often gets overlooked in broad policy papers (Sachar Committee, 2006; JETIR, 2022). Many government primary schools suffer from high several physical and resources inadequacies like lack of proper physical infrastructure, poor-teaching learning resources, teacher absenteeism, lack of proper toilets, remotely located, concern for safety of students (especially girls) (Alam, 2011). In such villages, a local madrasa or maktab becomes the only place where a child learns how to hold a pencil, read basic alphabets, and sit in a disciplined classroom environment (IJCRT, 2021).

As most madrasas operate on community charity (Zakat and Sadaqah), they do not charge any tuition fee. In fact, many residential madrasas provide free hostel rooms, daily meals, winter blankets, and clothing to orphans and children whose parents work as daily-wage laborers, rickshaw pullers, or landless farmers (Sachar Committee, 2006; Sikander, 2026). Therefore, free education along with other facilities usually comes with price act as boon for many of the poor parents. It has been reported, that as far girls' education, many of the parents do not want to send their daughters to nearby co-educational schools or schools which are distantly located, therefore for these parents' best option to educate their girls is to send them nearby Niswan (girls') madrasas, because they trust the safe cultural environment (JETIR, 2022). This helps the girl to have foundational literacy thus contributing to national literacy (Alam, 2011).

This contribution of madrasa to develop foundational literacy and numeracy among young children has never been recognized at national level. This is because that many madrasas not officially recognized as an institute in government data (as per RTE Act, 2009). Moreover, institutions too do not maintain proper admission registers or student tracking IDs, which makes it even harder to officially declare these children as literate/educated (Clear IAS, 2024). So, while they receive basic education, yet they are not recognized as a result they hardly enter into higher education system.

3.2. Modernizing the Curriculum (Challenges and Reforms)

There is a continuous debate around what is actually being taught inside madrasa. Traditionally, madrasa education in India follows century old curriculum called Dars-i Nizami, which was designed in the 18th century by Mulla Nizamuddin of Firangi Mahal, Lucknow (Alam, 2011). This syllabus puts heavy focus on classical Arabic grammar (Sarf and Nahw), medieval logic (Mantiq), philosophy, Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), and Quranic exegesis (Tafsir) (Sikander, 2026). While this curriculum produces deep scholarship in classical texts, its subjects were designed for medieval administration and do not match the needs of modern India's economy or competitive job exams (ClearIAS, 2024).

To fix this gap, various reforms have been tried by both governments and community leaders over the past few decades, though the results were mixed. Under the Central Government's Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrasas (SPQEM), financial help was given to introduce modern subjects like Science, Mathematics, Social Studies, Hindi, and English into traditional madrasas (ClearIAS, 2024).

At the state level, institutions affiliated with official bodies—like West Bengal Board of Madrasah Education or Bihar State Madrasa Education Board—teach NCERT or State-prescribed textbooks up to the secondary (Alim) and higher secondary (Fazil) levels, along with religious subjects on the daily basis (Alam, 2011; JETIR, 2022). In southern states like Kerala, Samastha Kerala Islam Matha Vidyabhyasa Board operate a smart dual-shift system where students attend regular schools during the day and madrasa classes in the morning, avoiding the clash of timings and curriculum (ClearIAS, 2024).

Despite these positive examples, deep challenges remain in implementing modern curricula across northern and eastern India:

- **Irregular Funding & Salary Delays:** In many states, modern teachers appointed under government schemes face months or even years of salary delays, forcing many qualified science and math teachers to leave.
- **Double Burden on Students:** When a madrasa tries to teach Din Talim alongside NCERT curriculum, students are not only overburdened with homework but also get fatigue of long classroom hours. Since the type education are different, therefore it hampers their understanding of both fields (Sikander, 2026).
- **Lack of Labs and Computers:** Teaching sciences without laboratory apparatus, or having computers without proper provision of electricity and internet connection, leads to only theoretical knowledge (JETIR, 2022; Sikander, 2026).

Because of these constraints and improper implementation of modern curriculum across the Madarsas leaving a huge gap between some of the well-managed state-board madrasas and poor, unrecognized rural madrasahs (Sachar Committee, 2006).

3.3. Holistic and Value-Based Pedagogical Approaches

In the modern debates related to schooling, a major complaint against mainstream education that it has become commercialized, exam-driven, focused only on rote learning and driven by marks, thus completely ignoring development of good character, value laden and well

balanced human beings (Sikander, 2026). In contrast, the relevance of madrasa education is its traditional emphasis on Tarbiyah (moral discipline and character cultivation) alongside Ta'lim (academic instruction) (Ahmad, 2022; Sikander, 2026).

In residential madrasas across India, the daily schedule is strictly organized around discipline, cleanliness, community prayer, and non-communal living. Students clean their own living quarters, eat together on simple floor carpets (Dastarkhwan), and share duties in serving food and managing daily affairs (IJCRT, 2021). This routine teaches students simplicity, respect for elders, patience, and a sense of equality, because children from different social and economic backgrounds live under the same roof without any class distinction (Ahmad, 2022; JETIR, 2022).

Furthermore, the teacher-student relationship (Ustad-Shagird) in a traditional madrasa is much closer than what seen in many modern private schools. Teachers often live in the same compound, mentoring students not for their life but also helping them to resolve personal conflicts, develop ethics, and community service (Alam, 2011; Sikander, 2026).

However, this traditional method has inherited weaknesses that cannot be ignored. The teaching method in many traditional madrasas relies heavily on rote memorization (Hifz and rote learning of classical commentaries) rather than encouraging critical questioning, open debate, or problem solving (Sikander, 2026). Students are rarely encouraged to challenge historical texts or analyze contemporary scientific issues independently. While this method succeeds in building moral obedience and religious discipline, it sometimes leaves students unprepared for the analytical thinking and problem-solving required in modern academic and professional world/spaces (Sikander, 2026).

IV. Critical Challenges: University Equivalence, Sanad Recognition and Vocational Pathways

4.1. The Deadlock of Degree Equivalence and Sanad Recognition

When a student finishes years of study in a traditional madrasa and steps out into the real world, the biggest challenge they face is the official recognition of their degree, traditionally called a Sanad (Sachar Committee, 2006). In the Indian educational setup, higher education admissions and government jobs are based on the recognition of qualification which hardly any universities or recruitment agencies recognized qualification completely through madrasa. Moreover, even if the regulatory bodies like UGC, NCTE, AICTE etc. do not consider Madrasa education as equivalent to general education. These bodies require formal 10th (Matriculation), 12th (Intermediate), or Bachelor's degrees granted by a recognized central board (like CBSE) or an authorized state education board or recognized universities (Alam, 2011).

As thousands of independent madrasas operate are private Madarsa and outside the control of state madrasa boards (to maintain their autonomy), their Alim (often considered equivalent to senior secondary or BA) and Fazil (considered equivalent to MA) certificates are not treated as valid degrees by mainstream Indian universities (Sachar Committee, 2006; Sikander, 2026). Only a handful of central universities—most notably Aligarh Muslim University (AMU),

Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI), Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU), and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) that have approved list of private Madarsas whose qualification these universities recognized that too for specific courses like B.A (Urdu/Persian/Arabic etc) or else they offer bridge courses to madarsas students to mainstream in general education (Alam, 2011; JETIR, 2022).

Even in these universities, the admission is mostly restricted to humanities departments, such as:

- Arabic and Persian Literature
- Urdu Language and Islamic Studies
- History or Political Science (in limited cases)

Madrasa students who wish to study B.Sc. in Physics, Computer Science, Law (LL.B.), or Commerce (B.Com.) finds no entry as these courses do not consider madrasa education as equivalent to Sciences/Commerce/Law programmes (ClearIAS, 2024). This creates a structural bottleneck where a bright young student's entire academic career is boxed into a narrow lane, regardless of their actual intellectual capability (Sikander, 2026).

4.2. Inadequate Vocational Training and the Employment Deficit

Another major challenge of madrasa educations that it does not impart any vocational training to students that fails them to earn a decent earning in today's world (Sachar Committee, 2006; IJCRT, 2021). Historically, madrasas education trained individuals to become community leaders, judges (Qazi's), teachers, and imams. But today, the number of madrasa graduates passing out each year far exceeds the available vacancies in local mosques, religious trusts (Waqf boards), and community schools (Sikander, 2026).

When thousands of Madarsa graduates enter the open job market without any vocational skills like computer operating skills, typing, account-keeping, or functional spoken English, they face extreme difficulty in getting white-collar jobs in banks, private companies, or retail businesses (JETIR, 2022). As a result, many madrasa pass-outs are forced to accept low-paying informal jobs, such as:

- Low-wage private home tutoring for religious texts
- Tailoring, bookbinding etc.
- Unorganized clerical work in local trust offices

While some state has taken initiatives to introduce National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and prepare the students for vocational training (like electrician, mobile repairing, and computer typing) in madrasas, these initiatives often remain on paper only (ClearIAS, 2024). In most cases, there are no proper toolkits, working machines, or trained vocational instructors to run the programs effectively, leaving students with theoretical knowledge of modern trades with zero practical training (Sikander, 2026).

4.3. Infrastructure Gaps, Teacher Under-Compensation, and Legal Uncertainty

Beyond degrees and jobs, the internal running of many madrasas across Indian states suffers from severe material resources that directly affect student learning outcomes (IJCRT, 2021; JETIR, 2022). In many private madrasas, classrooms are often congested, with children of different age groups sit together on floor. As these are mostly charitable institutions and functions on donations, therefore, there is severe shortage of drinking water facilities, separate functional toilets for females, and improper ventilation (Sachar Committee, 2006; Alam, 2011).

Teachers are either lowly paid or remain unpaid for months. Even in the schemes like SPQEM where subject teachers appointed under government provisions are either lowly paid or remain unpaid in comparison to the regular government school teachers. Sometimes the situations become worsens as these salaries are frequently delayed by state treasuries, sometimes up to 24 months, forcing teachers to quit their jobs to feed their own families (JETIR, 2022). This high turnover leaves children without any continuity in subjects like Math and Science for months at a time.

On top of it financial and infrastructural constraints, legal and administrative scrutiny of Madarsa in various Indian states like Surveying of unrecognized madrasas, Recognitions under the Right to Education (RTE) Act—has created an atmosphere of confusion and anxiety among madrasa administrators and poor parents (Sikander, 2026). Without a clear, long-term stable policy from state and central governments, students remain in catch-22 situation in the middle of bureaucracy, unsure whether their educational certificates will hold any value in the future (Sikander, 2026).

V. Practical Policy Suggestions and Way Forward

If one has to solve the problem which arises whether Madarsa will be the center of modern education, or traditional education, the owners of the private Madarsa and government cannot fight or provide small funding to these institutions (Sachar Committee, 2006; ClearIAS, 2024). We need practical steps that respect both sides:

5.1. Using NIOS Open Schooling System

Instead of forcing madrasas to change their institutional identity as centre of religious education—which makes management suspicious and resistant—the easier approach will be to accredit all private Madarsas as learning centre of National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) (Alam, 2011; Sikander, 2026). Madrasas can easily register as study centres. In this way, children can study their religious curriculum (Hifz or Alim) in the

morning, and in the afternoon, they can prepare for 10th and 12th exams in modern subjects. This helps them to acquire government validated certificates, diplomas and degrees without sacrificing their religious freedom.

5.2. Bridge Courses in More Universities

Right now, only a few big universities like AMU, Jamia, and MANUU take madrasa students, and mostly only in Urdu, Arabic, or Islamic courses (Alam, 2011; JETIR, 2022). State universities should also start 1-year bridge courses. In this one year, students are imparted education on fundamental/foundational subjects which act as bridge to undergraduate

programmes. Also, students are given special training in English writing, basic computer skills, and general knowledge. Once they pass this bridge course, students will be allowed to take admission in other regular streams like B. Com, Law, or Social Work, not in just language courses (Sikander, 2026).

5.3. Fixing Teacher Salaries on Time

The biggest failure of past schemes like SPQEM was that modern subject teachers were paid very small honorariums, and even that salary usually delayed for several months. Naturally, no good teachers will work under such conditions. The education department must send teacher salaries monthly directly into teachers' bank accounts. Also, District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) should provide in-service training to madrasa staff so they can learn better teaching methods (JETIR, 2022).

5.4. Real Hands-on Vocational Centers

Giving lectures about skill training is not enough; madrasas students' needs vocational exposures (IJCRT, 2021). The government's Skill Development Mission can set up training hubs for each 4–5 madrasas where students can learn vocational skills like mobile repairing, electrical work, computer typing, and accounting tools. This gives them an opportunity as well as safety net so that even if they do not get a government job, they can still run a small business or industry or even shop or work in a local company with dignity (Sikander, 2026).

VI. Conclusion

To conclude this paper, madrasas in India are educating the unreached and poor population. For millions of poor families, sending their children to schools and receiving education may be dream but Madarsa come as boon in many families wherein they not only stay there but also get food, shelter, and academic atmosphere to know how to read and write (Sachar Committee, 2006; JETIR, 2022). They are the institutions of opportunity especially for girls' students where access to normal schools or getting safe and secure environment is (Alam, 2011). It is untrue to say that Madarsa provides platforms to many families to educate and thus contribute to the national literacy.

On the other front, there are several problems in hand in Madarsas. Non-recognition of Madarsa education, lack of vocational education in Madarsa, absence of modern education makes the situation complex which leads to stagnation in life (Sikander, 2026). So, they end up doing low-paying jobs often nature of job is casual.

The solution is not to close down madrasas or treat them with suspicion, but to help them adapt to the modern world. If we can combine their religion-based value education with flexible modern education, along with community support, it will be much easier to mainstream them. At the end, blending of modern education with religious education will create a win-win situation for both students and Madarsa. Both the system of education should work together so that every child studying in Madarsa gets benefitted (Sikander, 2026).

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