Jan-Peter Hartung and Helmut Reifeld (eds). *Islamic Education, Diversity and National Identity: Dini Madaris in India Post-9/11*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. 2005. 331 pages. Indian Rs 380.00. Paperback.

This book deals with a current subject, particularly reflecting the fallout from the 9/11 events in the USA. For years *dini madaris* (religious schools) have contributed to Muslim educational development in India as well as across the border in Pakistan. As a consequence of 9/11, these religious schools have come under the spotlight with respect to their curriculum and whether they are turning out fanatics bent on destabilising the existing political and economic order, domestically as well as internationally. This has become all the more important because in the western world-view these religious schools encourage an extremely narrow frame of mind. Such schools, according to the western world-view, promote violence (i.e., terrorism), have hidden sources of funding, operate secretly, and impact significantly on the political front.

The book consists of 12 essays/articles which may be divided into three segments. The first segment has four articles. These deal largely with the historical evolution of the madrassa system of education in India, from the late Mughal period to the end of British rule in India. These four articles in particular highlight two significant issues that are current today: the first issue relates to the syllabus taught and the second to the reforms that have been undertaken from time to time. It is interesting to note that generally such religious schools in colonial times acted as brakes on social progress and development. It was not only the colonial power that held this view about the religious schools but also certain leaders of the Muslim community. Sultan Mahmood Shah, the third Agha Khan who died in 1957, did not think that such schools could contribute to progress in secular or spiritual matters. In his words: "There are, indeed, a certain number of old-fashioned Maktabs and Madrassas which continue to give parrot-like teaching of the Quran. But even in these places no attempt is made either to improve the morals of the boys or to bring before them the eternal truths of the faith. As a rule, prayers are but rarely repeated, and when said, not one percent of the boys understand what they say or why".[1] So the modern-day view, that these religious schools were only producing *Jihadists*, goes back to colonial times.

The other two prominent articles in the first section deal with education and Sufi establishments in Northern India and with the Shia madaris of Awadh. The Sufi establishments were important centres for the dissemination of religious and religion-based knowledge.

The second part of the book, which also consists of four articles, discusses the role of the religious school not only within a regional context, but also takes into consideration cross-border linkages. The three main articles look at religious education in Bihar, the Deobandi school of Islamic thought, and Islamic education in a Tamil town. The second article is quite interesting as it outlines the evolution of the Deobandi school of thought in India. The focus of this school was to reconstruct Muslim society along more religious lines. Furthermore, the Deobandi movement in India was a national movement, making a substantial contribution towards the religious education of the Muslims.

[1]R. Nathan (1904) *Progress of Education in India, 1897-98 to 1901-02*. London: HMSO.

The article on madrassa education in Bihar is also revealing. The Muslims under Bakhtiyar Khilji conquered Bihar in the 12th century. By the end of the 13th century, primary education was introduced in Maner. One of the more notable and well-known Muslim intellectuals of this time was Shaykh Sharaf-ud-Din Maneri, who wrote in detail about the type of education imparted in Maner, Bihar, from 1295 AD to 1304 AD. With the advent of British rule in India, and in particular after 1857, Muslims in general kept away from the more formal educational system. Here the Hindus took the advantage, alternately securing most of the formal government employment. The interesting part of the article is the result of a grassroots survey about religious schools and the perception held by the people interviewed.

Although the final report of the survey (carried out in 2003) is yet to be written, what emerges from the initial analysis is quite revealing. The respondents felt that the madrassas emphasise that people should live in harmony. The role of madrassas in the spread of literacy was clearly acknowledged, and also that madrassas did not favour communalism.

The third segment of the book reviews current development and is composed of three articles. In particular, the post 9/11 impact on Muslims is discussed with an emphasis on the Indian Madaris. Possibilities of reform are also discussed in another article in this section. The third article, in a category by itself, examines the issue of the natural sciences forming part of the madrassa curriculum.

The book covers the subject of Islamic education with particular reference to the *dini madrassa* system in India. What emerges should interest scholars and other concerned with educational reform. The religious schools, as portrayed in this book, do not conform to the conventional view that they reject change. The madrassas have played a positive role in keeping peace between the Muslims and the Hindus.

Madrassas in Pakistan also perform similar functions. It would be illuminating to have a detailed and objective study of the topic in Pakistan—to measure the impact of the madrassa in the Pakistani society. Such a book could provide a framework on how to proceed in educational reform further. All the articles in the present book are well-researched and provide a wealth of information. A glossary of various Arabic and other terms would have been useful to the lay reader.

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