

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE:

EDUCATION IN THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL REPRODUCTION OF NORTH INDIAN MUSLIMS

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Remember:

- *Ignorance is darkness and education is enlightenment*
- *The understanding of religion and the world comes only from education*
- *Education gives us a peaceful life*
- *Education helps us to get ahead and develop*
- *Education makes us capable of helping our country and our people*
- *Do not deprive your children of education*
- *Enrol the people close to you in a madrasah or school and turn them into good human beings and good urbane people*

This exhortation features on an Urdu poster printed by an Aligarh-based Urdu committee. The village *pradhan*, a Muslim peasant farmer and part-time roads contractor, had pinned it to the veranda wall in his home.¹ It encapsulates central ideas in discourses of modernity that

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have been circulating in India since colonial times: that education is beneficial for individuals and the nation alike, because it brings enlightenment and the educated person attains the status of civilised human being. Such perceptions are part of very general understandings of the importance of education in contemporary India. Indeed, more than half of the President's address to the nation on August 14th 2004 was devoted to emphasising the importance of the education system 'in creating an enlightened, dynamic and prosperous society' and transforming 'a human being into a wholesome whole, a noble soul and an asset to the universe.' In line with very widespread assumptions, President Abdul Kalam sees illiteracy as one of the root causes of poverty.

This view is not so much wrong as partial, for poverty itself is a major reason for illiteracy and low levels of educational attainment. This has never been more so than in today's rapidly changing economic and global situation—and it applies as forcefully to India's Muslims as to the rest of the Indian population. The commonplace trope of the 'backward Muslim' (and especially the uneducated Muslim woman) tends to blame the 'victims' for their own backwardness. Here, we want to challenge such assumptions by confronting the role played by systemic social, economic and political processes in the educational careers and prospects of Muslim children in India.

In 21st century India, everyone has to contend with economic liberalisation, globalisation and the scramble for employment and economic security. Formal education is becoming increasingly significant in people's attempts to reproduce or improve the social and economic positions of their households. Children may have to spend several years of their childhood

and Manjula Sharma, to the people of Qaziwala and Nangal Jat, the school and madrasah staff, and many others who so readily answered our questions.

notching up examinations successes and imbibing the General Knowledge and social polish on which social and economic success rests. But people are able to rise to these challenges in rather different ways. Wealthy urbanites have both the economic capital to enable their children to obtain educational credentials and the social networks to facilitate their transitions to adulthood. Extensive schooling, lucrative and secure 'modern' jobs, and 'good' marriages are beyond the reach of the poor.

Most Muslims in India, however, do not have the social and economic capital with which to succeed in this rapidly changing situation. Like their neighbours from other communities, Indian Muslims occupy a range of occupational and class positions. In general, though, Muslims in independent India have been economically marginalised and they are disproportionately located towards the lower end of the socio-economic hierarchy (Shariff 1995). Muslims in western UP, for instance, suffered a general decline in their relative economic and political position after 1947, in part because of excess migration of the urban and rural elites to Pakistan (Brass 1974: 182ff.). Today, Muslim children are significantly less likely to be enrolled in so-called secular schooling than children from other communities, and, once registered, Muslim boys are more likely to drop out before completing primary schooling. Muslim girls, once into school, are as likely to complete as are Hindu girls (Siddiqui 2004: 94-98). Many Muslim children—especially from poor rural households—receive formal education only briefly, if at all. Muslim literacy rates are probably lower than among caste Hindus, especially in the rural areas. Many Muslim children continue to be educated informally, often learning by watching their parents at work. Urban Muslims, in particular, are likely to be artisans, many of whom are largely educated through apprenticeships (Hameed 2005; Kumar 1988). Somewhat higher up the economic scale,

families may struggle to educate their children via a range of educational institutions. The poor recruitment of Muslims into the IAS and the professions since 1947, however, reflects the relatively small numbers of urban middle class Muslims who have been able to provide their children with lengthy formal schooling. Poverty and residence affect Muslims' ability to navigate changing educational markets, much as they do for Hindus. But communal politics play an additional and pernicious role for Muslims.

The future of Muslim children's education must be viewed in a framework that accommodates the diversity of Muslims' social and economic positions at the same time as it encompasses overarching processes. First we shall lay out some general features of the situation in UP, where several aspects render Muslims' minority status and general economic marginality particularly acute. Later, we shall use our research in Bijnor district to explore how these processes operate. We focus on secondary schooling, since this is crucial for obtaining the cultural capital and credentials that are crucial for boys (and a few girls) in the employment market, and for both girls and boys in marriage markets. Briefly, this is a story of failing state provision, privatisation of educational provision and diversification of Muslim children's educational careers accompanied by the saffronisation of educational cultures and an increasing communal separation of pupils.

Political economy of education in Uttar Pradesh

The Uttar Pradesh state has consistently accorded education a low priority in its spending. In the 1990s, evidence accumulated of the UP state's abject failure to provide comprehensive, accessible, affordable, and good quality schools for the mass of the population, especially for villagers and the urban poor (Govinda 2002; The Probe Team 1999). Locally dominant castes and classes actively contributed to this outcome. They have

also been the best placed to take advantage of shifts in the wider economy to market liberalisation, a process that has accelerated since 1991.

Between 1960 and 1990, teachers' unions pressurised the state government to nationalise schools (a trend that has now been reversed, especially in the secondary sector). The salaries of the (overwhelmingly upper caste Hindu) teachers still on the government payroll now absorb the lion's share of the UP education budget. This skewing has subsidised the urban middle classes at the expense of expanding educational provisions serving the rural population and the poor (Kingdon & Muzammil 2001). With growing cohorts of school age children, there are too few government schools and teachers to meet the potential demand, especially in the rural areas. Further, decisions about where to build government schools are not based simply on population size and 'need'. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Hindu urban middle classes and dominant landowning castes could manipulate their connections (often through relatives) into an educational officialdom dominated by upper caste Hindus. Like the lower Hindu castes and the Scheduled Castes, Muslims had little leverage over the 'Hindi establishment' that dominated UP's educational institutions.² Rural schools were more likely to be constructed in villages or sections of villages dominated by Hindu upper castes than near Muslim majority villages. Generally, the fabric of the rural school buildings is poor and teaching materials are more inadequate than in urban schools. High levels of teacher absenteeism and shirking compound the general problem of recruiting staff for rural posts.

² 'Scheduled Castes' are castes previously termed 'Untouchables' or 'Harijan'. They are included on a government 'schedule' and entitled to benefit from certain government programmes. The term 'Dalit' [oppressed] is not commonly used in western UP.

These inadequacies are even more glaring in schools located in Muslim dominated villages or *muhallās*. In practice, government schools rarely provide free education and regular attendance by pupils is often significantly lower than enrolments. Drèze and Kingdon consider that low attendance rates among rural Muslims are due more to ‘tangible disadvantages such as poverty and low levels of parental education’ than to parental opposition to schooling (Drèze & Kingdon 2001; see also Srivastava 2001: 280). Muslim pupils, moreover, are rarely entitled to the benefits—problematic though they are—of government scholarships, which probably enhance SC enrolments in comparison with others from similar economic backgrounds (Srivastava 2001).

With the UP state’s fiscal crisis during the 1990s, real per capita expenditure on education and numbers of teachers per capita declined (Drèze & Gazdar 1997; Drèze & Kingdon 1998; Drèze & Sen 2002: 143-88; Srivastava 2001; The Probe Team 1999). Meanwhile, there has been a remarkable growth in private and government-aided schools and colleges since the mid 1980s, primarily in response to the UP government’s failure to provide minimally adequate schooling for the majority of its population. The process of privatisation has accelerated during the 1990s and may compensate somewhat for the shortfall in state provision. It does not redress inequities in access, however (Jeffery et al. 2005b; Jeffery et al. 2005c). Indeed, the educational market reflects (and probably reproduces) pre-existing inequalities. The new educational institutions normally rely on fees and other levies from pupils’ parents (e.g. ‘donations’ to obtain admission). Generally, the founders locate their institutions—particularly secondary schools—where they can benefit from the growing demand for schooling from concentrations of moderately wealthy upper caste Hindu families: in other words, in urban centres or small towns (Drèze & Gazdar 1997: 71; NCERT 1997: Table

V 17 & Table V 41). The rural poor in particular have very few options, especially for young children who cannot travel far alone: their school attendance rates are generally the lowest (Drèze & Gazdar 1997: 80; Srivastava 2001). Indeed, aside from the fees, providing transport or arranging for children to board with urban relatives poses severe problems even for relatively wealthy villagers. Most non-state institutions, then, effectively exclude poor or marginal populations—including most Muslims.

Girls have been amongst the least well served by the UP education sector and gender differentials in school attendance, literacy and educational attainment remain wide (Drèze & Gazdar 1997; Drèze & Sen 2002: 143-188 & 229-274; Karlekar 2000; The Probe Team 1999; Wazir 2000).³ General problems of girls' access to education are exacerbated for Muslims because schools are unlikely to be in Muslim dominated villages or urban *muhallās*. In education, as in other fields, there is a general problem of recruiting and retaining women for rural posts, whether in the government or private sector (Drèze & Gazdar 1997: 61, 68-69;

³ Using data from the 1991 national census and the 1992-3 National Family Health Survey, Drèze and Sen estimate that rural enrolment rates in UP in the early 1990s were 43% of girls and 70% of boys aged 6-14; the urban rates were 70% and 77% respectively. Some 44% of girls never enrolled in school, compared to 19% of boys. Only 30% of girls aged 15-19 had completed 8th class, compared with 55% of boys (Drèze & Sen 2002: 147). More recent data (e.g. from 1997-8 (Nayar 2001) and from the 2001 Census (supplied in electronic format File ST2001RU, Table 1)), show little material change in the differentials. Girls' chances of enrolling at school and becoming literate are closely related to their mothers' education, which in part explains the low levels of girls' school enrolment in areas—like Bijnor—with low levels of adult female literacy (Drèze & Kingdon 2001; Srivastava 2001: 271).

Nayar 2001: 43). Unless there are compelling financial difficulties, women's employment outside the home is widely frowned upon—especially if it entails working with men, or travelling to villages (which are believed to be dangerous for unaccompanied women). Employed women must usually continue to perform their domestic duties, whilst the time and cost of travelling to work are further disincentives. Not surprisingly, most women teachers are in urban or large village schools, mainly in the primary sector. Like many other parents, Muslim parents may hesitate to enrol their daughters if few local girls are attending school, if the school is too distant or if there are no female teachers (The Probe Team 1999: 18ff.). Rural schools often fail to provide girl-friendly environments (e.g. separate toilet facilities), and there is evidence of gender bias by teachers as well as in the curriculum (Karlekar 2000). Parents are often worried about sexual harassment on the way to school (Srivastava 2001: 305). For the poor, for villagers and for Muslims, the most acceptable—as well as affordable—option may be to curtail their daughters' education once they reach puberty. Indeed, Muslim girls were all but absent even in the primary schools in our research villages.

The education sector in UP (and north India as a whole) is characterised by long-standing exclusionary class and residence biases that have been especially (though not exclusively) disadvantageous to most Muslims. Simply put, most Muslim parents in UP have inadequate opportunities to provide for their children's education, however strongly they want to do so.

Saffronised educational cultures

In general, north Indian Muslims confront much the same systematic exclusionary processes as their poor neighbours from other castes and communities. Another layer needs unwrapping here, though: communal politics. The role of the dominant classes and castes in

determining the location of schools by no means exhausts the communal issues involved in education. Thus, we turn now to the ambience of schools in north India, particularly focusing on the medium of instruction, aspects of curriculum and the domination of teaching by upper caste Hindus (Jeffery et al. 2004).

Urdu in the Persian script occupied a prime position among the vernacular languages in official business and in publications well into the 20th century. But the ‘Hindi establishment’ (many of whom were employed in the colonial education administration) gradually dominated in curriculum development and the expansion of teaching Hindi in Devanagari script in schools and colleges (Orsini 2002).⁴ Urdu and Hindi became ‘symbolic links among members of the same ethnic group, barriers to communication between members of different ethnic groups, and additional marks of identity and separateness for such groups’ (Brass, 1991: 85). Since 1947, Urdu has been widely seen as an alien language and a threat to national unity and its decline has been precipitate.⁵ It ceased to be an official language of UP in 1951 and was relegated to ‘minority language’ status: repeated efforts to get Urdu recognised as UP’s second official language have failed. Given the Constitutional guarantees to provide ‘mother tongue’ teaching for minorities at primary school level and the ‘three language formula’ as applied to UP (Hindi, English and another Indian language), Urdu might have achieved some prominence in school curricula. It is, however, marginal. As a *medium of instruction*, Urdu is now largely restricted to the *madrasah* sector (see below).

⁴ See also {King, 1994 #1945; Rai, 2001 #1946}.

⁵ For more on the contemporary position of Urdu in UP, see: (Abdullah 2002; Ahmad 2002; Brass 1974: 119-274; Brass 1990: 135ff.; Brass 1991: 69-108; Farouqui 1994; Latifi 1999; Pai 2002; Rahman 2002: 198-262; Russell 1999; Venkatachaliah 1999).

Few schools even offer Urdu, although it became an optional subject in some government primary schools in the 1990s.⁶ It is rarely an option as a literary subject in secondary schools. By contrast, most schools are Hindi-medium, a highly Sanskritised version of Hindi is valorised in the school curriculum and Sanskrit itself is generally taken as the third language. Thus, the linguistic ambience of UP schools tends to marginalise and denigrate the vernacular non-elite forms of Hindi spoken by most villagers and the poor (Kumar 1991; Kumar 1993; Orsini 2002; Rai 2001). For the Muslims among them, problems of script compound those of vocabulary. Urdu facilitates children's access to Islam, including reading the *Qur'ān Sharīf*—Hindi in the Devanagari script does not.

English complicates this linguistic contest, of course. Initially, English was to occupy the position of a national language in independent India only as an interim measure (Brass 1990: 135ff.). As an international language, however, English is a stronger currency than Hindi in the employment market, in India and abroad ((Deshpande 2000; Mohan 2000; Srivastava 2000). As Faust and Nagar (2001) argue, English-medium schooling is socially and politically divisive, however. The higher fees charged in English-medium schools not only indicate the greater prestige of English in comparison with Hindi but put competence in English out of reach of most Hindus, leave aside most Muslims. In the language stakes, then, Urdu has been doubly marginalised, by English as well as by Sanskritised Hindi. But only relatively affluent and courageous rural Muslim parents—like wealthy Hindus—could send their sons to English-medium fee-paying schools; even fewer send their daughters—in

⁶ Many Muslims in Bijnor expressed widespread cynicism about the qualifications of staff appointed to teach Urdu, and considered the move a political ploy by Mayavati and Mulayam Singh Yadav in their competition for Muslim votes, rather than a commitment to Urdu.

Bijnor's leading English-medium secondary schools, dominated by Hindus, boys outnumber girls about 1.9:1.

Most UP schools are also characterised by curricula—formal and hidden—that presume that the pupils are Hindu and that tend to marginalise and even demean Muslims. This largely pre-dates the overt and official saffronising of school curricula under the auspices of the BJP government in the late 1990s. The 'institutional stranglehold' (Orsini 2002: 382) of the Hindi establishment over education had ossified the UP Education Board Hindi literature courses and they still contain narratives of Indian history, mythology and Hindi literature in which Muslims are portrayed in a negative light. Sanskrit itself is associated with the Hindu scriptures. The Hindu bias of the syllabus has long been a matter of concern to Muslim commentators (see, for instance, (Brass 1974). Yet the recent debates about NCERT textbooks and school syllabi more generally have focused on History, Social Science, and Vedic Mathematics and Astrology rather than Hindi (Sahmat 2001; 2002a; 2002b). The government elected in 2004 has committed itself to removing the most explicitly saffronised elements from school curricula. But this will be insufficient to remove the biases against Muslim children, who experience educational regimes that tend to denigrate and humiliate them, even if they are not attending the Arya Samaj or RSS schools that might have less subtle anti-Muslim agendas (Balagopalan & Subramanian 2003; Kumar 1989: 59-77; 1993) (Thapar 2005). Muslims themselves often allege that teachers are unsympathetic (if not overtly unpleasant) to Muslim pupils, that they display favouritism in marking schoolwork or accepting pupils for tuitions.

The continuing domination of school teaching in general by upper caste Hindus is crucial here. Most schools—government schools included—exhibit 'banal Hinduism' (cf. Billig

1995), the taken-for-granted yet insidious practices that tend to construct an upper caste Hindu ambience. There is no formal timetabling of religious instruction in most schools, but textbooks and lessons are not the only medium through which religion is ‘taught’: daily assemblies and other functions, such as Founders’ Days and January 26th celebrations, are replete with Hindu iconography and Sanskritised Hindi (cf. Bénéi 2000). Furthermore, teachers in RSS schools are not a separate cadre and teachers may work in RSS schools before moving seamlessly into a better-paid job in another school. Some teachers in apparently ‘secular’ schools are involved in or at least approve of the activities of the Sangh Parivar. But teachers do not need to be actively committed to the worldviews of the Sangh Parivar to influence the ambience of the schools where they teach: because much Hinduism is ‘banal, even well-meaning teachers may peddle it without consciously knowing that is what they are doing.

Educational options, educational outcomes

Most Muslims in north India, then, face numerous obstacles to obtaining satisfactory education for their children, whether in the government or non-state sector. They often share some of these hurdles—relative poverty, rural residence—with their non-Muslim neighbours. Others particularly affect them as Muslims, since most government and non-state schools are alike in being permeated by a Hindi-Hindu educational culture—sanskritised Hindi, upper caste Hindu—that is problematic for children from Muslim homes. How, then, do Muslim parents deal with the challenges of providing their children with education? Here, we want to stress the *diversity* of the educational careers of Muslim children in north India.

For the vast majority—the urban poor and most villagers—lengthy education may simply not be an affordable or feasible option. In many poor urban neighbourhoods and

increasingly in the villages, too, Muslim children are now attending *madrasahs*.

Unfortunately, neither Drèze and Gazdar (1997: 72) nor Srivastava (2001: 267) included ‘non-profit’ or ‘informal’ schooling in their accounts, so we cannot gauge the overall significance of *madrasahs* in Muslim children’s education in UP today. Nevertheless, in our view, *madrasahs* are best understood within the wider political economy of educational provision in contemporary UP: essentially, the state and the market alike have failed to create adequate provision for Muslim children’s education. *Madrasahs* are primarily a response to this and they go some way to addressing Muslim children’s access to formal education. Poor and rural Muslim parents—like many others—complain that non-state schools are too costly or too distant, and that government schools are characterised by the lack of committed teachers, the failure to teach their pupils, poor facilities and inaccessibility. Many Muslims also say that government and non-state schools alike emphasise knowledge and examinations, but that their teaching is devoid of ethical content and their ambience is unsympathetic to Islam. Yet Muslim parents want their children to have some education and are keenly aware of the costs of illiteracy. Where Muslims form a tiny minority of the population, *madrasahs* are almost certainly few in number. In places with sizeable Muslim populations, though, the growing numbers of Muslim children of school age and an increasing demand for formal education have resulted in a rapid expansion in the *madrasah* sector during the 1980s and 1990s.

Madrasahs share many features with other educational institutions (Jeffery et al. 2004; Jeffery et al. 2005a). Schools and *madrasahs* are not hermetically sealed from one another: individuals or even entire management committees are sometimes involved in simultaneously managing schools and *madrasahs*. As with non-state schools, *madrasah* managers are usually prominent and relatively wealthy members of their locality. Most

madrasah teachers come from middle to poor peasant rural backgrounds or from middle ranking urban backgrounds. Most male *madrasah* teachers spent two or more years at one of the large seminaries (such as *Daru'l `Ulūm* in Deoband) whilst the small number of women teachers have mainly been educated informally. Teaching in a *madrasah*—like teaching in most non-state schools—is poorly paid, although it is respectable white-collar work. Teachers in schools and *madrasahs* have similar educational philosophies: for instance, in their preoccupation with ‘discipline’ and the need for ‘moral education’ to be centrally placed in the curriculum, in their understandings of how children learn and the importance of teachers’ civilising role. *Madrasahs* and school pupils alike are punished if they do not practise bodily self-control in the classroom, fail to sit still and with correct postures, display disobedience or disrespect for their instructors, do not learn their lessons assiduously, and or fail to pick up their instructors’ linguistic styles and manners. The same range of views towards the form of that punishment can be found amongst schoolteachers and *madrasah* staff alike: some consider the threat of physical punishment the only reliable way of maintaining classroom discipline and ensuring that children study diligently, while others vehemently oppose corporal punishment and consider that pupils’ misdemeanours should be dealt with only through verbal chastisement and shaming.

The expansion of *madrasahs* has been possible only because of the growing affluence of some sectors of the Muslim population (for instance, those who have benefited from agricultural developments, or from migration to the Gulf). Unlike non-state schools that rely on pupils’ fees, *madrasahs* are funded by subscriptions collected through networks of traders, landowners and others within the locality or in more distant places, such as Mumbai and Surat. By contrast, SCs and other poor communities cannot readily fund educational

institutions comparable to *madrasahs* as they generally lack networks with the economic and geographical spread of some Muslim ones. Nevertheless, given Muslims' relative poverty, *madrasah* funding is erratic and unpredictable. Most *madrasahs* are poorly resourced—a quality they share with government schools and smaller non-state schools, but not with the exclusive and expensive private schools in towns. A minority of *madrasahs* have extensive premises and hundreds of students, some of whom are boarders. Most, however, have only one or two teachers and a handful of pupils, and they would more usually be termed 'maktab', since they cater for young children, mainly from poor backgrounds. These provide only a very limited curriculum, with Urdu and reciting the *Qur'ān Sharīf* occupying prominent positions. Most cannot offer instruction in Arabic and Farsi language and other advanced Islamic subjects. Whilst *madrasah* teachers prioritise Islamic subjects, however, they are rarely opposed to 'this-worldly education'. Indeed, some *madrasahs* have UP state recognition to teach Hindi and other subjects in the UP curriculum up to Class 5, although even employing Hindi and English teachers is constrained by finances. Usually, *madrasahs* charge no fees for instruction in Urdu and the Islamic curriculum, but they might require parents to purchase books and other resources needed for Hindi, English and 'this-worldly' education—a serious deterrent for poor parents. Few *madrasahs*, though, can contemplate extending and 'modernising' their curricula by introducing subjects such as science and computing, purchasing equipment and teaching materials, and employing well-trained staff on attractive salaries and conditions.

For the most part, *madrasahs* provide poor Muslims with a means of educating their children. Muslim parents' preferences for *madrasahs* over schools rest on their accessibility and low cost, their safe, user-friendly environment and the conscientious teaching, as well as

‘moral education’ from an Islamic perspective (Engineer 2001; Sikand 2001b). Better, they say, a *madrasah* education than no education at all. *Madrasah* pupils, then, are mainly young children who generally have rather short educational careers. Most boys attend for a few years—often irregularly—and discontinue their studies by the age of 10 or so, before becoming functionally literate in Urdu, let alone in Hindi. Girls seem more likely to continue attending until they are about 12, or when they reach puberty.

<Tables 1 and 2 about here>

But *madrasahs* are only a part of the story of Muslim education in Bijnor—and by the secondary stage they are relatively insignificant, mostly providing just out-of-hours Islamic education for children who have not already learned to read Arabic and the Qur’an. Supposedly ‘secular’ schools provide schooling for substantial numbers of Muslims children who live in towns or are accessible to them. The vast majority of secondary-age Muslim children who are still in school are following the UP Board Hindi-medium curriculum. As we noted above, this means that these children must put their Muslim identities in cold storage whilst in school, since this curriculum is shot through with assumptions that the ‘normal’ student is a Hindu, one for who stories of the Hindu gods and Sanskritised vocabulary is familiar. Because secondary school pupils also face pressures to take private tuitions in their school subjects, their overloaded daily routines tend to compromise either Muslim children’s attention to Islamic studies or their school subjects or both.

Where there are sizeable concentrations of Muslims—as is the case in most towns of western UP, including Bijnor—local Muslims have established schools and colleges, not only catering for Muslim children but recruiting fair numbers of (mostly Scheduled Caste) Hindu children as well. There are also some Muslim-run schools in larger villages, although they are

as reliant on having enough people able to pay the fees as are other non-state schools.⁷ In Bijnor town, for instance, Muslim committees have founded several schools. As yet there are no fully English-medium schools in Bijnor under Muslim management, but one has struggled to establish an English-medium stream. The other Muslim schools offer educational facilities on a par with those provided in other schools in the same price bracket. In the Bijnor area, at any rate, these schools are all Hindi-medium and follow the UP curriculum. The three largest Muslim-run institutions all offer Urdu as an optional subject. Thus, they perhaps result rather less in the erasure of their pupils' Muslim identities.

But children who go to ordinary schools—the majority of urban Muslims—are nonetheless being left behind in other ways as well. Our data from Bijnor show that patterns of secondary school-going vary by religion in significant ways. These are the schools that have the most impact on future work and marriage opportunities. Until 1991 almost all such schools in UP (outside the metropolitan areas) were Hindi-medium and either fully- or part-funded by the Government. The major change since 1991 has been the rise in non-State schooling, both English- and Hindi-medium. Until 1991 almost all secondary school pupils in Bijnor town attended Government or Government-aided Hindi-medium schools, of two kinds: relatively well-funded Government and aided schools that continued to class 10 or class 12 (the latter known as Intermediate Colleges) and relatively poorly funded Middle Schools (teaching only to Class 8). Muslim children were under-represented in the former but

⁷ In recent years (when the BJP was in power in UP) they claim to have faced problems of getting recognition from government, or in being allowed to refill posts that have become vacant. Almost all school managers—Hindu or Muslim—told the same kinds of stories, so we do not know if there was a deliberate policy to make life difficult for Muslim-run institutions.

over-represented in the latter. Muslim children remain under-represented in the Government and aided Intermediate Colleges. In the boys' colleges, about 22% of the pupils are Muslim; in the girls' colleges, the figure is about 20% (whereas the population of the catchment area is probably over 50% Muslim). Because there are more boys in total in these schools, this means that there are more Muslim girls in this category of schooling than Muslim boys.

Beyond that, however, different patterns emerge for boys and for girls. In the rapidly-growing English-medium schools, much the most expensive and highest status, Muslim form only 13% of girl pupils, but 20% of boys. Although boys from all religious communities outnumber girls in this form of schooling, for Muslims the disparity is even more marked, with nearly three times as many Muslim boys as Muslim girls getting English-medium schooling.⁸ In private Hindi-medium schools, the second-fastest growing category, there are almost exactly the same number of Muslim boys and Muslim girls. But whereas almost all the girls (87%) are in Muslim-run schools, boys are more widely spread, with 62% in Muslim-run schools, and 36% in those run by Hindus (the remainder are in the one school set up by a Scheduled Caste group).

In the long term, if these trends continue, and Government and aided schools continue to be privatised, charging higher admission and tuition fees, we suspect both that the total numbers of Muslim pupils will not grow as fast as the numbers from other religious communities, and that there will be an increasing separation of pupils. Already, hardly any caste Hindu children attend schools run by Muslims or by SC managers. We predict that this will become the norm, and (rather as in Northern Ireland) schooling will be increasingly

⁸ Two of the five English-medium schools did not provide a breakdown of pupils by religion, so these figures are based on the other three schools, with about half the total pupils in this sector.

segregated. This does not have to be the case: one English-medium school, responding to its competitive situation, has a mixed management committee, and although the principal is Hindu, the school teaches Urdu to those children who want to learn, as part of a clear strategy to recruit more Muslim pupils.

Transitions to adulthood

As with many other aspects of Muslim Indian experiences, the effects of schooling experiences vary dramatically by class, and for urban and rural groups. Muslim children's educational experiences are diversified and fragmented. Urban middle class Muslim children generally have very different experiences of education from rural and poor children, experiences much more similar to those of Hindus from similar backgrounds. These similarities should be borne in mind in what follows.

At the top of the economic scale, and especially for children living in urban areas, the educational options are much wider, and they have a wider range of occupational options. Like some children from moderately wealthy rural backgrounds, they are much more likely to have attended a school than a *madrashah*, and to have continued in formal education at least through secondary schooling, and possibly at degree colleges.

On the face of it, Muslim children from such homes seem the most likely to become successfully integrated into the Indian 'mainstream', but this might be too facile a conclusion. For the urban middle class boys, attending school, gaining the skills and credentials relevant for moving into white-collar employment and maintaining and even improving their life styles are aspirations that they might realistically share with others from similar class backgrounds. Girls from the same families will probably also attend school, though not necessarily for as

long as their brothers. Generally, girls' education in such families is an important currency in the marriage market—although many middle class parents, Muslim and Hindu alike, are increasingly ready to countenance girls' education as a means of ensuring that their daughters can 'stand on their legs' in the event of problems in their adult lives, such as widowhood or divorce.

But there are limitations on the extent to which Muslim boys are able to enter the labour market on equal terms with Hindus of comparable economic standing. Their aim for mainstream incorporation is not always successful: they are trying to enter employment markets that are very problematic, particularly if they look for work in the kinds of jobs for which there are few family or community precedents.⁹ New job-seekers need 'pioneers' who can sponsor young men into jobs, and Muslims often do not have plausible kinship and trust based networks that they can operate in order to enter new kinds of work. They are more likely to follow established links, for example to work in cities in India—for the most part small employers rely primarily on their own kinship networks to recruit—or in the Gulf States (with all the downside of being exploited labour, separated from families and discontented with their civil status).¹⁰

Boys from families who do not have the economic, social and cultural capital necessary to get their children into 'good' schools (whether the handful of good Government or aided schools,

⁹ This point also applies to other historically marginalised communities, like the Scheduled Castes, of course.

¹⁰ Men in such circumstances are often regarded as particularly vulnerable to recruitment to fundamentalist movements, but we have no evidence that this is true for young Muslim men from Bijnor.

or the increasingly expensive private Hindi- or English-medium schools, have little incentive to stay the course to the end of upper primary (class 8) or secondary (class 10 or class 12) schooling, if 'secular' schooling is chosen for them. Whether they leave after five or eight years of schooling, their level of literacy will leave them at distinct disadvantages in dealing with the public sphere of newspapers, Government offices and official notices. Such boys will tend to move into the occupations of their fathers (farming, small businesses, artisanal positions whether 'traditional' like butchery, or 'modern' such as car maintenance). Increasingly, competition is limiting the amount of work they will be able to get in this way, especially if they are a second or higher parity son. Boys in these positions turn to migration to towns and cities, usually following existing migration chains. In the case of boys we know in Bijnor, the growing area of employment is in machine embroidery in Delhi (at least while the Government clamp-down on 'polluting industries' is in abeyance). Such work may be relatively well-paid, and does not depend on book qualifications: but it is not clear for how long young men can continue with such work before their eyes or dexterity deteriorate. Here at least, however, Muslims seem to operate at a relative advantage compared to young SC men.

For *madrakah* pupils, the minority who have only Islamic training find this no bar to gaining admission to one of the larger Islamic seminaries. For them, higher training in Islamic subjects may open the way to posts such as *maulwī* or *imām*, one of the very few ways in which those versed in Islamic subjects can use their education directly and in a respected (though not lucrative) fashion. These positions are not always regarded as second best to white collar secular occupations: we were often told that the ability to memorise so much, and in Arabic, was an accomplishment that was available to few boys, and a certain kudos

attached itself to their achievements. These young men may also have a strong religious commitment; but whether or not this was true, some of these young men seem the least discontented of those we know; and more generally, *madrasahs* represent a positive assertion of Muslim identity that offers an attractive alternative to the ‘secular’ world. But it is important to remember also that not all those with a higher Islamic qualification go onto religious occupations, but may gain additional certificates or become involved in the family enterprises, whether as traders, landlords or artisans. The *maulwī* identity, however, is one that is a public statement of a commitment to Islam, an implicit critique of westernisation, and sometimes of consumerism and modern sector jobs.

Madrasah education is a positive choice for only a tiny minority, however.

Madrasah education does little to enhance pupils’ capacity to deploy their skills in the employment market, to engage with a world in which Hindi and English dominate, or to access non-Muslim networks that might open up routes into a wider range of jobs. Boys who have only four or five years of *madrasah* schooling usually move straight into work on the family farm, employment as agricultural labourers and unskilled manual labourers (rickshaw pullers, head-loaders etc.), or take up apprenticeships for a craft skill, either in the local town or in places such as Delhi, Surat or Kashmir. *Madrasah* education and Urdu have largely become a fallback option for poor Muslims—a remarkable change from the earlier prestige of those learned in Urdu (and Farsi and Arabic), the religious scholars and lawyers, the urban elites and literati.

Most girls in all classes and communities are rarely being educated primarily for employment outside the home (although some parents consider a girl’s education important in case she needs to seek employment later on). Nowadays, however, having some education

is important in the efforts by Muslim parents to arrange 'good' marriages for their daughters because boys are said to want educated brides, even if they are not highly educated themselves (Hasan & Menon 2004; Jeffery et al. 2004). For Muslim girls from poor households, *madrasah* education provides basic knowledge of Islamic practice and belief, and tries to inculcate demure behaviour. Rural Muslim girls' enrolment in formal education in *madrasahs* increased particularly strikingly in the 1990s, indicating parental responsiveness to changes in the accessibility of educational facilities, in the significance of girls' education in the marriage market and, to a much lesser extent, in the employment market.

Rightly, poor Muslim parents do not perceive *madrasah* education as an effective passport to social mobility and secure, prestigious, well-paid employment for their sons. Rightly, too, many Muslim parents also do not believe that *any* kind of formal education can provide an escape from poverty. They consider it futile to spend their scarce resources on educating their children in poor quality schools, because their children will fail to obtain credentials and they themselves lack the social contacts and financial resources necessary to facilitate a successful transition into employment (Jeffery & Jeffery 1997: 179ff.). In other words, it cannot enable Muslim children to overcome established processes of social and economic exclusion that perpetuate inequalities through the generations. On the contrary, it may—we presume unintentionally—be fostering their reinforcement (Ahmad 2000). Madrasahs as fall back position for most : followed by apprenticeships, use their ethnic contacts into craft and artisan work in urban areas. In face of consumerism and lack of access to employment?? —these are likely to be disaffected, those who see the prizes of modernity and money eluding them. Urban employment and changes in villages????

both to continue in formal education after puberty. Only they could imagine futures in which good marriages were arranged for their daughters and employment opportunities opened up for their sons.

Conclusion

Recent public debate in India has tended to exoticise *madrasahs* as primarily 'Islamic' institutions. *Madrasahs* have become crucial ciphers in communal politics. They have often been seen as evidence of Muslims' supposed introversion, conservatism and lack of patriotism. The Hindu Right has vilified them as training grounds for Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists, or as hideouts for the banned SIMI (Students Islamic Movement of India), for Pakistani spies and for arms stashes (Godbole 2001; Kumar 2000b; Sikand 2001a).¹¹ At various times in the past decade or so, several kinds of state intervention have been proposed to regulate and inspect *madrasahs*, to oversee or dictate their curricula, to insist that they are registered with the government, even to close them down. Often, proposals to exercise control over (but not fund) *madrasahs* reflect an anti-democratic political agenda, rather than an (ostensible) concern with educational standards. Government attempts to reform *madrasahs* have been neither credible nor successful.

Moreover, the verbal battles and allegations about *madrasahs* tend to distract attention from the more pressing issue: the widespread and established processes of social and economic exclusion in UP, to which *madrasahs* themselves have been one response. Currently, *madrasahs* in UP are performing an important educational role for Muslims,

¹¹ *Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *Amar Ujāla*, and the RSS weekly *Organiser* have carried numerous news and comment articles on this subject over the past couple of years.

especially for the urban poor and for villagers. Given the other alternatives that are available to such sectors, it is far from clear that *madrasahs* are providing an especially poor educational option. Nevertheless, as *educational* institutions, *madrasahs* certainly are problematic. Most of their pupils will remain illiterate in Hindi, and possibly barely literate even in Urdu. Poor resourcing and their continuing emphasis on Urdu and Islamic subjects suggest limits to extent to which they will be likely to change. In the present state of communal politics, moreover, attempts to reform *madrasahs* may not only be ineffective but also counterproductive.

In any case, Muslim parents generally are willing (in principle at least) to educate their children in schools, provided they are affordable, accessible and non-threatening for their children. Indeed, evidence from around the country indicates that Muslim parents enrol their children in schools, if they can afford to (Hasan & Menon 2004). The expansion of the *madrasah* sector in UP, then, would probably not have been so rapid if enough schools had met the (perfectly reasonable) expectations of Muslim parents. Making a frontal attack on *madrasahs* would probably precipitate a defensive response from what is already an embattled minority. Rather, investing in Muslim-friendly schools—schools in the right places, with sufficient facilities and committed staff, and with the worst excesses of saffronisation removed—would draw in Muslim children. This would probably also reduce the role of *madrasahs* in Muslim children's education to places that teach religious subjects out of school hours (as is already effectively the case amongst the urban middle classes). But any such suggestions will be hard to implement, since the UP state is not in position to do much. As the market takes an increasing role, the problems over getting enough affordable schools are likely to increase. Only where Muslims are numerous and include a relatively affluent

middle class sector will there by provision targeted at their interests. So we should not assume that more schools will be a panacea.

We should not let the madrasah issue distract us from wider considerations about education in UP more broadly, and for Muslims in particular, and the problems with *madrasahs* are only part of the story. Indeed, a fixation with *madrasahs* distracts attention from some serious processes at work in the school sector. Although the direct threats to minority schools have retreated, now that the BJP is not in power either at State or national level, the situation is still bleak. Where there is a critical mass of Muslims, there will be *madrasahs* and private schools; where there is no critical mass, there would probably be nothing at all or only *maktabs*, masquerading as *madrasahs*.

Table 1: Teachers in Secondary Schools in Bijnor Town, 2001-02

Teachers	Hindu	Muslim	SC and Other	Total
<i>Government and Government-Aided High Schools and Inter-Colleges</i>				
Male	90	34	8	132
Female	77	32	9	118
<i>English-medium Schools (including pre-secondary teachers)</i>				
Male	40	3	1	44
Female	108	19	8	135
<i>Hindi-medium Schools (including pre-secondary teachers)</i>				
Muslim-run, Male	0	0	0	0
Muslim-run, Female	20	20	2	42
SC-run, Male	0	0	0	0
SC-run, Female	2	0	4	6
Hindu-run, Male	13	0	3	16
Hindu-run, Female	78	3	5	86
Total: Male	143 (74%)	37 (19%)	12 (6%)	192
Total: Female	285 (74%)	74 (19%)	28 (7%)	387

Source: Authors' survey of secondary schools, October-January, 2001-02. Figures include teachers on permanent salaries as well as those on part-time and/or temporary contracts.

Table 2: Distribution of Muslim pupils by School type, Bijnor town, 2001-02

Pupils	Hindu and SC others	Muslim	Total
Government and Government aided schools			
Girls	2970 (50%)	888 (15%)	2084 (35%)
Boys	3499 (57%)	1249 (20%)	1369 (22%)
Unaided English-medium schools			
Girls	284 (87%)	43 (13%)	327 (100%)
Boys	581 (83%)	123 (17%)	704 (100%)
Unaided Hindi-medium schools			
Muslim-run:	0 (0%)	11 (10%)	104 (90%)
Girls			
Boys	1 (1%)	7 (9%)	74 (90%)
SC-run: Girls	1 (8%)	10 (77%)	2 (15%)
Boys	3 (21%)	9 (64%)	2 (14%)
Hindu-run:	178 (77%)	39 (17%)	14 (6%)
Girls			
Boys	281 (71%)	71 (18%)	43 (11%)

Note: Data collected by authors in 2001. Communal breakdown was not provided of 199 pupils in four Hindi-medium schools, and of 924 pupils in two English-medium schools.

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