

Diversification of Madrasa Education in Rural Bangladesh: Comparative Study of Four Villages

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1. Preface

The media attention to the recent growth in the number of madrasas throughout South Asia, especially those belonging to the Deobandi sect, and their sensational way of reporting madrasas related to the Taliban in Pakistan, has produced the oversimplified image of the madrasa as a breeding ground of anti-Western Islamic politics for the poor. Although attempts to present a more realistic perception of the madrasa in place of such a cliché have been initiated by recent scholarly works, more attention should be paid to the contextual differences between three countries in South Asia, namely Pakistan, India and Bangladesh as well as the regional diversity within a country to clarify the complexity of the madrasa phenomenon.

To achieve this goal, the factors that popularized the madrasa should be re-examined in its socio-religious and political context. For instance, as already described in Yamane's chapters, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and subsequent destabilization of the tribal areas allowed the mullahs in the periphery to open new madrasas for mobilizing fighters against the Soviet troops, increasing the number of madrasas in the Afghan-Pakistan border area. On the other hand, in Bangladesh, the recent growth of the madrasa could be attributed to the ulama's response to the various types of educational incentive programs led by the government and the local and international NGOs, which primarily aim to extend the purview of education throughout the country.

The contextual differences inside a country are as important as those between the countries. In the case of Bangladesh, though 89.58% (BBS 2003: XIX) of the entire population are Muslims, they are far from the monolithic embodiment of Islam as the way of life among the rural people is multifaceted by their individual contexts. Owing to the regional diversity, no uniformity can be observed in the growth of madrasas within a country. Therefore, the following methods were applied in order to understand and identify the factors which made the madrasa more popular in some regions than in others in Bangladesh: first, we examine how the madrasas have attempted to adapt to societal changes in order to attract more students; and second, we examine how local people evaluate the role and value of the madrasa as a means of obtaining their livelihoods. This comparative study on the development of madrasas in four villages located in different socio-religious environments will help us to examine how madrasas function in fulfilling the needs of villagers as well as how villagers respond to these entities in the different localities.

Prior to addressing the comparison of the madrasas in the four different villages, I explain the historical process of Islamization in western and eastern Bangladesh, which brought the regional differences in the characteristics of Islam to Bangladesh. Furthermore, I illustrate the system of the madrasa in Bangladesh and its development in relation with secular schooling. This information will be the premise for the comparative study on the madrasas in the four different villages.

2. The Historical Process of Islamization in Bangladesh

Though Islam was explicitly brought to East Bengal (contemporary Bangladesh) from the northern Indian subcontinent through political invasion at the outset of the thirteenth century, scholars suggest that Islam had already permeated the region long before the thirteenth century, mainly through the activities of *pirs* (Islamic saints). Sufi activity began in Mymensingh, an eastern part of contemporary Bangladesh, in the mid-eleventh century and in Munshiganj in the Bikrampur region, a central part of contemporary Bangladesh, in the early twelfth century.

Pirs and their disciples shifted to Bengal, namely contemporary north-west India and Bangladesh, facilitating the conversion of the lower Hindu castes and establishing various gathering places such as mosques, madrasas and Sufi-lodges. *Pirs* used vernacular idioms to translate Islamic precepts to the people. In this context, as Roy contends, 'Islam in traditional Bengal was, in contrast, marked by its tendency towards convergence with and assimilation to the local cultural milieu' (Roy 1983:4). Apart from the influence of this syncretistic tradition, the Islamization process in Bengal was accelerated by the agrarian policies of the Muslim rulers, as revealed by the historian Eaton. He suggests that the expansion of the Muslim community in East Bengal was positively correlated to agricultural productivity. Bengali literary and folk traditions dating from the sixteenth century are replete with heroes associated with taming the forest, extending the cultivable area, and instituting new religious cults (Eaton 1994:226). Typically, these heroes combined the piousness of holy men with the organizational skills necessary for forest clearing and land reclamation; hence, they were remembered not only for establishing mosques and shrines but also for mobilizing communities to crop the forests and settle the land. In turn, people gradually came to venerate these men, who were usually Muslims.

In this context, *pirism* became a widespread phenomenon in many parts of East Bengal. Hence, it was not only because of the piety of these men but also because of their roles in creating a new settlement by clearing the jungle for the newly converted Muslims in East Bengal. As a result, the veneration for *pir* became increasingly popular as part of the embodiment of the syncretistic frame of reference by which the Bengali people assimilated Islam as a way of life (Roy 1983:7). This was particularly the case in the eastern area of East Bengal, which was densely covered by jungles and forests and where many maritime merchants of Arabia and Central Asia used to arrive for trading.

Even though the existence of Islamic syncretism was and still is predominant in Bengal, the emergence of the reformist Islamic tradition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century

came to the fore as another important phenomenon that had a tremendous impact on the syncretistic practice of Islam in Bengal (Ahmed 1981:4-6). This reformist Islam, which emerged as a response to the British colonial power, attempted to revive the Muslim communities by purifying Islam of the syncretistic tradition.

Considering the nature of Islam in Bangladesh, the embodiment of Islam in western and eastern Bangladesh is distinctively different in their context, and the impact of reformist Islam was stronger in the east than in the west (Hara 1990:96-98). Therefore, this difference in the embodiment of Islam in the eastern and western parts of Bangladesh is a focal point in the framework of the internal comparison on the transformation of the madrasas. According to my observations¹ from western to eastern Bangladesh, the number of orderly mosques with many attendants increased. Certain Islamic practices, such as the wearing of the *burkha* (veil) among the women become significantly visible in eastern Bangladesh. In western Bangladesh, it was easy to make conversation with the various members of the families, including the women. However, in eastern Bangladesh, women only responded from behind the house fence or curtain.

3. Contemporary Madrasas in Bangladesh

Madrasas in contemporary Bangladesh can be classified into three types: government, semi-government or government-aided and private madrasas. Kabir mentioned in his volume of work that the first two categories are commonly known as Aliya² while the third is known as Kharizia or Quomi.³ The government has direct control over the Aliya madrasas in terms of funding, prescribed syllabi and management. Aliya madrasas teach the same general curriculum as that of other government or government-approved general educational institutions. Unlike general schools, however, Aliya madrasas provide Islamic education alongside the general curriculum. On the other hand, the government has no control over the Quomi madrasas, which operate on their own system and form of management. Preliminary level general subject courses supplement the Islamic ones in these madrasas. There is an interconnection between Aliya madrasas and general schools. For example, students who graduate from the primary level of an Aliya are able to transfer to schools at the secondary level. Many former graduates of an Aliya are integrated into the public sector. Throughout Bangladesh, these madrasas have continued to increase since 1976: in 1976 there were 1,838 madrasas, with this number having increased to 9,384 (Banbeis 2011). Under certain conditions, if the government recognizes these madrasas, the teachers of these institutions are provided a hundred-percent of their basic salaries, otherwise known as MPO (monthly payment order). On the other hand, Quomi madrasas adopt their own syllabus which follows a predominantly religious content that greatly emphasizes Arabic, Persian and Urdu language studies. These madrasas are financed by various sources such as

1 I did field research from 1999.2~3, 1999.8~10, 2001.2, 2001.8~9, 2002.2~3, 2002.8, 2003.8~9, 2004.3~4, 2004.7~8, 2006.2, 2006.8~9, 2007.2, 2007.3.

2 Aliya madrasas offer primary (class1~5) and secondary education (class 6~10)

3 Quomi madrasas generally offer 12-year-education.

religious and individual donations, expatriate Bangladeshis' contributions especially from Middle Eastern countries and frequent donations from some charity-based Islamic organizations. In terms of future prospects, the Quomi madrasas are disadvantaged since their educational system is not officially recognized. Despite the advantages of the Aliya madrasas over the Quomis in terms of career prospects, the rural inhabitants' choice of the Quomi as the option for educating their children is a crucial question. This question will be investigated in the following case study comparison of four villages.

4. EFA Policy and its Influence on Madrasas

In the backdrop of a growing concern over the negative correlation between poverty and education, the government introduced its EFA (Education for All) policy in 1990 to promote education throughout the country, of which 85% lives in rural areas. Although Bangladesh is the most noted for its poverty and disasters, its EFA policy has boosted primary school enrolment to 97.49 per cent and completion rates have increased to 67 per cent (Banbeis 2012). To facilitate the EFA policy, the government along with ODA (Official Development Assistance) and NGOs, have implemented and promoted various education programs. In statistical terms at least, the country may be said to have attained the global standards outlined in the Education for All declaration of 1990. Apart from EFA policy, educational incentive programs such as Food for Education (FFE) and the Female Secondary Education Project (FSEP) have affected the educational attainment of the country in the last few decades. Moreover, policies such as the Compulsory Education Act of 1990, which proclaimed primary education as a basic human right to be attained free of cost, and the Stipend for Education Project of 2002, which was a modified version of the FFE program, rapidly stimulated Bangladesh's educational indicators.(Table 1)

Table 1 Number of madrasas (Dakhil to Kamil), teachers and students

Year	Madrasas	Teachers	Students
1970	1518	16015	283380
1975	1830	18728	291191
1980	2684	28499	380013
1985	3739	31945	638926
1990	5793	81636	996996
1995	5977	85351	1837013
2000	7279	108491	3112205
2005	9214	151967	3453221

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), Ministry of Education, Dhaka

The EFA policy and other educational incentive programs are intended for both general schools and recognized madrasas, that is, Aliya madrasas. The government's intentions were to place as many madrasas as possible under its control in order to expand basic educational attainment through these incentive programs. This program was also attractive to many madrasas

in need of financial support. Although government efforts to formalize the madrasa commenced in the 1980s, as table 1 indicates, the rapid increase in the number of Aliya madrasas and their students can be observed from the 1990s. This implies that EFA policy helped promote the formalization of many madrasas. EFA policy encouraged children, especially those residing in the rural areas, to attend either general school or a madrasa.

In contrast to the Aliya madrasa, the Quomi madrasas could not receive such incentive programs since they refused to be incorporated into the government's mainstream education system. However, it does not mean that the Quomi madrasas remain unchanged. Interestingly, many of the Quomi madrasas have gradually systematized and institutionalized their management to survive in the context of the emergence of a counter Islamic education system; that is, the formalized Aliya system. Quomi madrasas even demand the government's recognition of their system without changing their curriculum in order to keep their originality. They assert that they do not require the government's financial assistance but rather the official recognition of their degrees. However, the curriculum of the Quomi madrasa is far from that of the Aliya, rendering it unacceptable to the government. A government officer of the Madrasa Education Board in Dhaka expressed that the Quomi madrasas are problematic and should accept government supervision. This government pressure forced the Quomi madrasas to acknowledge the need to acquire accreditation for their educational program. However, the Quomi madrasas, which have been financed by individual donations, should comply with the people's wish for them to remain authentic religious institutions that maintain the Islamic tradition. As such, the Quomi madrasa could survive not just as an educational institution but as a religious institution that revitalizes the public's identity as Muslim and serves as a religious centre for the community by providing the latter with various religious services.

5. Comparative Analysis of Four Villages

In order to identify the factors that made the madrasa more popular in one area than in another, four villages with different socio-religious backgrounds were chosen and compared to identify how they each coped with the change in social conditions and people's demands.

First, rural rather than urban areas were chosen for this study because the popularity of the madrasa can be observed mainly in rural areas where 77 per cent of the entire population in Bangladesh resides (BBS 2003: I VIII).

In choosing the villages for this research, the religious characteristics of the given villages were first taken into consideration. As mentioned earlier, there has been a considerable difference in Muslims' perception of Islam and their religious practices in Western and Eastern Bangladesh. Therefore, two villages were chosen from each Western and Eastern Bangladesh.

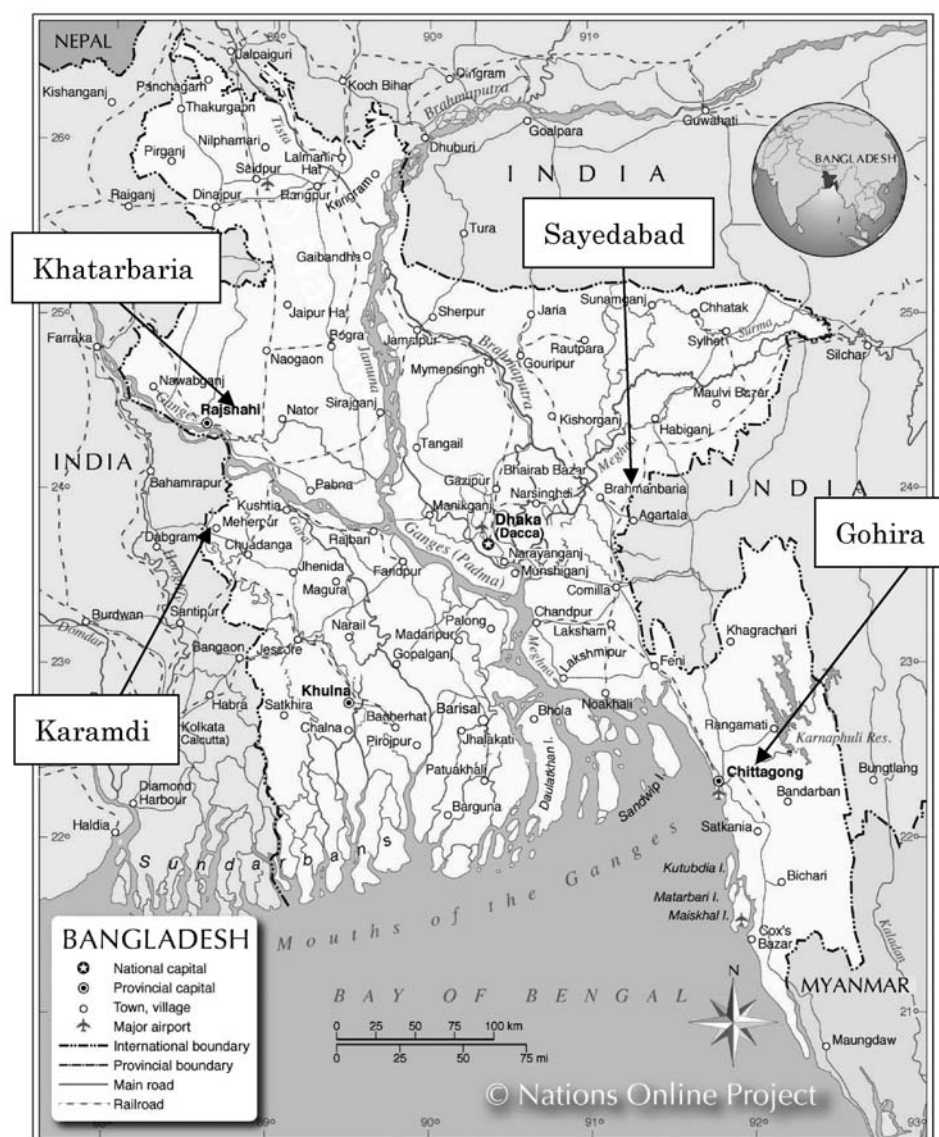
Second, the distance of the village from the closest town was taken into account, since the location of a village is directly related to the penetration of the industrial economy, which incites school attendance. For instance, people residing far away from industrial zones are more likely to be confined to traditional agrarian labour because of their limited access to *chakri* (wage

labour), which requires a formal education. The development of the industrial economy and degree-issuing schools are positively correlated.

Figure1

	Aliya madrasa predominant area	Quomi madrasa predominant area
Close to town & city	Khatarbaria Village Putia County Rajshahi District	Gohira Village Raozan County Chittagon District
Far from town	Karamdi Village Gangni County Meherpur District	Sayedabad Village Kasba County Brahmanbaria District

MAP 1



(Source) www.nationsonline.org

6. Madrasas in Western Bangladesh: Case of Karamdi

Karamdi village is located in Gangni county of Meherpur district, the westernmost region of Bangladesh. The village is in close proximity to the country's national border, which divides the area from West Bengal state in India. Therefore, many villagers cross the border to visit their relatives in West Bengal, and many of them engage in small-scale cross-border businesses. The construction of Jamuna bridge in 1999, shortened the journey from Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, to Karamdi village from eight to four or five hours. The majority of farmers are landless peasants called *bhumihin*, who do not possess enough or any land for their livelihood; thus, many of them are obliged to travel to other districts as labourers during harvesting periods because of the lack of agrarian labour opportunities inside their villages. What is worse, they seldom have an opportunity to work in factories, mills or in any other industries.

In terms of religious culture, the people of Karamdi village are not strict in their Islamic observation. During my fieldwork, I observed that very few people were attending the daily prayers in the mosques, poorly constructed of bamboo and straw. It is difficult to find villagers attending *mazaar*, and it is probable that there is no such institution in the village. During my household survey conducted by visiting houses, women do not hesitate to talk male interviewers face to face, and some of them even invited interviewers for tea. The women are not covered and segregated and even bathe in a pond with no partition between the men and the women. There is no clear division between the ulama and lay people.

According to the interviews, villagers were forced to choose their religious affiliation at the time of the 1947 partition, and most of the villagers followed the decision made by the head of the family. As a result, the majority of the villagers have converted from Hinduism to Islam;¹ however, such Hindu traditions, such as the retention of the occupational class known as the *Jat*, remains in some communities.

There are several educational institutions, mostly primary and secondary levels, in Karamdi. (table 2)

Table 2. School foundation in Karamdi village

year of foundation	name of School	remarks
1920	Karamdi Government Primary School	
1970	Japani Primary School	funded by Japanese NGO
1973	Karamdi Jr. High School/High School	
1974	Karamdi Madrasa	semi governed since 1980
1991	Karamdi Fourth Primary School	
1994	Karamdi Satellite Primary School	
1999	Karamdi KG Primary School	
2001	Karamdi Collage	

Source: Field work in 1999

however, the educational condition of these schools has remained underdeveloped, and with the exception of the teachers of government primary schools, teachers are mostly obliged to engage in low-paid services to sustain a living. Aside from the secular schools, there has been only one madrasa in Karamdi. This madrasa was founded as a Quomi madrasa in 1974 but was transformed into an Aliya madrasa by accepting the government formalization initiative in 1980.

These secular schools and the madrasa coexisted in Karamdi village until the implementation of the EFA policy—under which 10–12 kg wheat were distributed to the families that sent their children to the schools covered by the EFA program. Since the Aliya madrasa in the village was excluded from the EFA program, many of its students left and shifted to the general schools to procure this wheat. In order to counter the EFA program, the Karamdi Aliya madrasa provided free clothing for its students; however, this measure was insufficient in ceasing the number of outgoing students, and eventually the madrasa was temporarily obliged to suspend its activities until the government extended the EFA program to the Karamdi Aliya madrasa in 1996. In this madrasa, Bengali is the language of instruction and Arabic and English are taught as second languages; by 2007, all the subjects taught in the secular schools will be included in their curriculum.

Villagers can be categorized into two groups, namely the landed class and the landless peasants known as the *bhumihin*. The villagers, of whom only a small number are considered elites in Karamdi, scored successfully in their general education not only in Bangladesh but also abroad, and interestingly, those who obtained a higher education are regarded as role models by the peasants. On the other hand, the graduates of the Aliya madrasa are not seen as role models by the villagers.

Therefore, for these villagers, schooling is a social choice inspired not by educational content but rather by the economic reality upon which their lives depend. That is why the economic incentive programs such as the EFA were effective in changing their attitudes towards Islamic education. For them, economic support is more important than being ‘Islamic’. Furthermore, the real cash offered by the FSEP program for female students in secondary schools in 1994 dramatically increased their numbers.

In the context of the growing importance of general schooling, the Karamdi madrasa attempts to accommodate to the changing environment and meet the needs of villagers by reconstructing its building and inviting teachers from modern general schools to introduce general subjects alongside the Islamic courses. In addition, the teachers of the Karamdi madrasa are increasingly attired in normal men’s clothing instead of traditional Islamic dress. Such rejuvenating initiatives can capture the villagers to the extent that the madrasa can survive. However, the Karamdi madrasa fails to provide a prospective model to the villagers, and the villagers are not interested in protecting the madrasa as a sacred institution.

7. Case of Kathalbaria

Khatalbaria village is located in Putia county in Rajshahi district, one of the metropolises of

Bangladesh. It is also situated in the furthestmost western part of the country. Khatalbaria village is close to the third largest city of Bangladesh, which implies that the industrial economic flow from the urban area might have more of an influence in this village than that of Karamdi. It takes approximately thirty minutes to reach the city. Another feature is that it is located besides the highways of Rajshahi and Dhaka, which enhances the mobility of villagers. Though the people who live in Khatalbaria village still depend on agriculture, they also have opportunities to obtain employment in factories, companies or in shops in the nearby city since the village is within commuting distance. Some villagers work as mechanics and some as drivers of motor vehicles. The existence of urban employment and mobility facilitates the monetary economy which could not exist in Karamdi village.

According to government demographic figures (1991), the number of Muslims in Putia county were 147,321 while the number of Hindus were 100,376. The historical legacy of the Hindu culture is still in existence in this area. An impressive Hindu temple, the Putia Rajbari (the King Palace of Putia), located at the centre of Putia county is a historical site for many local visitors. In the case of Khatalbaria village, according to my research, 135 households or 23% of all households are Hindu. The presence of the Hindu culture creates a syncretistic religious culture in this region.

The number of Muslims attending the daily prayers in the mosques was not significant. The name of a primary school, Suresori Government Primary School, is named after the Queen of the Hindu kingdom—Suresori. This implies a Hindu cultural influence on the lives of the villagers of Khatalbaria. For example, one Muslim person is the caretaker of the Hindu temple of Rajbari, is serving as a guide for its visitors. The existence of the *mazaar* was not significant in this area.

According to the villagers, there was no *maktab* (pre-primary Islamic education) in this area in 2003. Since going to *maktab* is a very common practice for young children in many parts of rural Bangladesh, the Khatalbaria case is rather unique.

There are eleven educational institutions in Kathalbaria village: five are government primary schools, two are secondary female schools, two are colleges and two are Quomi and Aliya madrasa (table 3). This Aliya madrasa, Putia Dakhil madrasa, was originally established in 1962 as a *maktab* and continued until 1967. In 1968 it was upgraded and restarted as a madrasa but was obliged to close in 1992 because of the decline in enrolment when the EFA program was initiated in the village. On the other hand Quomi madrasa, Nifta Fusunna madrasa, established as Deobandi style madrasa in 1990. According to fieldwork in 2010, the Nifta Fusunna is teaching 35 students. So Aliya madrasa is predominant in student number also madrasa history. In addition, the influence of Hindu cultural and social interactions between Muslim and Hindu families also affected the Muslim's choice of schooling. In order to survive as a madrasa under such circumstance, the madrasa renewed itself as a newly formed educational institution, teaching both general and Islamic subjects in 1995. As a result, the madrasa was successful in obtaining the government's recognition in 1998 and became an Aliya madrasa. This government accreditation provided the madrasa with the eligibility necessary for acquiring financial benefits.

The teachers of the madrasa became entitled to receive 90 per cent of their basic salaries from the government. Conspicuously, the number of students increased from 150 in 1995 to 251 in 2003.

Table 3 School foundation in Khatalbaria village

year of foundation	name of School	remarks
1865	Putia P.N Jr. High School/High School	
1878	Kandera Government Primary School	funded by Japanese NGO
1910	Suresori Government Primary School	
1968	Gondogohari Government Primary School	semi governed since 1980
1968	Putia Girl's Jr. High School/High School	
1969	Firigasa Government Primary School	
1973	Raskurpur Degree Collage	
1974	Khatalbaria Government Primary School	
1990	Nifta Fusunna Madrasa (Quomi madrasa)	
1995	Putia Women's Degree Collage	
1995	Putia Dhakil Madrasa	

Source: Field work in 2002, 2010

Owing to their geographical proximity to the city, many villagers had been exposed to the market economy prior to the 1990s. Therefore, these villagers knew the value of general schooling and sent their children to government schools even before the initiation of the EFA program in the 1990s. Such attitudes towards education facilitated the transformation of the madrasa. However, we should bear in mind that the madrasa attempted to differentiate itself from the general schools by placing an emphasis on its religious value, as demonstrated in the conversation with the principal of the madrasa.

Principal: The villagers deemed that no traditional madrasa was available here. For the continuation of the madrasa, we had to respond to the change in context owing to the present modernization process; otherwise, we could not attain students.

Interviewer: You could achieve the same things through the establishment of a general school, couldn't you?

Principal: This is, indeed, true. But this madrasa was established and donated by Muslim contributors, accordingly madrasa should keep its the religious credential. It was not easy to adapt the school curriculum. This madrasa has the advantage of offering students who study here the ability to study both religious and general subjects.

This conversation indicates that the Khatalbaria madrasa responded to the educational

needs of the villagers by including general subjects into their curriculum while simultaneously attempting to attract the devout Muslims by offering Islamic knowledge not available in modern schools. In that sense, the madrasa opted for the mediating position that bridged the gap of Islamic and modern education, which we may call a ‘niche business’.

8. Madrasas in Eastern Bangladesh: Case of Sayedabad

Sayedabad village is located in Kasba county in Brahmanbaria district, one of the remotest areas of eastern Bangladesh. The village is far away from any town and people are mostly engaged in agriculture or agricultural-related works. It takes one and half hours by local bus to reach to the closest town of Brahmanbaria. Households with relatively good cash income—except for civil-servants, government school teachers and company employers—have sent the male members of their families to either Dhaka or a Middle Eastern country for work. According to my survey, many villagers have had an experience working outside the village and are planning to send their children to urban areas for work.

Prior to the 1947 partition of India, Brahmanbaria was part of Tripura state where Hindus were predominant. However, at the time of partition, most Hindu families migrated to India and many Muslim families immigrated to this area. As a result, Brahmanbaria became a predominantly Muslim area. Although reformist Islam has strong influences in this area, the syncretistic tradition also remains and several *mazaars* and *ashrams* (Hindu ascetic lodges) exist in this area. The villagers of Sayedabad worship a local *pir* who is the chief of the Sayedabad Quomi madrasa. The main mosque in the village is well attended.

There are eight educational institutions in Sayedabad village including primary and high schools and colleges (table 4). Out of them, a Quomi madrasa, the Sayedabad Sani Yunusia Darul Uloom madrasa, is the largest in terms of ground area and it is well-structured. This madrasa was founded in 1927, the second oldest educational institution in the village (table 4); therefore, it has played a significant role in the villagers’ education.

Table 4. School foundation in Sayedabad village

year of foundation	name of School	remarks
1915	Sayedabad Uttor Government Primary School	
1927	Sayedabad Sani Yunusia Jarul Urum Madrasa	Qawmi madrasa
1969	Adorso Mohabiddaray Collage	
1972	Sayedabad Dokkin Government Primary School	
1979	Monirul Haq Primary Jr. High School/ High School	
1996	Tinrakpir Primary School	
1998	Sayedabad Satellite Government Primary School	
2000	Disari KG Primary School	

Source: Field work in 2002, 2007

This madrasa has strong ideological affinity with the Deobandi movement. Since this madrasa has not received any assistance from the government, the madrasa offers education based on its own curriculum and thereby does not follow the one prescribed by the government. Education at this madrasa consists of four stages: *maktab*, *hafezia* (Quranic memorization course), *nurani* (basic Islamic and general subject course) and *daura hadith* (the highest level of education to be an expert on prophetic tradition). As mentioned earlier, the principal of this madrasa is revered as a *pir* by the villagers. Teachers' salaries are approximately 60 per cent of that of government primary school teachers. However, the madrasa teachers live in the dormitory with free daily meals. Students can study free of charge and approximately half live in the dormitory. The madrasa obtains its financial support from five different means: first, donations from the villagers; second, donations from the graduates who migrated to Middle Eastern countries; third, the madrasa owns the two ponds on their premises that they lease to others for fishing and which earns them a significant amount of money; fourth, on the occasion of the annual religious festivals, the villagers contribute religious alms and the skin of sacrificed cattle to the madrasa; fifth, paddy is donated by the villagers at harvest time, which is used in the dormitory.⁴

In the 1990s, Sayedabad was included into the target of the EFA policy. In contrast to the madrasas in western Bangladesh, this EFA policy increased the number of madrasa students in Sayedabad. In 2004, there were 535 students in the madrasa with 18 teachers. Of the 535, 240 were borders in 2004 and they were living and studying in the same room. They arise at approximately five o'clock and offer prayers at a mosque adjacent to the madrasa. Classes commence at approximately six-thirty in the morning, after breakfast. Religious subjects and Bangla, mathematics and English are nominally imparted. Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages are given priority so that students can study advanced Islamic texts.

Three primary schools were founded in this village in the 1990s (table 6) under the EFA program. According to the interviews and conversations with the villagers, almost all the villagers regarded primary education as necessary and they were anxious about their children's careers and life-courses. In Sayedabad village and in its adjacent area, there was neither an NGO from which they could obtain some social and economic support nor a factory nor industry that could provide them with job opportunities. Although this economic situation is more or less identical in Karamdi village, the reasons Sayedabad villagers send their children to the madrasa which concentrates on religious education needs to be examined.

4 I came to know that the madrasa collected an amount of 48,000 Taka from village source. Beside this fact, the graduates who migrated to some Middle Eastern countries also frequently contributed to madrasa finance. During my field visit I found that the madrasa received 50,000 Taka annually from such outsource. The madrasa had two ponds in their premise which they leased to other people for fishing and earned significant amount of money annually, 135,000 Taka. During the annual religious festivals such as eid, the villagers usually contribute religious alms and the skin of the sacrificing cattle to the madrasa. This is the biggest source of their earning ranges from 100,000 to 250,000 Taka annually. Very often the villagers donates paddy when the harvesting season comes, which is used for the consumption of rice for those living in madrasa seminary. What I speculate from such dependent financial management both from inside and outside of the village help the madrasa authority accumulate their resources for their future prospect and development.

The majority of the followers of the madrasa in Sayedabad are from impoverished households. Therefore, parents are attempting to reduce the number of mouths to feed by sending their children to the madrasa. However, this is not the only reason. In a village like Sayedabad where the opportunities to obtain an income are extremely limited, the degrees from the general schools do not guarantee employment. On the other hand, there are job opportunities for madrasa graduates in madrasas and other religious institutions and devout Muslims deem that they will be religiously rewarded in the hereafter by engaging in such religious services.

9. Case of Gohira

Gohira village is located in Raozan county in Chittagong district, the easternmost part of Bangladesh. From the 1960s to 1970s, industrial development progressed in this area. Chittagong is the second largest city in Bangladesh. Several Japanese and American garment and chemical factories were founded here. These industries seek a cheap labour force. Gohira village supplies this labour force to these industries because of its close proximity to Chittagong city. It takes only thirty to forty minutes by bus to the city. To obtain a job in a factory, at least a secondary school certificate is required and this, in turn, encouraged education in this village. (Table 5)

Table 5 School foundation in Gohira village

year of foundation	name of School	remarks
1884	Poshchim Gohira Shinha Government Primary School	governed since 1973
1915	Gohira Government Primary School	governed since 1973
1929	Chikdar Munshipara Government Primary School	governed since 1973
1930	Gohira Jr. High School/ High School	governed since 1973
1932	Dokkin Gohira Kanshahe Government Primary School	governed since 1973
1938	Gohira F.K Madrasa (include <i>hafezi</i> course)	
1970	Gohira Degree Collage Chikdal Jr. High School/ High School	
1989	Ghaushia Monir Madrasa	
1991	Soiyod Bodulnnesa KG Madrasa	
1994	Santirdil Adorsho KG Primary School	
1996	EGR Government Primary School	
1999	Kaelu Mustafa Nurani Academy (Quomi madrasa)	

*This table not include many small Quomi madrasas in the village.

Source: Field work in 2002, 2004

The Islamization process in this area began before the thirteenth century, through the efforts of some Sufi and Muslim maritime merchants and visitors, thereby deeply rooting Islam in the lives of these people. There are many madrasas, mosques and *mazaars* in this area and Islam

has a strong influence on its residents. Religious-educated Muslims such as madrasa teachers and mosque preachers typically wear the long beard and Islamic dress. Women wear the *burkha* and do not interact face to face with a male stranger. The women's place for bathing in the pond is separated by a curtain or fence, which was hardly observed in western Bangladesh. Villagers revere the *mazaar* as a holy place and often pray at the site.

During my fieldwork in 2004, I found the number of female students was higher than that of males at secondary general schools and that parents were expecting their daughters to contribute to their household income, since there is a high demand for female workers in foreign industries in Chittagong. In addition, it is more difficult for parents to arrange a marriage for a daughter with less education in exchange for a significant dowry. Education for the women, especially in this area, reduces the dowry pressure for many parents. In this situation, the villagers had a positive view of female education.

Although the development of the industrial economy facilitated general education and discouraged the traditional madrasa system in Khatalbaria village, a similar phenomenon could not occur in Gohira village. Despite this situation, the madrasa system could coexist in this area; thus, what factors allowed this?

Gohira F.K. madrasa is founded in 1938 and officially registered in 1941 in East Pakistan. Owing to its official recognition, it became an Aliya madrasa. However, this madrasa offered a *hafezi* (Quranic memorization) course and *qira't* (Quranic enunciation) course, which is now primarily offered in the Quomi system. There were 820 students in this madrasa in 2002. The salaries of the teachers are provided by the government, as with other Aliya madrasa in the country. In addition to this government support, they manage their own financial sources. The madrasa sent one of its teachers to Abu Dhabi to collect donations from the expatriate Bangladeshis employed in the region. I came to know that the teacher could successfully accumulate nearly 250,000 Taka from Abu Dhabi per annum. Villagers also frequently donate to this madrasa. On the other hand, Ghausia Monir madrasa and Soiyod Badrunnesa madrasa were newly established madrasas with a smaller number of students. Although the buildings are poorly constructed and some even collect small fees, interestingly, even in these madrasas, the number of students is on the rise. What are the advantages of studying at a madrasa in a region with many factories?

In Gohira village, almost all the children under school age attend *maktab* to learn the basis of Islam, which provides job opportunities for madrasa graduates. Madrasa graduates are in demand as home tutors of religious studies by comparatively well-off families in the village. In many cases, home tutors are offered room and board while they teach Quranic lessons as well as general subjects to the children. Tutors who are lodged in wealthy families are often allowed to pursue studies either at a Quomi madrasa or an Aliya madrasa. Occasionally, the host families help tutors find employment after their completion of tutoring. In short, the madrasa education could help students from impoverish families earn their living.

Another important factor affects the madrasa enrolment. Considerable numbers of people from Gohira village migrated to Middle Eastern countries for work and these families are

economically well-off in comparison with others. Therefore, many madrasa students also hope to go to a Middle Eastern country for work, and they regard the Arabic language and Islamic knowledge they instructed at the madrasa as an advantage to obtain employment in these Arabic speaking Middle Eastern countries. This situation allowed both the madrasa and modern education to coexist in Gohira village.

10. Conclusion

The comparison of the madrasas in four villages with different religious and economic characteristics indicates that madrasas could survive only when they accommodated to the changes in the economic and religious needs of the local people, which differed from area to area.

In western Bangladesh, where economic needs always superseded religious concerns, people demonstrated a strong preference for the general education system, which provided more job opportunities. Therefore, the madrasas must emphasize the secular subjects by minimizing the religious education to the extent that it will not lose the significance of 'being a madrasa' in order to attract the devout who still view the madrasa education as important to being a good Muslim and who donate money that is greatly appreciated by these entities.

In Eastern Bangladesh where Islam has deep roots, the madrasa could attract people by emphasizing the importance of religious knowledge in being a good Muslim. Regardless of whether or not job opportunities are available in the industrial sector, madrasa graduates can earn a living by offering various kinds of religious services, including being the teacher of a madrasa while others create even more religiously related job opportunities such as preaching the importance of being observant in this contemporary world. In a village like Sayedabad, where people are suffering from extreme poverty, free madrasa education is seen as one of the means to reduce the number of mouths to feed by needy families; on the other hand, in a village like Gohira where many of its youth travel to Middle Eastern countries to work, the madrasa education's emphasis on Arabic language studies is evaluated positively, since these people see Arabic language studies as an advantage over the Bengali-based general education to find employment. In conclusion, although the total number of madrasas in Bangladesh has increased, the growth did not occur equally and the factors which caused the increase are different in all regions. This implies that we cannot attribute the recent growth of the madrasa to simply the result of "Islamic resurgence", at least in Bangladesh.

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