

## Book Review

**Abul Barkat, Md. Badiuzzaman, Rowshan Ara,  
M. Taheruddin and Farid M Zahid (2008)**  
**Political Economy of Madrassa Education in Bangladesh:  
*Genesis, Growth and Impact*, Dhaka: Ramon Publishers**

LAMIA ISLAM\*

In this book, Abul Barkat and his coauthors explores, most likely for the first time, the various unexplored areas of political economy of madrassa education system in Bangladesh. The authors have focused on the political economy of the education system by analyzing the historical background of madrassa education, the increase of madrassas along with number of students and teachers overtime and projected numbers upto year 2050, the reasons for such increases (by types of madrassa – Alia and Quomi); the socio-economic background of teachers and students; the administrative and financial management systems; curricula; female students, the causes for sending children to madrassas and so on. A comparative analysis of the mainstream and madrassa education system has been done in the book. Besides, the book has highlighted the risk factors which are responsible for the rise of religion-based fundamentalism and extremism associated with madrassa education.

The authors have discussed about the four streams (General education, technical education, madrassa education and English medium education) of the education system in Bangladesh. They have mentioned that the curriculum, pedagogical methodology, behavior, educational standards of the teachers etc. are quite distinctive from one stream to another. As a result, these divisions cause stratification of education that causes rise to a discriminatory society instead of creating an egalitarian one.

\* Lamia Islam, MSS, is an Assistant Professor in Department of Political Science at Jagannath University of Dhaka.

The Madrassa education system is discussed in the book as one of the ancient education systems in the Indian sub-continent which has strong social and religious identity. The authors have mentioned *forqania*, *hafezia* and *maktab* (naurani madrassas) as Quami Madrassas and *Ebtedayee* Madrassas as Aliya Madrassas. There are three distinct levels of madrassas; these are: primary, secondary and above secondary levels. After the partition of India in 1947, this education system got state patronization which was a new phase of educational development. Besides, it needs to mention that the authors have found the highest growth rate of madrassas during the military regimes of President Ayub Khan (1958-1969), President Ziaur Rahman (1976-1981) and President H. M Ershad (1982- 1990). The main reasons for the highest growth of madrassas during the military autocratic rulers are the establishment of religious political parties, change in state policies, encouragement of madrassa education and so on.

Every year a significant number of students are enrolled in madrassas of Bangladesh. The authors deeply observed that the highest numbers of students in the Aliya madrassas are studying at the secondary level (Dakhil Madrassas) whereas the maximum students of the Quomi madrassas are enrolled at the primary level (hafezia, forqania, norani and other types of maktab). Moreover, it is mentioned in the book that students' enrollment in both of Aliya and Quomi madrassas in rural areas is larger than that of urban areas. In addition, the female students are very few in number compared to male students in both categories of madrassas. The authors discerned that many of the female madrassa students believe in women empowerment. It is noticeable that Quomi madrassas do not pay attention to the women's empowerment and their role in economic and social development.

While examining the socio-economic status of the students, the authors ascertained that maximum madrassa students belong to large household which is higher than national average. Most of the students' household members have formal education and their occupations are farming, teaching, salaried jobs, petty trading, wage labor, business, housewife and students. The authors reported that a predominant part of the students are from poor and lower middle class family. The authors noticed that a major portion of the students' households are absolute poor (Calorie intake less than 2122 kilo calorie per day) whereas one third students are from hardcore poor (Calorie intake less than 1805 kilo calorie per day).

Furthermore, the authors have mentioned that although general subjects are included in the madrassa curriculum of both Aliya and Quomi madrassas besides religious subjects, the maximum students prefer to study Hadiths and Tafsir rather

than Geography, Economics and so on. In this regard, female students are less interested than male students to study general subjects. Likewise, Quomi madrasa students prefer religious subjects to general subjects than the students of Aliya Madrassas. It is noticeable that the students of Aliya madrassas are more interested to complete their higher studies than that of Quomi madrassas. When asked about their ideal personalities, majority of them have chosen the leaders of religion based political parties of Bangladesh whereas a significant number of students have mentioned about national poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam as their ideal personality. A very few of them have chosen Poet Rabindranath Tagore, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Sher-e-Bangla A.K Fazlul Haque as their role model. Apart from that, the authors have an interesting finding that the madrasa students are conscious about social problems and constitutional rights.

Also, the book envisages the socio-economic factors of the teachers of both Aliya and Quomi Madrassas. The authors highlight some problems of madrasa teachers, for instance, inadequate salary, lack of training, lack of specific rules for promotion and so on. These problems cause negative impact on their living standard. Although the teachers are economically insolvent, they are socially respected persons. Moreover, it is identified by the authors that majority of the teachers of both categories madrassas send their children to the mainstream educational institutions.

The authors have diagnosed the religious, economic and other related reasons for the demand of madrasa education. The parents of the students have mentioned that learning and promoting Islamic knowledge, easy way to after life (heaven), and connection with following Islam are the main religious reasons for sending their children to madrassas. Besides, high educational expense in the mainstream education, high unemployment rate of the mainstream education's graduates, study opportunities for orphan, destitute and physically challenged child are significant factors for the high demand of madrasa education. Moreover, difficulty to understand the course curriculum of general education, essence of religious and modern knowledge in madrasa education, scope of joining mainstream education easily are the other related reasons for sending children to madrassas.

The authors have tried to identify the problems of madrasa education system from the perspectives of teachers, students, members of governing bodies and distinguished persons. Limited scope of joining government services, inadequate skilled teachers, outdated curriculum, insufficient financial assistance from government, lack of science and commerce education, no arrangement for

vocational training, limited scope of extra-curricular activities, rise of fanaticism are the major problems of the madrassa education system.

Finally, the authors have analyzed the risk factors of the madrassa students to involve in militancy. They have mentioned that outdated curriculum of madrassa education is not connected with radicalism. Mainly, some domestic political actors use the religious capital and manpower of the madrassas for their own advantages. The authors have mentioned that the rise of Islam-based militancy is not linked to only madrassa education system but also many internal and external factors are responsible for that.