From behind the curtain : a study of girls' madrasa in India
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2 Discussing girls' madrasas: absences and appearances

As academic sources on girls' madrasas appeared to be scarce\(^1\), I tried alternative ways of finding out how they emerged. Especially during the first months of fieldwork I spent time interviewing local people associated with various Muslim organizations and driving around Delhi searching for Islamic bookshops and publishers. The scarce Urdu materials available on girls' madrasas, like for example the section in Qamaruddin's *Hindustan Ki Deeni Darsgahan (The Madrasas of India; 1997)*, seemed to consist mainly of survey like information. Such surveys generally include the founding date of the respective girls' madrasa, the number of students, affiliations with any particular Islamic school of thought, the subjects taught, and finally whether there are any 'special' subjects, such as 'home science', computer skills, and the like.\(^2\) Although my interlocutors often showed great interest in madrasa education for girls, it was evident that among Muslims concerned with Islamic education information on this topic was generally scarce as well. In addition, those who were aware that girls' madrasas existed were generally men who had as little access to girls' madrasas as I did in those days.

2.1 Looking for girls' madrasas in the literature

Initially, my trips to the Old City of Delhi led me to the famous bookshops opposite Jama Masjid, but the bookshops of Nizamuddin were even more interesting. The basti Nizamuddin is lined with small bookshops, some of which are run by men associated with the lay preachers' movement known as the Tablighi Jamaat (see Chapter 3). The bookshops in front of the Tablighi Markaz or Centre sold the theological books studied in the nearby Madrasatul Niswa off the shelf. Besides, numerous treatises for women or addressing the issue of women in relation to various contemporary subjects were available as well (see Chapter 4). This literature did not, however, provide information on the development of girls' madrasas. While the content of these publications will be discussed in the following chapters, in this chapter I mainly deal with publications issued by Muslim
organizations on madrasa education. At the headquarters of the Jamaat-e-Ulama-e-Hind, an organization of Islamic scholars mainly associated with Deoband, I obtained a number of issues of their publication Al-Jamiyat that included articles on madrasa education. Other books on the topic of Islamic education and women were published by the Delhi based Institute of Objective Studies.

The overall impression gained during my search for literature suggested once more that not much is known about girls' madrasas. Among the older generation, memories and images related to the pre-Partition custom of home teaching for girls in Delhi were well preserved. In addition, during my initial visits to the Old City of Delhi I found that Urdu medium Islamic schools for girls were readily accessible too. Another point of entry into debates on madrasa education were articles published in the English medium Muslim newspapers post 9/11, often in response to the negative publicity on madrasas in the non-Muslim press. While most of the discussion did not deal with girls' madrasas in particular, it is worth noting that post 9/11 girls' madrasas were often mentioned as one of the positive developments in the field of madrasa education.

This chapter attempts to address the absences and presences of girls' madrasas in two main sets of writings by concerned Muslims. On the one hand there are Urdu writings that address the emergence and present state of madrasa education. On the other hand there are English articles published in Muslim newspapers post 9/11. In both cases, I point to the ways in which girls' madrasas are largely absent and occasionally present, sometimes as a topic in itself, but often as part of a wider argument on the achievements in the field of madrasa education. I use these sets of literature to give insight in the historical background of the emergence of girls' madrasas, to point to the contexts in which discussions on madrasa education for girls came to the fore, and to provide an insight into the wider debates on madrasa education. The latter include the specific context of the post 9/11 debates on madrasa education, which coincide with the period wherein I attempted to gain access to a girls' madrasa and did fieldwork there.

2.2 Discussing the early history of madrasa education

My interlocutors often suggested that madrasas for girls are modelled after madrasas for boys. Investigating how Urdu writers describe the history of madrasa education, I was struck by the extent to which these Muslim authors appear to identify with the Middle East. In other words, their
accounts tend to sketch the history of Islamic education in the Middle East and in India as a continuum, even though in India the ‘Madrasa Movement’ emerged in reaction to the colonial encounter and the decline of Muslim rule in the nineteenth century.

In a special issue of the earlier mentioned Al-Jamiyat Weekly on madrasa education, for example, the evolution of Islamic education is described from the times of the Prophet up to the ‘age of technology’. The general argument is that Islamic education became institutionalized when in 1067 AD a minister of the Seljuk dynasty by the name of Nizamulmulk Tusi established the Nizamiya madrasa in Baghdad. The ruler had granted the property as an endowment (waqf) and left its management in the hands of the madrasa staff, thus ensuring limited state control over the madrasa. In keeping with the growing interest in Islamic knowledge, formalized education had to be provided in order to keep pace with the increasing diversity of Islamic thought at that time. As the number of students increased, the precincts of the mosques no longer sufficed to meet the spatial demands. Moreover, the ever-growing number of madrasa graduates needed funding to continue their studies, and the government administration in turn required able and efficient staff. Attempting to meet those needs, the mosques and madrasas offered training in non-Islamic subjects along with the theological curriculum (Dehlavi 2002:21-22). The period of Imam Ghazali (1058-1111 AD) is seen as the golden period of Islamic education, because in his days education was ‘so common that even the lowest professional was well educated’. Another Urdu publication elaborates on Ghazali’s educational views, as in his opinion a human being should acquire the knowledge and skills helpful to understand the relationship between God and his servants and to live a moral life. (Farooqi 1992:45-59).

While in the above Urdu sources women are conspicuously absent, the few academic publications available mention fields of knowledge wherein women were trained from the early days of Islam onwards. According to one author, the disciplines in which women excelled include religious knowledge, cultural knowledge, poetic traditions, mystical education, vocational and professional education, music, and military training (Chaudhry 1953:77-101). In addition, Berkey’s article on women’s education in the Mamluk period points to women’s contributions in the field of Islamic education. As Islamic legal and religious education were originally intended to be and continued to be mainly informal during the Middle Ages, the emergence of madrasas from the eleventh century onwards represents the formalization and institutionalization of the originally informal
and interpersonal methods of teaching (Berkey 1992:143). Apparently the madrasas did not monopolize the educational sector, because despite the growing institutionalization of Islamic education earlier forms of informal education continued to exist side by side with the madrasas. These informal forms of education are important for understanding how women were taught in the past. During the Mamluk period, women were active in the field of madrasa education as financial benefactors, founders, and supervisors (Berkey 1992:145). Since learned women are mentioned in historical sources, the question is how they were educated, because there seems to be no evidence that women taught or studied in the madrasas they were associated with as benefactors, founders, or supervisors. Instead, especially in learned families, the women’s husbands and male relatives were generally seen as responsible for the education of women. Outside the home, women’s participation in informal meetings held in mosques formed a point of contention, as on such occasions popular practice collided with the rules of gender segregation (Berkey 1992:151).

Still, it seems that even though women were mainly taught at home, it was possible for them to specialize in a particular subject under the guidance of a (male) teacher. Generally, such classes were held in the teacher’s house and they were attended by men and women alike. Informal teaching at home and attending public classes are sketched as complementary activities in Chaudhry’s (1953) account. Moreover, there are examples of women who even undertook ‘grand tours during their educational career’, and the same author points out that women enjoyed a ‘rich and full-blooded’ professional life as teachers, even if they were not officially affiliated with a madrasa. As the historical sources mention male savants who obtained diplomas (ijazas) from women, it is likely that women taught in private (Chaudhry 1953:72). In that respect, a ‘spotless character’ or the ‘integrity of their character’ appears to form the necessary conditions for women’s interactions with men. Similarly, there seems to be a strong emphasis on women’s moral education and moral discipline, which is a point that will be examined in Chapter 4.

Historical examples indicate that women could compete with men in the field of transmitting Prophetic traditions or ahadith, as many women in the early Islamic period were known as narrators of Prophetic traditions (muhadditha; Berkey 1992:151-153). Still, as Berkey points out, the education women received differed substantially from the education young men received in madrasas. As the main emphasis was on training the memory, such one-sided training ensured women’s exclusion from formally acknowledged positions in the educational and legal sectors. With regard to the
above remark, my findings suggest that similar mechanisms underlying women's partial and selective inclusion in the public and restrictions in the educational domain are still at work in girls' madrasas today, as we will see in the following chapters.

2.3 **Writings on madrasa education in India**

Turning to the history of madrasa education in India as presented in Urdu sources, the president of the (revivalist) Islamic Centre in New Delhi, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, points to the connection between the Muslim reaction to the introduction of Thomas Babington Macaulay's education policy in 1834 and the onset of the 'Madrasa Movement'. Under the colonial regime, Muslim power had visibly diminished by the early nineteenth century. Against this background, the author opines that the 'Madrasa Movement' is noteworthy for the leadership of Islamic scholars at a time when Muslims were in a vulnerable position. Underlying the movement were particular interpretations of Islam and Islamic knowledge. Assuming that Islam distinguishes between two types of knowledge, namely revealed knowledge and verified or scientific knowledge, the author concludes that the madrasa curriculum should be based on the same classification. The aim of madrasa education is to train students so that they may become competent in following the path laid out by Quran and shariah and to spread the knowledge and message of God to humankind for their physical, intellectual, and spiritual wellbeing (Khan 2002:84-137).

By the early twentieth century the most popular Islamic schools of thought and Muslim organizations were represented in the madrasa education system, such as the Deobandis, the Barelwis, the Ahl-e-hadith, the Jamaat-e-Islami, and the Nadwatul Ulama. The efforts of the latter proved to be significant for the coming to be of girls' madrasas in India, and the girls' madrasa I did fieldwork in was, in fact, founded under the patronage of the Nadwatul Ulama. And there was another link, because the Nadwatul Ulama's former director of education, Saiyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (1914-2000), was influential in the Tablighi Jamaat (Malik 1997:471), the very same movement in which the 'men in charge' of running the Madrasatul Niswan were actively involved.

In Saiyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi's biography, the Muslim 'minority psychology' is mentioned as the main reason for the coming into being of maktab-ib and madrasas in India. Regarding the minority rights of Muslims, the Indian constitution grants the 'right to freedom of religion', along with 'cultural and
educational rights for minorities', subsumed under the heading 'fundamental rights'. Nadwi claims that Muslims establish institutions of Islamic learning to ensure the preservation of Islam at a basic level in secular India and to counter their fear of cultural domination at the hand of the Hindu majority. Elaborating on his educational ideals, Nadwi argues in his *Madaris Arabia ke Talba ke Nam eka Paigham* (A message to the students of Arabic madrasas; Nazmi 2000:132-133) that a Muslim who studies Islam in order to communicate the message of God to man for his salvation is the vicegerent of the Prophet. By the same token, madrasas are founded to continue the mission of the Prophet, and for that reason a madrasa student should possess (some of) the Prophet's qualities. In the light of the above, Nadwi concludes that madrasas and makatib are not only necessary and beneficial for Muslims, but for everyone to learn morality and humanity. At the same time, Nadwi points out that the Hindu majority is unaware of the basic needs, identity, and psychology of the Muslim minority. As a result, government agencies may intentionally or unintentionally enact laws that form obstacles with a view to maintaining the communal identity of the Muslim minority. For example, Nadwi notes that the syllabi of state-run schools and colleges generally include Hindu mythology, belief, culture, and traditions (Hasan n.d.:134-137). The same point was frequently brought to my attention during fieldwork, when I asked the students why they attended a madrasa, as it seems to represent a widely held view.

Similarly, other authors such as Salamatullah (1990), the author of *Hindustan mein Musalmano ki Talim* (Muslim Education in India), note that following Partition Muslims feared the manipulation of secularism on the part of the non-Muslim majority. Claiming that following Partition Muslims became more conscious of their religion, such forms of cultural domination had the potential of causing damage to what he refers to as the 'cultural' Muslim identity. As a result, Muslims struggled to preserve their institutions of religious learning in an attempt to put a halt to the perceived decline of religious and moral values. The same author argues that morality cannot be confined to a textbook or to a set of principles, as society at large is responsible for moral education. In other words, value-oriented education begins at home, extends to the neighbourhood, and should be continued in school, where ideally the environment is conducive to good actions. By the same token, teachers should function as role models, not through command and punishment, but through precautions and through creating a healthy atmosphere. Moral education is seen as a subject that cannot be limited to a fixed timetable, nor is it merely part of the curriculum, as it represents a process that permeates all academic activities, as we will see in Chapter 4.
As Islamic education developed in all its diversity, the gap between forms of non-Islamic education and madrasa education grew wider. The following examples may illustrate the extent to which both education systems co-exist today without allowing for many points of contact. In late 2002 a university lecturer asked me whether I wanted to give an informal talk about my fieldwork in a prestigious girls’ college in New Delhi. I hoped that the views of the teachers-to-be would add to my understanding of the middle to upper middle-class non-Muslim opinions regarding madrasa education. Quite to the contrary, it turned out that the young women knew close to nothing about madrasas, although ‘confessional schools’ were included as a module in their teachers’ training programme. Nevertheless, the students’ textbooks did not appear to contain any substantial information about madrasas. Moreover, as far as the students’ knowledge of Islam and Muslims was concerned, it was by and large informed by stereotypes.

In the Madrasatul Niswa in turn I was confronted with a host of stereotypes regarding non-Islamic education, because generally neither the teachers nor the students were familiar with alternative forms of education. Furthermore, since the teachers and students lived in purdah, they were hardly exposed to outside influences while teaching or studying in the madrasa. The worldview of this particular Muslim community also prevented the young women from getting too involved with their surroundings, as we will see in the following chapters. As a result, apprehensions concerning non-Islamic education were common. The young women’s concerns centred on the ‘free mingling of the sexes’ and the disastrous consequences of ‘immodest’ behaviour, which according to them stood in a causal relation with teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Very similar ideas were expressed by the earlier quoted president of the Islamic Centre about the flaws of non-Islamic education in comparison with madrasa education. In his opinion, Islam is entirely scientific and all encompassing, owing to which ‘modern’ knowledge does not add anything new to what is written in the Quran. By contrast, non-Islamic schools are presented in an unfavourable light, because ‘secular schools’ merely provide labour market oriented education, while madrasa education is oriented toward God. Similarly, the same author suggests that secular schools teach the possession of worldly things as the main aim in life. Islamic education, on the other hand, is meant to teach that material things are merely means needed to make life easier, rather than being ends in themselves. The main principle underlying the curriculum in Islamic schools is the command of God with its eternal ethics. As a result, although worldly development is
Possible in non-Islamic societies, the evolution of proper humanity is impossible therein (Khan 2002:84-137).

Others point to the tension between Islamic and ‘secular’ knowledge within the field of Islamic education itself. Addressing the tension between Islamic and non-Islamic education from a different angle, another source adds that the bifurcation between Islamic and ‘secular’ knowledge gradually crept into Islamic education as well. Owing to this bifurcation, some opine that secular knowledge should be banned from the madrasas altogether. Their main argument is that there appears to be a tendency to render education into yet another economic and commercial activity, or into a privatized sector with materialism as its primary aim and underlying guiding principle (Alam 2000:44-53). On the other hand, others express concern that the bifurcation of education and society results in the training of two separate worldviews, namely one that is traditional and one that is modern (Ajjola 1999:23). In the opinion of the latter, the aim of educational reform should be the integration of Islamic and secular knowledge. Such an integration could take the shape of allowing for a Western ‘hardware’, i.e. Muslims should appropriate the technology of the West, combined with an Islamic ‘software’ to preserve Islamic values. The latter justify their stance by claiming that there is no distinction between theology and science in Islam, as according to the Quran man’s task is to observe nature. This Quranic injunction in turn is interpreted in such a way that the Islamic sciences originally combined theology and science. In the course of history this inclusive view of the Islamic sciences was reduced to theology, thereby marking the onset of what many perceive as the decline of Islamic education. In short, according to the adherents of the integrational model, modern interpretations of traditional concepts and institutions are needed in order to effect a positive change in the Islamic educational system (Ajjola 1999:27-4).

Similar tensions could also be discerned in the Madrasatul Niswan. While the young women’s disregard for co-educational non-Islamic schools was obvious, their negative views were paired with the assessment that nowadays upward social mobility requires some degree of exposure to ‘worldly education’. In line with this assumption, the Principal told me that their community deemed it desirable for girls below the age of purdah to study in non-Islamic schools. For that reason the daughters of the madrasa’s ‘core families’ attended a prestigious public school in Delhi, as we will see in Chapter 4. The above section indicates the tensions in the field of Islamic education today. Although the Urdu materials surveyed tend to sketch the
rise of madrasa education in India as a continuum with the history of the Middle East, the 'Madrasa Movement', in fact, emerged against the particular background of declining Muslim power and the colonial encounter in the nineteenth century. In addition, post Partition in 1947 Muslims formed a minority in India, owing to which the gap between the non-Islamic education system and the madrasa education system widened. It is also worth noting that at present certain parallels with the situation under colonial rule and post Partition are highlighted, because many seem to perceive the Muslim minority today as being in a similarly vulnerable position as during those times of crises, especially post 9/11.

2.4 The post 9/11 media debate

Girls' madrasas also appeared in a very different set of writings that is in the English medium Muslim press. If some of the early Urdu medium writings were an attempt to rewrite history, these articles are part of debates that emerged post 9/11. While the non-Muslim media attempted to establish a link between madrasa education and forms of violence, the Muslim media utilized examples of 'modern' madrasas to show the new face of Islamic education. Among these 'modern' institutions of Islamic learning, girls' madrasas were mentioned as examples indicating how 'progressive' madrasa education can be. I would like to give an insight into these debates, as they also convey an impression of the post 9/11 Muslim concerns, the period in which I did my fieldwork.

The Muslim newspaper materials used below are representative of those who reacted to newspaper articles published in the English non-Muslim dailies from late 2001 onwards. The tone of the non-Muslim newspaper articles often bore resemblances with earlier colonial discourses that had utilized similar imageries of Muslims as naturally inclined toward violence. The madrasas fitted into this imagery as the alleged 'breeding grounds' for the 'angry young man,' thought to be readily available for initiating anti-national and terrorist activities. By contrast, concerned Muslim authors suggested that even if violence was consciously taught in some madrasas, we ought to take into account structural factors in such contexts. In their opinion, 'Islamic militancy [...] has a strong element of class conflict [...] as they [the students, M.W.] are also from poor backgrounds they express their sense of being cheated by society in the idiom of religion' (Rahman 2004:9). The responses can be categorized in three sets: those countering 'incorrect allegations' of non-Muslims, those arguing for reform of the madrasa system, and those providing positive examples of madrasa education.
Starting with those countering the ‘incorrect allegations’, historian Muzaffar Alam notes that ‘the sad part of the present times is that the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party, M.W.] Government has been targeting these madrasas as breeding ground for conservatism and obscurantism’ (Alam 2002). Another author states that post 9/11 the madrasas ‘end up proving their secular credentials besides providing the authorities with certificates of loyalty’ (Ahmed 2002). While the allegations attempted to project an image of the madrasas characterized by indoctrination, violence, and backwardness, historically speaking the madrasas were major centres of learning, scientific innovation, and high culture, as we saw in the previous sections. With a view to proving their point, my interlocutors often claimed that much of what had been published about the madrasas in the non-Muslim media lacked empirical validity. Especially the Delhi-based English medium Muslim newspaper Milli Gazette made great efforts to counter the allegations that were published in the non-Muslim media on an almost daily basis. According to the Milli Gazette’s chief editor Zafarul Islam Khan, today’s negative images regarding the madrasas tend to be based on information about the neighbouring Pakistani situation or the border region madrasas. Owing to structural factors, such as the ongoing tensions over Kashmir and unceasing cross border violence, the environment is much more politicized in both settings. For that reason conclusions based on the two above-mentioned contexts is far from being representative of the overall situation regarding madrasa education in the rest of the country. Similarly, in reaction to a controversial report on madrasas issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Zafarul Islam Khan points out that ‘Until now the authorities have not been able to identify a single madrasa in the country providing any sort of military training’ (Sikand 2003). In order to fully appreciate Khan’s statement, we ought to keep in mind that radical Hindu organizations are known to run schools that provide military training among other subjects. As opposed to the madrasas, even post 9/11 the curricula of schools with such agendas of violence remain by and large unquestioned.

The media discourse on madrasas also gave rise to other reactions, such as the repeated call for reform of the madrasa education system. Both Muslim and non-Muslim advocates opined that the establishment of a Central Madrasa Board would render the madrasa system more transparent. For the Muslim advocates the need for funding and hopes for recognition of madrasa education as an alternative in its own right appeared to be the pivotal concerns. By contrast, the non-Muslim advocates seemed to hope for more transparency in order to check the madrasas’ funding sources,
curb possible links with terrorist organizations in the border regions, promote assimilation to the non-Islamic education system, and to gain a say in the regulation of madrasa curricula with a view to exerting control. As a consequence, Muslim reactions to the proposed establishment of a Central Madrasa Board were ambivalent. While admitting that 'steps should be taken to encourage these institutions [i.e. madrasas, M.W.] to add inputs on modern education,' concerned Muslims also expressed anxiety that the central monitoring of the madrasas could lead to interference on the part of the non-Muslim state. Despite such anxieties, it is a widely shared perception that reforms are necessary, as concerns centre mainly on the question of the future perspectives of madrasa graduates. One author mentions the example of a madrasa that recently increased the length of its course from fifteen to sixteen years, but 'even after completing such a lengthy and boring course, students fail to get anything.' For that reason 'there is a great need to streamline these madrasas and put them on a track,' which could be among the tasks of a Central Madrasa Board (Rahman 2002).

By and large the suggested cooperation between the madrasas and the state was perceived as a 'welcome step.' The cooperation entailed the alleviation of fund raising for the madrasas, while in return the madrasas would give up their independent status and allow the state to monitor their activities. One newspaper article stated that 'amid growing allegations of misuse of madrasas by terrorists, Delhi government is working to register all such religious institutions in the capital and set up a board to run them to help remove the 'crisis of credibility' (Times of India, 23 June 2002). Still, apprehensions continued to be expressed as well, as only a few weeks later another article titled 'Muslim Law Board opposes bill on madrasas' reported that 'terming the setting up of a Madrasa Board an infringement of the Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution and an interference in the rights of Muslims, [...] participants said it was a deliberate ploy to defame these educational institutions [...]’ (Times of India, 23 September 2002). In reaction to the above article, a concerned Muslim reader opined on the internet that the setting up of a Central Madrasa Board was 'yet another government effort to harass poor Muslims [...]. If the government is serious in combating extremism, then why just madrasas, why not temple trusts[...]'? Apparently this was a feeling shared by many, as it seemed to be a common fear that instead of improving the situation for the madrasas, the state might strive to regulate and control them. In the words of the same reader, 'there is a fear that these monitoring bodies might be turned into regulatory bodies.' Moreover, so far the government-
run madrasas in other states have not proven to function well. Turning to government programmes launched in an attempt to promote the assimilation of madrasas to non-Islamic education, Zafarul Islam Khan of the Milli Gazette notes that ‘in principle that [the government programmes, M.W.] sounds fine, but in practice it is very difficult to get funds from the state. Funds will only be given to a madrasa if it receives a prior security clearance [...] even to get a simple birth certificate one has often to pay a bribe [...] these hurdles make it impossible for many madrasas to access funds from the state’ (Sikand 2003:3).

Finally, a range of positive newspaper articles familiarized the readers with madrasas of a different kind. I would like to take up the following examples to show what arguments were made with regard to the Jamiatul Hidaya in Jaipur, the Markazul Maarif in Mumbai, and finally the Jamiatus Salehat in Rampur. The ‘hi-tech madrasa’ Jamiatul Hidaya is mentioned, as it represents a ‘completely new experiment with the traditional madrasa education system’. Apart from teaching theological subjects, based on a combination of the curricula of the Darul Uloom Deoband, the Nadwatul Ulama in Lucknow, and the Mazahir Ulum in Saharanpur, this madrasa also provides training in duniyavi or non-Islamic subjects. Moreover, the Jamiatul Hidaya offers degree courses in computer applications, accounts and business management, and pharmacy. In the author’s opinion, this ‘institution is an apt example of how a madrasa must be in the age of science and technology’. By contrast, graduates from madrasas that are less well equipped face the dilemma that ‘poor students who pass out from these madrasas quite unfortunately become misfits in the practical world since they can’t decipher numbers on the buses or stations’ names while traveling in a train.’ Unlike these ‘unfortunate ones’, the graduates of this ‘Oxford of the madrasa education in the country’ are able to find ‘prestigious jobs in places like Citibank, Kuwait Embassy, Luxor Pens, Escorts, Indian Railways, Rashtriya Sahara, etc.’ (Ahmed 2002).

The above article suggests once more that future trajectories of madrasa graduates form an urgent concern (see Chapter 5). In that regard, the Mumbai based post-graduation education centre Markazul Maarif represents an innovative concept. The Markazul Maarif trains graduates from madrasas all over the country, including the Darul Uloom in Deoband, the Nadwatul Ulama in Lucknow, and the Mazahir Ulum in Saharanpur. Every year an average of twenty graduates clears an entry test advertised in madrasas, thereby obtaining permission and funding to follow the two year training in the Markazul Maarif. During the post-graduate course, subjects such as English and computer skills
are taught. In addition, the Markazul Maarif is a registered Non Governmental Organization dedicated to social work in various Indian states, wherein the organization operates English medium schools, primary schools, orphanages, and healthcare centres. What sets the Markazul Maarif apart is that ‘They [the students, M.W.] have everything to surprise anyone believing in the orthodoxy of madrasa graduates. Meet them and get the first hand experience of what a madrasa student could look like after being given some exposure to English and good teachers’. Apart from describing what the Markazul Maarif does for its students, at the same time the above statement counters a host of stereotypes regarding madrasa students. For example, it is a widely shared view that madrasa students are conservative, that they do not speak English, and that madrasa teachers lack proper training. Apparently, the Markazul Maarif managed to tackle all of the above issues successfully, as ‘with flowing beards and traditional madrasa dress of kurta and pajama not lower than ankles, these young people flaunt fluent English and etiquette believed to be prerogative of only people with a Public School background’. The Markazul Maarif strives to fill a void in its aim to change ‘the whole perspective of madrasas and their outlook’, as ‘in this competitive world [...] it is just impossible to walk without arming with modern education’. (Rahman 2002a).

While the Jamiatul Hidaya and the Markazul Maarif offer education for boys, the Jamiatus Salehat in Rampur has offered secondary education for girls for more than three decades. Founded by the earlier mentioned Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Hind, the madrasa caters to more than one thousand students from all over India. Apparently the Jamiatus Salehat ‘is not only changing the concept of women education in the country but also giving a facelift to madrasa concept’. What is innovative about this ‘dual type’ girls’ madrasa is that up to the eighth standard it ‘follows complete NCERT [National Council for Educational Research and Training, M.W.] syllabus and teaches every subject taught in a modern public school.’ The ‘dual’ curriculum means that along with Islamic subjects, Urdu, and Arabic, the Jamiatus Salehat implements the state curriculum and teaches English and computer education from standard five onwards. In addition, the madrasa offers various facilities on its campus, such as ‘a small hospital, a canteen, a general store and a bank’. As the Jamiatus Salehat belongs to the oldest and largest public ‘dual type’ girls’ madrasas in India, it inspired others to set up similar institutions, as we will see in Chapter 4 (Rahman 2001). The above examples show that post 9/11 the already existing tensions within the madrasa education system led to an even sharper polarization. The situation necessitated a rethinking of madrasa education, and expressions thereof tended to be located between
being apologetic and confident. Among the latter girls' madrasas appeared again in the debate.

2.5 Returning to the emergence of girls' madrasas

During fieldwork, another Jamiatu Salehat in Malegaon (Maharashtra) was commonly referred to as the oldest girls' madrasa in post-Partition India. This girls' madrasa was founded in the early 1950s, while the above-mentioned Jamiatu Salehat in Rampur came into being roughly twenty years later in the early 1970s. My interlocutors suggested on many occasions that the 1975 Islamization of Education conference held in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) was crucial for the post-Partition mushrooming of girls' madrasas in India. From India, Maulana Mukarram al-Nadwi attended the conference and subsequently founded the Muhmmadiya Education Society in Mumbai. Similar to the earlier mentioned Islamization of Knowledge project, those associated with the Muhmmadiya Education Society advocated the integration of Islamic and non-Islamic subjects in the madrasa curriculum. In addition to introducing 'dual' curricula in madrasas, a second idea that found enthusiastic following was promoting madrasa education for girls. This idea was well received in certain circles, as it was justified in historical terms. The history of women's education in Islam is briefly sketched in a recent issue of an Urdu magazine called Hijab Monthly. The main argument reminds of the late nineteenth century reformist ideas regarding women's education, which in turn are representative of explanations I heard during fieldwork:

'Once Islam was considered synonymous with education, because Islam didn't confine education to a particular caste or class. The Prophet made it compulsory for each and every Muslim to seek education. Imparting education to girls and women was a matter of great concern to the Prophet. He used to teach them and through them also their family members and close kin. However, following the 'golden age' Islamic scholars did not pay as much attention to the education of women and consequently it became a rare phenomenon. The need of the hour demands that society faces its negligence in order to stop this discrimination against women to the extent that every girl and woman should be educated, as the responsibility of educating and guiding future generations rests with her. Only this way the Muslim ummah may be able to regain its lost glory. The Prophet didn't confine his efforts to making women literate, as according to him it didn't suffice to acquaint women
with one particular aspect of knowledge. The Prophet drew people's attention to teaching women even trifile things, though he was especially concerned with teaching them Islamic knowledge. To the Prophet it was clear that education represents the backbone of any society that generates intelligence, consciousness, and perception. Absence of these qualities may lead to its downfall, and hence the principal cause for the 'backwardness' of Muslim society is that it didn't pay much attention to women's education. (Ibn-e-Fareed 2000:107-110)

Two points are emphasized in the above account, namely the precedent set by the Prophet with regard to educating women and that educating women is necessary today with a view to guiding the future generations and for the Muslim ummah to regain its lost glory. Taking such notions down to the family, as it were, the promotion of education for girls is also addressed in a poem found in the Ladkion ka Islami Course (The Girls' Islamic Course), which is also used in the Madrasatul Niswan:

Ladki hai ek daulat (A girl is wealth):
'Girl Child: A Gem of Society
O successful man! O eloquent man
You are anxious – Don't worry
God gifted the girl to you
She is like a beam of light in your life
She is the gift of God
She is the solace of your heart
She has the key to prosperity
She is laughing and reciting:
I am the flower from paradise
I am drenched in perfume
I am coming from paradise
I am she. Recognize me
Whom the Prophet
Used to love
God gifted him, too
First a girl-child like me
She is a source of light
For the whole human flight
Praise thy God
Prostrate before the Lord
As the girl is a blessing
As the girl is a gem
As the girl is wealth
God's gift, God's boon
She is light, she is solace
Welcome her unhesitatingly
Win her blessings
Either boy or girl
Both are a gift of God
Educate her
Discipline her
Teach her good conduct
The etiquette of life, too
She is the princess of your palace
She is a ray of hope for you
Don't get angry with her
Don't get angry with her’ (Siwhari n.d.:3-4)

In order to fully appreciate the meaning of the above poem, we should keep in mind that many valorize having a male child more than having a girl in India. Giving birth to female offspring is often charged with negative emotions, as the mother may be ostracized by her family, owing to which her daughters in turn may end up being ‘punished’ for being girls. By contrast, the poem exhorts fathers that both boys and girls are gifts from God. For that reason it is the father’s duty to educate his daughter, to teach her discipline and good conduct, which appear to form the cornerstones for the educational model laid out for Muslim girls, as we will see in Chapter 4.

To conclude, contemporary Urdu materials link the emergence of girls’ madrasas with the educational model laid down in the times of the Prophet. While prior to Partition home teaching seemed to be the most common form of informal education for Muslim girls, the particular history of India with its colonial interim and the Muslim minority situation post Partition forms the background to the emergence of girls’ madrasas. The latter were built on the ideological foundation established by the late nineteenth century Muslim reformers with their views regarding women’s education, the role of women in society, and their ideals of Islamic womanhood. However, with regard to the curriculum of girls’ madrasas today, the shift from informal education to institutionalized education called for innovations and modifications of the reformist ideas and the standardized madrasa curriculum, as we will see in the following chapters.
1. By contrast, regarding academic sources on the history of madrasa education for boys, see for example Alam 1999; Brandenburg 1978; Grandin 1997; Makdisi 1981.

2. Qamaruddin, who is affiliated with the Hamdard Education Society in Delhi, claims that there is a total of approximately 35,000 madrasas in India. Out of these, he suggests that roughly eight to ten percent are girls' madrasas, which amounts to a total of over three hundred. One of Qamaruddin's research assistants allowed me to make use of his survey like data on girls' madrasas across the country.

3. With a view to 'defining' the Muslim organizations mentioned in this section, I would like to note briefly that the Deobandis are known for their scripturalism in religious matters and apoliticism in worldly affairs. Their main opponents are the Barelwis who are known for their mystical inclinations and their less averse stance regarding things political. Finally, the lay preachers' movement known as Tablighi Jamaat believes in the necessary separation of politics and religion. For that reason it is an apolitical movement with a broad outreach, owing to its doctrinal simplicity and ideological transsectarianism. As a reform movement, it promotes the realization of a religious identity directed toward the universal Muslim community or ummah (see also Eickelman and Piscatori 1996:148-154).

4. In addition, I also used journals and periodicals found at the All India Milli Council (Taalim 1994) and at the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre (see Chapter 4).

5. The Institute of Objective Studies is associated with the Islamization of Knowledge project. In the educational sector, the project aims at the integration of Islamic and non-Islamic subjects. Those in favour of such integrative measures argue that Islamic education could benefit from state resources while remaining committed to its Islamic vision. The publications issued by the Institute of Objective Studies include a directory of Muslim organizations in Delhi, yet another survey-like book on dini madaris (Ansari 1997), and a study on Indian Muslim women since Independence (Hashia 1998).

6. For example, a retired lecturer of the Jamia Millia Islamia University still recalled the times of home teaching in the neighbourhood she lived in. Similarly, another retired teacher at the Anglo-Arabic College added to the collage of impressions with his memories of the Persian home teaching, which the female family members of his household had received.

7. Among the non-Islamic subjects taught were Arabic, Arabic literature, mathematics, history, astrophysical geography, chemistry, biochemistry, pharmacology, and medical sciences. Philosophy was not included in the madrasa curriculum, as the subject was restricted to classes held in mosques. Finally, while the primary language of instruction was Arabic, Syrian and Greek were compulsory for the students of medical sciences.

8. Apart from other examples, Chaudhry mentions that Ibn Batutta received such academic certificates or ijazas from two female scholars. One of them was Zaynab al-Miqdisi, who was also called Rihlat al-Dunya or 'Attraction of her Age' (Chaudhry 1953:73).
9. In addition, the author suggests that regional differences concerning the practice of gender segregation should be taken into account, as for example fifteenth century women in Spain had 'much more freedom of associating with men than women in the rest of the Islamic world'. Similarly, the learned Indian Mughal princesses enjoyed the company of 'literary persons'; such as poets, writers, and religious scholars (Chaudhry 1953:81).

10. Like the girls' madrasa I did fieldwork in, the Islamic Centre is located in Nizamuddin. The Islamic Centre was founded by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan himself, who was born in 1925 in the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh (Azamgarh). Disillusioned with his earlier associations with the Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Hind and the Tablighi Jamaat, he founded the Islamic Centre with a view to bringing about an 'Islamic revival' (see Khan 1986; 2001).

11. The Ahl-e-hadith movement is known for the propagation of a 'pristine and pure' Islam, owing to which it is associated with the Wahhabis and the Salafis. Dating back to the post 1857 period, during the 1880s the movement became synonymous with socio-religious reform. Typically, followers of the Ahl-e-hadith deem Sufism and the veneration of saints at shrines un-Islamic and they do not practice adherence to any particular school of thought in matters of jurisprudence (i.e. they are ghair taqlid; see Khan 2001 regarding the question why the association with the Salafis is preferred over the term Wahhabi).

12. Following Partition in 1947 the Jamaat-e-Islami split up into a Pakistani and an Indian branch called the Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Hind. According to Grare, the Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Hind faced the challenge of preserving the cultural and ideological legacy of its founder Maududi, while remaining receptive toward contextual questions emerging in a Muslim minority context like India, wherein the organization could not monopolize the representation of all Muslims in the public sphere. Owing to this dilemma, the main activities of the Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Hind are restricted to religious education and matters related to Muslim personal law (Grare 2001:98, 101).

13. Among the Indian Sunnis, the main allegiances are claimed to be either with the so-called Salafiyah movement, which is more commonly referred to as Wahhabi in the Saudi Arabian setting wherein the movement originates, or with the Nadwatul Ulama, known as liberalist. In India, the Salafis include the so-called Wahhabis and the followers of the Ahl-e-hadith movement. The Nadwatul Ulama in turn attempts to bring about reconciliation between the different Islamic schools of thought (madhhab) in matters of jurisprudence. Moreover, the organization is known to be favourably inclined toward the independent application of reason in matters of jurisprudence called ijtihad and advocates an inclusive concept of Islam.

14. The concept of purdah denotes wearing 'modest dress', including a veil and burqa, as well as female segregation, which will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 5.
15. Shedding light on how such stereotypes come into being, an essay on the Pakistani madrasas mentions the so-called radd texts (Rahman 2004:7). These texts serve to refute ‘alien’ philosophies and although they are not included in the official madrasa curriculum, such tracts are readily available and consumed. The treatises typically address a multitude of everyday topics, thus ensuring a broad outreach. In the radd texts, the ‘West’ is generally sketched as depraved, while Islam is presented as superior and under a constant threat of corruption by alien influences. In the bookshops of Nizamuddin such tracts were available in Urdu, Hindi, Arabic, English, and French. Although the influence of the radd literature has not been discussed in depth so far, I share Rahman’s opinion that its influence may be substantial on the minds of madrasa students from lower to lower middle-class backgrounds with little to no exposure to alternative forms of education.

16. See Gupta 2001 for an analysis of these colonial imageries of the Muslim man.

17. Till this date, in states such as Bihar, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh Madrasa Boards function as administrative organizations that check the incoming funds of their affiliated madrasas and serve as a link between the madrasas and the state.

18. *The Girls' Islamic Course or Ladkion Ka Islami Course* is also included in the curriculum of the Madrasatul Niswan (see Appendix II; see also Jeffery 2004).