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Portrait of Imams and their Professional Training in Pakistan

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Abstract

This research study is concerned to know the Imam status such as appointment, qualification, salaries, professional development, religious group affiliation and etc in Pakistan. It also focuses on solutions to be adopted to make the imam professional development system more effective. The research is exploratory in nature. The participants of this study, who served as the sample, include thirty (30) imams who were working in different types of mosques and thirty (30) prospective Imam studying in different religion education Madaris. The data were collected through self-developed in depth interviews and thematic analysis. The researcher personally approached to the respondents and collected the information. The findings of this study indicates that there are seven major governing bodies of Pakistani Madaris that deal with the religious professional development in Pakistan. There is no basic education for imams in Pakistan. The religious qualifications for imams are also expanding from one year to eight years. While the curriculum is different in each school of thought institution. The name of program is almost same but the durations vary from eight to nine years. The teaching methodology is focused on lecture and rote memory, with a bit of focus given to discussion. However, not all Madaris have trained staff. All Madaris should be registered and minimum qualifications of imams should be determined.

Key Words: Imams, Madaris, Schools of thought, Professional Development

Introduction

The main purpose for creation of Islamic Republic of Pakistan was to maintain the individuality of the Muslim community in South Asia. Muslims of South Asia have a communal identify, but cannot live united in one place. The state religion of Pakistan is Islam, a country that provides the right to its citizens. The population of Pakistan (241.49 million) is comprised of 96.35% Muslim and 3.65 % Non-Muslim. “Muslim” includes those affiliated with different schools of thought (sects) and “Non-Muslim” includes those with different religions and beliefs. Muslims in Pakistan belong to two sects: Sunni (77%) and Shia (19.16%). Though members of Ahmadiyya (Qadiani) are 0.35% and consider themselves Muslims (Digital Census of Pakistan, 2023). The government of Pakistan as per constitution of Pakistan does not consider this group as true followers of Islam and has declared Ahmadis as “Non-Muslims” (Miller & Tracy, 2009).

In the Muslim population (Sunni & Shia) of Pakistan. There is also a significant number of Non-Muslim (2010). Among Non-Muslims, Hindus (including Scheduled Castes) are 2017 % and Christians are (1.37%) and reaming are other religions along with minorities such as Sikh, Jews, Buddhis, Baha’is and others (*“Religious Demographics of Pakistan 2023”*).

The mosque is an imperative to Muslims and also the main symbol of the Muslim community. According to a conservative estimate there are more than 400,000 mosques in Pakistan. The person who leads the religious activities and prayers in the mosque is called an imam. There are different titles used for imams, such as “Molvi”, “Mullah”, “Qari”, “Hafiz”, “Khateeb” “Moulana” and so on. In Pakistan, the most common title in rural areas is “Molvi”, and in urban areas, “imam”.

There is no data available that can provide clear information around how many mosques exist and how many religious leaders, whether referred to as “Imam”, “Molvi”, “Mullah”, “Qari”, “Hafiz”, “Zakir” “Khateeb”, or “Moulana”, there are in Pakistan. This is because there is no strict system or rule to register mosques or

imams; however, it is estimated that almost 250,000 imams are working on a regular basis in Pakistan (Source: interviews with religious leaders).

Portrait of the Pakistani Imam

There are no hard and fast rules for appointment of an Imam in Pakistan. The mosques. Madaris under the control of government bodies and big autonomous institutions appoint imams on specific self-developed criteria such as Imam must have a certified religious education, such as Dars-e-Nizami. In other mosques which are controlled by local communities, any person can become an imam who is Muslim, has a beard, shows honesty, pity, humbleness, mastery over a few Qurani Surrah, and apparently has committed no serious sins.

Physical appearance of Imam; In Pakistan it is compulsory for an imam to have a beard, wear shawlar Qameez, and put a cap or turban on his head.

Imam's Salary; The average salary ranges in different mosques. The information of salary range is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Showing Imam's Salary Range in Pakistan.*

Category of Mosques Managed by	Pay Scale / Grade	Salary Range (Per month)	Age for Appointment
Ministry of Religious Affairs	9 to 17	Rs. 40000/- to 60000/-(120 to 200 €)	18-35 years old
Defense forces	9 to 17	Rs.40000/- to 60000/- (100 to 200 €)	18-35 years old
Educational institutions and other government departments	9 to 17	Rs.40000/- to 60000/- (100 to 200 €)	18-35 years old
Autonomous bodies or religious organization	No grade specific	Rs.15000/- to 35000/- (50 to 120 €)	No age restriction

Local community	No grade specific	Rs. 15000/- to 25000/-(50 to 85 €)	No age restriction
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Source: Respective mosques provided information

The majority of imams work as full-time employees in mosques. The mosques under the control of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Defense Forces appointed full-time imams in their mosques. The imams working in mosques that are managed by religious organizations have more of an influence on the surrounding Muslim community than other mosques. Imams of mosques in rural areas are less qualified, but have more influence on the Muslim community due to the low literacy rates in rural areas.

Educational Requirements for Imams

There is no specific educational requirement for imams in the majority of mosques under the control of local communities in Pakistan; however, mosques under the control of the government, autonomous bodies or an organization, imams should have a religious education certificate or equivalent from Dare-e-Nizami. Table 2 presents the detailed information about educational requirements for imams in each mosque category.

Table: 2: Showing Educational Requirement for Appointment as Imam

Category of mosques managed by	Educational requirement for Imam
Ministry of Religious Affairs	Dars-e-Nizami, but in a very few cases (well reputed and big mosques such as Faisal Masjid) post-graduation such as Mufti or Sheikh- Ul -Haidth/ master degree in Islamic studies or Arabic is required
Defense forces	Dars-e-Nizami
Autonomous bodies or religious organization	Dars-e-Nizami
Educational institutions and other	Dars-e-Nizami or short religious course

government departments	with duration of one to two years such as Fazal Arabic, ATTC, and others
Local community	No restriction for religious education

Source: Respective mosques provided information

Institutions (Madaris/schools/Colleges) for the Education of Imams in Pakistan

In Pakistan there are two types of institutions or systems available who are responsible for provision of religious education; modern educational institutions and traditional educational institutions.

Modern Educational Institutions (Public and Private); the modern educational institutions, both public and private, are encompassed in six junctures:

Primary covering grades 1 to 5 (5 years) for children 6 to 10 years old. There is Masjid Maktab School for grades 1 to 3 for Islamic education (Quran and Hifz), along with modern educational options – however, these are few in number and the government is now going to merge these schools with nearby primary schools. Some private schools are providing Islamic education as the recitation of the Quran (Nazra) and the memorization of the Quran (Hifz), along with modern educational options such as Mezan, Suffah, Bait-ul-Arkam and others.

Middle covering grades 6 to 8

Secondary from 9 to 10 class.

Higher secondary 11 to 12 (2 years) for youth 16 to 17 years old.

Graduation - two to four years of education in a college or university.

Post-graduation, MPhil, and PhD in religious education (Islamic studies, Arabic) in universities.

Note: The subject “Islamic studies/Ismaiat” and Nazra Quran is compulsory from grades 1 to 14, and in some universities until 16 years (master’s degree level), such as Islamia University (IU) in Bahawalpur, Pakistan. Some students of Islamic Madaris also take the Secondary and Intermediate examination, and enroll in

modern subjects along with their religious subjects to get Secondary and Intermediate “sanad”

All of the above-mentioned modern institutions work under the control of Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) and universities. Institutions provide Master’s and PhD degrees in Islamic Studies and Arabic. Each BISE also provides the facilities for assessment and issues the certificate of “Fazal Arabic”, along with “Alam Course” for private candidates.

The Traditional Educational Institutions: the traditional institutions are the Maktib and Madarassas attached to mosques.

Maktib: They provide the facilitation for reading the Quran (Nazra); some also provide the facilitation for Hifz (memorization of the Quran). Almost all mosques provide this type of service to the community in the morning or evening sessions for one to two hours daily.

Madarassas/Madaris: These institutions teach mostly Islamic subjects to those hoping to graduate as a cleric (*maulvi, imam, maulana* or *mulla*). There are five major governing bodies of Pakistani Madaris, along with their related schools of thought (Fair, 2006).

Madaris have always played a vital role in the Islamic world. When Pakistan came into being, there were very few (245 or less) Madaris; however, they expanded greatly in number during the rule of president Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988). The main reason for the expansion of Madaris was due to the growth of Pakistan's population and the active government programs that promoted a specific culture and ideology (Rahman, 2005).

After the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, Pakistani Madaris became prominent in the eyes of America and Pakistan was forced to register and monitor their activities. So, the Pakistan Madrasah Education Board (PMEB) was established to monitor and control Madaris, along with identifying model Madaris.

It is estimated that there are 35000 Madaris out of which 26,160 Madaris are registered with provincial / areas government under the society act according to their Maslik (December 19, 2019). The majority of the Madaris in Pakistan are catering to the dominant Sunni sect, while an estimated 14-20% of Madaris are managed by the Shia Islamic population (Khaled, 2005). A person who received their religious education from Madaris can work under the control of the above-mentioned governing bodies and can serve as the imam, Qari, Mullah, Moulana, and Molvi in Pakistani mosques. (<http://education.stateuniversity.com>)

Imam Education in Pakistan

In Pakistan, there are two types of religious educational institutions for imam training, both recognized and unrecognized by the government of Pakistan.

Recognized Madaris/Institutions; The majority of Madaris are running under seven major Madaris bodies (referred above) and deal with religious education that helps students become imams in Pakistan. A list of prominent Pakistani Madaris is provided in Annexure 1.

Among all Madaris, the most common course for an imam is Dars-e-Nizami, although each school of thought will add curriculum according to their beliefs. Still, the name and duration of the program is essentially the same in all Madaris in Pakistan.

Dars-e-Nizami

This course was designed by Mullah Nizam al-Din Muhammad Sihalwi (1677-1748), and is primarily aimed to study the religious sciences from an intermediate level to the highest levels of the intellectual spheres. Pursued in the liberal arts, the students of this discipline are offered a canonical method of depicting the realms of higher education, as well as the study of classical doctrine in Islamic theology, the Hadith, the Qur'an and its principles, and jurisprudence and its principles. Each school of thought adds reading material according to their belief

in the curriculum and teachings. Again, the duration and name is the same in all Madaris.

Duration: At Sunni Madaris, the duration of Dars-e- Nizami is eight years. Girls complete a condensed curriculum in six years. Students complete four successive degrees (sanad) at regular intervals.

Recognition by Higher Education Commission, Government of Pakistan (GOP); The GOP recognizes the final degree (Shahadatul Alamiya) as the equivalent to an MA in Arabic and Islamic studies for most purposes. None of the lower degrees are recognized by the government. Students can take local school board exams and thereby obtain mainstream degrees while studying the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum.

Entry level behavior/Admission requirement; The basic requirement for admission in Dars-e-Nizami is at a minimum eight years of education – in some of the Madaris, ten years of education is required for admission in Dars-e-Nizami. Preference will be given those who have ten years of education.

Curriculum of Dars-e-Nizami; Dars-e-Nizami covers some twenty subjects that fall into two categories: al-uloom annaqliya (transmitted sciences) and al-uloom al-aqliya (rational sciences). Half of the curriculum includes subjects that are strictly religious in nature. The texts used for religious subjects generally date back to the seventh century. The most recent of these were written in the 11th century (Khaled, 2002).

Teaching Methodology; The teaching methodologies differ widely from madrassa to madrassa. The majority of Madaris use extensive lectures, assignments, library research, debates, competitions, and sports. A focus is given to memorization.

Assessment Procedure; A concerned Madrassa is responsible for conducting an internal examination at the end of two years. The respective governing body of Madaris will conduct the examination and award a “SANAD” (Certificate) at the completion of eight years.

Arabic Teachers Training Course (ATTC): ATTC is a one-year recognized course for Arabic teachers offered by Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in Islamabad. Some of the graduates of the ATTC program also work as imams in Pakistani mosques.

Postgraduate Specialization Program

Mufti, Sheikh-ul-Hadith, Tafseer, Hadees, Iftah, and Fiqh, in addition to Dars-e-Nizami are specialized program. *The admission requirement;* the students who have completed Dars-e-Nizami can apply to the above-mentioned program.

Unrecognized Religious Program

Some private Madaris adapted the Dars-e-Nazami course into a summarized form, such as in Dars-e-Nizami, where the traditional three-year Adeeb Arabic course is taught in one year and given the title of “Alam course”. Fazal Arabic and Pakki Routti are other examples. Other imams working in Pakistani mosques took short courses in Nazra, Hifz, reading the Quran translated into the local language, and basic Islamic taleem.

Monitoring and Supervision of Mosques/ Imams

In Pakistan, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Zakat, and Usher is available for dealing with religious matters such as Zakat, Hajj, Usher and others. The Department of Auqaf works under the control of the above-mentioned ministry. This department has sub-offices in each district. One of its roles is to monitor the mosques under control of this department, but these mosques are small in number and the majority are also situated in urban areas. Mosques attached to Madaris are monitored by concerned Madaris, but in Pakistan there is no governing body that is responsible for monitoring all of the mosques in Pakistan.

The Pakistan Madrisa Education Board (PMEB) was established in 2001 for the establishment of model Madaris and the registration of Madaris and mosques. The PMEB is still fully functioning and achieving its objectives. There is no

institutional body available for all categories of mosques or for the registration and monitoring of imams in Pakistan.

The Dawah Academy works under the control of the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) and has started a short program for imams working in Pakistan with the purpose to improve their Islamic and professional knowledge. Dawat-e-Islami, Jamat-e-Islami, and other religious organizations have organized workshops for religious education but their focus is not especially on imams.

There is no system available for dispatching imams to other countries, whether controlled by the government, in Europe, and in any other countries. There are no rules and regulations implemented by the government of Pakistan for the selection of imams who are working abroad in mosques established by the Pakistani community of origin. Their selection is made on a personal basis.

Conclusion

In Pakistan, Muslim population of 96.35% (and a disputed Muslim population known as Ahmadis (Qadianis) of 0.35 %). The dominant school of thought is Sunni (77%). There is no data available which can offer reliable information on how many mosques, Madaris or imams there are in Pakistan. There are 300,000 mosques and 250,000 imams working in Pakistan. There are five categories of mosques, and the majority of mosques are managed and financed by the community. The reason behind this is that there is no strict system for mosque or imam registration in Pakistan. Mosques attached to Madaris are monitored by concerned Madaris, but in Pakistan there is no governing body that is responsible for the monitoring of mosques.

The Pakistan Madrisa Education Board (PMEB) was established in 2001 for the establishment of model Madaris and the registration of Madaris and mosques. Imams in Pakistan are paid very little, with the average salary from 15000 to 35000 (50 to 120 €). There is no system available for dispatching/appointment of imams to other countries, whether controlled by the government, in Europe, or in

other countries. Although the majority of Madaris offer religious-based curriculum, there are also Madaris that offer curriculum in secular subjects alongside religious.

All types of Madaris and their corresponding staff should be registered so that a comprehensive picture can be gathered and presented. There should be a database for all categories of mosques, their programs for the surrounding communities and their imams. Standards should be established and implemented strictly for the recruitment of imams.

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