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Islamic Education System: A Complementary and Cost Effective Channel for Inclusive Elementary Education

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Abstract

The system of elementary education is usually characterized by the presence of multiple channels and avenues which work in parallel, complementary, and, often, in contradictory manners. Various forms of traditional indigenous systems of education (TISE) co-exist as functional avenues for universalization of primary and elementary education (UP&EE). Also, the mainstream educational system imposes a designed homogenization. However, as a matter of fact, hegemonic homogenization errs on two major counts i.e. cultural alienation and cost escalation. For these reasons, in a social system of cultural and ethnic plurality, variety of schooling channels is required. Various forms of TISE like Madarasa, Makatab, Mutt, Temple school, Ashram etc. are deep rooted in the social psyche. These are low-cost practical solutions to the problem of illiteracy in India.

This paper is based upon a discussion of available literature followed by observations gained through field survey and primary data interpretation. It discusses the Islamic system of education and compares it with modern schools vis-à-vis the structure, working and performance on a multitude of variables. It ends with a few suggestions for intervention as well as a model for development of TISE as a low cost alternate channels for inclusive educational environment and universalization of elementary education in the third world, especially India.

Keywords: Economics of Education; Islamic or Madarasa Education, Channels of Education, Primary Education, Model for Participatory Schooling, Third World.

1. Introduction

Islamic education, broadly defined, refers to a system of education that originated and evolved in the region of Middle East Asia under the backdrop of Muslim socio-political domination and Islamic way of life. It consists of a particular system of teaching learning whose center of gravity used to be around mosques or other religious centers.

Islamic education, if narrowly defined, will refer to instructions in Islamic religion and theology, delivered by men and leaders of religious learning. However such a narrow description will distract from vastness and comprehensiveness of Islamic education system, which happened at times a fine compromise, at times a perfect merger and at times a total separation between the instruction and education for this world and for the world hereafter.

Value and Place of Education in Islam

Islam puts the value of education in the highest esteem. It treats education as the most precious pursuit of humankind. Islam prefers the ink of the pen of a learned person to the blood of a martyr. The Prophet of Islam (PBUP) ordered the Muslim brotherhood to obtain education even if they had to face grave difficulties; even if they had to travel to China.

Education is the light. Education is righteousness. Education leads to right conduct. Education prohibits and forbids improper behavior. Only the education can uplift the standards of humanity. Despite such a high place of education in Islam, it is strange that spread of education among its followers is abjectly below the mark.

Islam believes that all knowledge is to God, the Creator. It is the God who creates the existence of the universe. God makes everything. The Holy Quran says: *Khalaaqal insana fii ahsane taqweem* (God created men in better spirits); *Allamal insana maa lam yaalam* (God taught men what men did not know); *Ehdinassiratal mustaqim* (Guide us to the righteous path); *Wa qul-rrobe zidni ilma* And say, O my Lord! exceed me in learnings!); (Al Rrehman, *Khalaaqal insana, allamahu*

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bayan (The Most Beneficent! He hath created men, He hath taught him the descriptions); Wa Siirou fil arde (And gainfully walk on the Earth).

The messenger of God (Peace be upon Him) placed the education and the educand in high esteem. The 'talib-e-ilm' is sacred and his prayers are listened to by God, the Almighty. The prophet (PBUH) ordered followers of Islam to seek knowledge as if a long travel to china for the sake of education becomes necessary. A few 'Hadiths' i.e. the sayings of the prophet (Peace be upon Him), are presented here:

- ♦ “No present or gift of a parent, out of all the gifts and presents of a child is superior to a good liberal education.” (Refer Al-Aas in Tirmidhiy and Bayhagi);
- ♦ “Whoso goes forth in search of knowledge, engages himself in the cause of God until he returns (home).” (Refer Anas in Tirmidhiy and Daud);
- ♦ “The very worst of the worst are the bad learned man and verily the best of the best are the best of the learned man.” (Refer Ahwas Bin Hakim in Ad-Darimiy);
- ♦ “Learn your duties and teach men their duties.” (Refer to Abu Hurayrah in Trimidhiy);
- ♦ “Faith is naked, its dress is piety, its adornment is modesty and its print is knowledge.” (Hakim);
- ♦ “The death of a tribe is easier in comparison to death of a learned.” (Bukhari and Muslim);
- ♦ “Learning of a chapter of knowledge is better for a person than this world and hereafter.” (Ibn Adi, Behaquis) ;
- ♦ “Knowledge is the treasure, its keys are questions. Continue to ask about knowledge because by asking one question four persons are rewarded - Petitioner, Learned, Listener and who loves them.” (Abu Naeem).

Education received the most from the prophet (Peace be upon Him). However despite so much importance attached to education in Islam, the Muslims world over seem to be the least learned at the present. This is quite paradoxical!

Agencies of Education

Islamic system of education evolved from the mosques and the congregations of the believers in quest of truth. In the earliest stage mosques were used as centers of worship and centers of learning. Earlier the 'dars' (instruction), discourses, discussion, and debates were performed in the mosques or the space attached to mosques. Either the Imam or any learned man could initiate and sustain teaching and learning process. The participants used to belong to variable age groups and background. It was open to all.

The process of 'dars' gave birth to 'darsgahs' and madaris which were to become the centers of instruction and teaching learning in various arts and sciences including, inter alia, martial arts, workmanship and worldly knowledge along with religious instruction. The intervening link between darsgahs and madaris were the makatib- the formal places of learning elementary reading, writing and reasoning and textual instruction. Makatib could be compared with modern lower primary and preparatory schools. With the passage of time, Islamic universities called 'Jameah' came into existence as center of higher order learning expertise and specialization in different branches of knowledge of practical and theoretical importance.

The subjects taught varied from religious ones to handicrafts, workmanship, martial arts, philosophy, history, medicine, science, logic etc. structured on a hierarchical basis from simple to complex tasks. Usually the Imam or some local person taught the Holy Quran and religious texts at the level of mosques and makatib. In madaris, the men of words used to impart higher order learning in a variety of subject. At the stage of 'Jameah', only the men of letters well versed in Islamic theology and experts in respective specialization taught the battery of students who were supposed to take charge of future developments.

The following table 1 summarizes the institutional denominations, contents, skills, and expected roles at various levels of teaching and learning in the loosely knit schema of Muslim educational centers and system.

Table 1: Muslim Educational System

Centers	Levels	Target Skills	Content (Subject)	Teachers	Expected Roles
Mosque	Introductory, Basic	Reading, Understanding	Arbic Alphabet Quranic Text, recital Hifz, Quirat	Local Imam	Literacy, Elementary Religious Knowledge, Future Studies
Darsgahs	Do	Do	Do	Imam, Local Teacher	Do
Makatib	Text Learning And Writing	3 Rs And 3 Hs	Language, Religious Texts, Arts, Maths, Behavioral Code	Formal Instructor, Teacher, Imam	Low Level Leadership, Religious Service, Livelihood
Madaris	Higher Order Learning	Versatile Skills, Letters, Wisdom	Theology, Hifz, Quirat, Maths, Logic, Philosophy, Arts, Medicine, Business, etc.	Formal Teachers, Men of Learning	Imam, Qazi, Faquih, Religious Leadership, Interpretation, Higher Leadership etc.
Jameah	Highest Order Learning, Universities	Intellect, Acumen, Wisdom, Global Skills	Integrated Comprehensive, All Subjects	Men of Letters And Men of Eminence	Qazi, Faquih, Interpretation, Religious, Political, and Diplomatic, Leadership etc.

Source: Compilation.

Islamic Schooling in the Contemporary World:

Islamic, schools are among the least-studied educational institutions in today's world, even though millions of children in dozens of countries attend such schools for either part or all of their formal education. In a comparative study of Islamic schooling in Indonesia, North Yemen, Senegal, Morocco, and Egypt, substantial diversity was found in these schools, both across and within societies (Wagner and

Lotfi, 1982; 1983)^{1,2}. In spite of an emphasis on the study of Quranic texts, which provides a similar focus for Islamic schooling across the world, Quranic schools have adapted to a variety of cultural constraints within each society, leading to important differences in Quranic schooling in different countries. For example, Islamic schooling in Indonesia (which, with over 100 million Muslims, is the world's most populous Islamic society, and sends over 20 million children

to Islamic schools each year), still maintains some of Buddhist features, including a long-term apprenticeship and the attribution of mystical powers to the religious teacher (Jones 1983)³. By contrast, most children in North Yemen go through only three to five years of Quranic schooling, and the Quranic teacher, beyond instructing children, often serves as a legal arbiter in his village because he is the single literate person who can read documents to adjudicate legal disputes (Messick 1983)⁴.

Quranic schools can vary dramatically within societies, a function of the last several decades of modernization. In Morocco, where almost 80 percent of all children now attend Quranic schools for some period of time, the traditional schools for older children are disappearing, while the “modernized” Quranic preschools, which sometimes employ teachers with public high school diplomas, are attracting more young children than ever before. One important reason for this increase in attendance is the participation of girls, who were once excluded from such schools. In Senegal, where girls have often attended Quranic schools (in contrast to Yemen), modernization has led to significant changes in pedagogy and curriculum. Rather than emphasizing rote learning of Arabic texts, which are not understood by children who speak only Senegalese languages, many Quranic school teachers are now trying to teach spoken and written Arabic as a second language. Changes such as those found in Morocco and Senegal are taking place in many parts of the Islamic world, as people adapt to changing societal pressures. These changes have also placed Quranic schooling in more direct competition with the government secular school systems in some Muslim societies (e.g. Senegal and Indonesia), since the modernized Quranic schools now provide a culturally and religiously valued alternative to modern schooling (Genest and Santerre 1974⁵; Kuku 1983⁶; Lecourtois 1978⁷; Wagner 1985⁸).

Contemporary Islamic education provides perhaps the most important example of indigenous education in today's world. The Islamic school system, which remained relatively static over many centuries, has now begun to undergo significant changes, which vary from society to society. The point to be emphasized here is that Islamic schools, like other indigenous schools, continue to attract very large numbers of children, many of whom never attend government schools. Such indigenous schools may be seen as an important educational alternative channel, at least in part, because the ‘reach’ of indigenous schooling penetrates more effectively than many government systems into the poorest, most traditional, and least accessible regions of the countries concerned. Indeed, it is precisely due to the difficulty of gaining access to these same populations which has protected the indigenous schools from serious competition by the state.

However, access to indigenous schooling would not be considered to be of much utility if one could assume that such schools provided little relevant instruction of skills thought to be important for national development. As it happens, many indigenous schools provide, as a by-product of religious training, language, cognitive, and social skills very similar to those which are taught in the contemporary secular school system.

Teaching-Learning in Indigenous Schools

The achievement of literacy has been one area of curricular agreement among contemporary educational systems. Often defined simply as the individual's possession of and control

of the skills of reading and writing, literacy nevertheless has been studied by specialists who consider its acquisition to be both an individual and social phenomenon. More recently, literacy has been increasingly studied in its historical and social contexts (Oxnham 1980⁹). The first major collection of work on literacy acquisition in indigenous schools was Goody's (1968)¹⁰ *‘Literacy in Traditional Societies’*, which included a significant section on the Islamic school literacy. Literacy instruction has been shown to be an important product of Quranic schooling, but literacy and other aspects of instruction are known to vary substantially across teachers, schools and societies (Jurmo 1980¹¹; O'Halloran 1979¹²; Scribner and Cole 1981¹³; Spratt and Wagner 1986¹⁴; Wagner and Lotfi 1982¹⁵). Instruction in traditional Quranic schooling has typically included a number of common features of literacy instruction: oral memorization of the Quran; emphasis on correct (that is, accurate and aesthetic) oral recitation; training in the Arabic script; and strict authoritarian instruction. In contrast to the primers used in virtually all modern secular schools, literacy instruction with the Quran as a text provided no opportunity for age-graded vocabulary or grammatical structures. In addition, the illustrations that most primers use to facilitate reading are strictly prohibited for religious reasons in Islamic schools. Thus, it is hardly surprising that learning to read by using the Quran as a primer (as in learning with the Bible) was and is not a trivial task for many children. Nonetheless, both the most traditional and somewhat modernized contemporary Quranic schools also share a number of common basic features with modern secular schools.

In spite of numerous regional differences, Quranic schools can be said to teach children how to: learn in a structured setting; respect the teacher; use language and recite in unison; encode and decode an alphabet; be a moral person and a good citizen; and more recently, do basic arithmetic. Each of these can be found in a great many secular preschool and primary school settings in developing countries. Furthermore, the sacred quality of the text and the strong motivation of children and parents towards Quranic learning may provide an additional stimulus for learning that many secular school systems cannot match.

A five-year longitudinal study, carried out in Morocco, sought to explore the consequences of attendance in Quranic preschools for learning and subsequent public school achievement. One notable finding was that Quranic preschooling was a significant factor in promoting children's literacy during the early grades of public primary school (when compared with children with no preschooling); the influence was most apparent in the rural environment and for children whose native language was Berber (Ezzaki, Spratt and Wagner 1989¹⁶). Also of interest was the fact that the effects of Quranic preschools were statistically equivalent to those of modern European preschools in the same Moroccan communities, a fact not entirely surprising since the ‘modern’ preschools shared a number of common features with the Quranic preschools (e.g. chanting, memorization, recitation and so forth).

There are a number of compelling reasons why such indigenous schooling might have positive effects elsewhere, if proper studies were carried out, and, especially, if Quranic schools were provided with the kind of financial support that would enable them to optimize what they are partially capable of doing already. As noted above, there is every reason to believe that the instruction already provided, and that which could be provided under conditions of increased

support, can transfer to the secular classroom. Evidence from educational psychology supports strongly the notion that background information, basic learning and language skills, and social skills in the classroom are the building blocks upon which much of subsequent schooling is based. If these skills are obtained prior to or along with secular school learning, there should be substantial transfer even if some of the content (e.g. the nature of the text studied, the Quran) is different from the classroom texts.

Another important question is the relationship between levels of literacy and other skills learned, and the uses to which the skills are or may be put. In this respect, two key questions can be asked. First, can "religious literacy" --that literacy learned in religious institutions on one or more religious texts (e.g. the Quran), be transferred in a meaningful way to secular societal tasks? There is some evidence that it can be in the Christian (Reder and Green 1983¹⁷), Jewish and Islamic (Jones 1983¹⁸; Messick 1983¹⁹; Wagner *et al.* 1986²⁰) traditions, although more evidence surely needs to be gathered. In perhaps the best-documented study of its kind, Islamic literates in prerevolutionary Iran were found to be at a considerable advantage in newly developing trade between rural and urban communities in Iran. As the only literates in the community, these religiously trained tradesmen (tajers) became a select and wealthy group of merchants able to mediate transactions between the traditional rural communities and the modern urban sector (Street, 1984²¹).

With respect to Islamic schooling, in particular, a second relevant question concerns the use of Arabic literacy in Muslim societies where Arabic is not widely spoken or considered to be a national language. Literacy acquisition in Arabic is certainly more difficult for non-native speakers (Wagner *et al.* 1989)²², and yet there remains considerable skepticism about the possibility of teaching literacy skills in each child's vernacular tongue on a large scale basis (Heyneman 1980²³). In contrast to the typical case of imposing a European language on a multilingual traditional society, Arabic literacy has the advantage of being already firmly embedded in the cultural fabric of societies with significant Muslim populations, such as in the cases of West African countries.

The choice of the national language of literacy and of public school instruction remains a political one, and one that often embodies considerable cultural and individual sensitivities (Rawley 1971)²⁴. This is so precisely because indigenous schools are, with few exceptions, at odds with, or at least in friendly competition with, public educational institutions. In the case of Senegal, for example, the accepted national languages for schooling are French and African languages. Arabic, the written language of many Senegalese who learned to read and write in Islamic schools, has not been politically acceptable to present and prior governments and, therefore, has not been accepted in schools or by the government as a language or literacy resource. While there appears to be some increased appreciation of Islamic schooling, state recognition to Arabic literacy would require a political decision of considerable importance.

While such questions cause difficulties in policy planning for literacy, it must be reiterated that, for a large number of children in numerous countries, literacy skills are acquired in indigenous schools before, simultaneously with, or in lieu of instruction in government run schools. Rather than viewing indigenous education and indigenous literacy as impediments to development policies, national planners would do well to consider such literacy as resource.

"The reality is that, for a real and substantial portion of the world's children, literacy skills are acquired in indigenous schools! And, if literacy is thought to be a central development goal, then the question ought not to be "Should indigenous literacy count?" but rather, "How can we reinforce useful learning contexts already in place, and build them into a long-term plan for human resource development?" While sensitive political questions often arise with respect to indigenous and religious schooling, it is important not to ignore the potential benefits for learning that might accrue to a policy of comprehensive educational inclusion" (Wagner, 1989)²⁵.

Structure and Working of Madaris and Makatib

Organizational structure of Muslim indigenous schools is conventionally focused towards religious instruction, training, and survival skills. Madaris are also organized according to the context and curriculum along ideological divisions. The practical organization and administrative structure of madaris revolves around the numerical strength and level of the courses taught. At a very elementary and low-level, the single teacher schools may cater to the minimum needs and requirements of Muslims to impart basic religious knowledge to children. Multiple teacher madaris may have many 'mudarrisin' lead by a 'sadar mudarris' i.e. the head teacher. Female organizers and female teachers ('ustani') could be found working at a comprehensive level, giving meaning to girls' education and female empowerment.

Economic base of madaris comprises of social support and cooperation in many forms. It revolves around the degree of cooperation and quantum of community resource base. Madaris have to face the crisis of survival here and there; now and then. Reliable and dependable income, income source, and endowments are rarely observed. A lot of valuable time of mudrrisin and tulba usually gets consumed by resource mobilization. They mobilize financial, material and other resources in cash and kind. Seasonal and temporary income flows further aggravate the fluctuation and vulnerability of madaris. Madaris take token and nominal fees. Contribution from students' families remains negligible. The providers and teachers bear the brunt of fiscal stress. Students, on the other hand, bear extremely low costs. MIS, therefore, seem to provide basic literacy to the students, at great pains, irrespective of students' economic status and contribution.

Curricular and co-curricular activities can be categorized into religious and others. Holy texts, theology, and tradition constitute their main syllabi. Other languages, like English, Hindi, Persian etc. and modern subjects like mathematics and sciences form a secondary layer of curricula. Sports, fares, congregations, debates, quizzes, visits to sacred places and pilgrimage etc. constitute set of extracurricular activities. Almost all MIS teach their students in mother tongue.

Usually the MIS emphasize some vitally important particular skills like recital of holy texts, recall, memorization (hifz), rhythmic recital (quirat), poetry (naat, hamd, sana, nazm, marsia etc.), logic, art of public speaking, debate, comprehension, interpretation, inferences, leadership (imatat and amatat) along professional and vocational skills besides reading and writing.

MIS follow an authoritative mode of teaching. Rote learning dominates, followed by illustrations and examples from history and 'hikmat' and 'hikayat'. Indoctrination, rather than analysis, is the main technique. Analytical method

comes into practice while teaching comparative and modern subjects. Use of teaching aids does not find much practice.

The most amicable teacher-taught relations and observance of strict discipline are normal features of madaris. Disobedience cannot be tolerated. Physical punishment comes within the zone of acceptance. However, the students see ardent well-wishers in their teachers. That is why the students realize the beneficial value of strict disciplinary order, and negativism never does emerge there. Rather, the punishment works as concrete reinforcement mechanism.

Madaris keep annual working schedule and learning hours flexibly and conveniently determined as per local requirements. They have different and varied schedules. Some schools have morning as well as evening shifts of shorter duration, some have morning session for regular students and afternoon session for other students including those coming after attending a modern school, while some have single shift of longer duration. Exact clock hours do not form primary consideration. Seasonal variations also figure in. MIS follow the Islamic calendar. They observe holiday on Muslim festivals and national days. The Islamic month 'Ramadan' constitutes long vacation.

System of examination and grade up gradation depend to a large extent on the actual learning outcome irrespective of calendar duration, particularly at lower levels. MIS thereby give primary concern to learning performance. They save the time of students. If a child can satisfy the teacher of its achievement, it will be promoted to next lesson grade. Evaluation generally remains personal and individualistic. Total performance of students gets evaluated by their teachers on a continuous basis rather than the undue emphasis on annual examination of certain skills.

TISs are far cheaper and economic comparative to MSE. These schools are either significantly far better or equally good performers pertaining to enrolment, pass-out, and performance scales.

Relevance and Limitations of TISE

Findings of the present study bring into light the utility and relevance of TISs as alternatives to the modern system of schooling –both public and private. The study established that, TISs are far cheaper in terms of cost of schooling. TIS are cheaper to students. TIS are cost-wise cheaper and institutionally affordable. TIS are income-wise resource saving and prudent. TIS are cheaper on account of almost all cost variables, both the private cost variables and institutional cost variables.

TISs are cost-effective in terms of per capita private, institutional and total cost. TISs work in most stressful condition. They have somehow to meet the both ends. They depend upon civil society and local- community for resources. They beg for money and other means. They have extreme fluctuation of resource flow. TISs are found to work in very dilapidated conditions, and situations, beyond imagination. Most of them lacked minimum infrastructure like space, covered space, dari-pattis, blackboards etc. Even, lack of textbooks was frequently observed. On occasions, single-individual-based TISs were observed. The zeal and missionary spirit of that kind of persons is, immensely, needed by the society.

Despite all odds and extremes, TISs have survived and are working on a noticeable scale. They are significantly and silently helping the cause of education and literacy for all, especially for the downtrodden, the neglected and the poor. TISs do significantly impart education to those, who are on the margin and further getting marginalized. TISs

encompass those people, who are for whatever reason, out of the educational stream. TISs provide options to the option less and alternatives to those tired of the monotony, apathy, and insensitivity of formalized structures of official educational machinery. TISs were found providing a battery of services to their locality and their brethren. They taught more skills relative to MSs. In addition to three Rs, TISs usually taught the art of oration or public speaking, the art of 'quirat' or 'path', i. e. recital of Holy texts, and some vocational skill like calligraphy, embroidery etc. They are practical and practice oriented.

TISs have multiple aims and goals of schooling e.g. functional literacy, training of three Rs, preparations for life, religious knowledge, occupational orientation etc. TISs are more concerned about local factors. Their academic calendar takes notice of local requirements. School timings are flexible enough to leave time for family work and other jobs. Students have the autonomy of leave. School time, sometimes, is the task- determined, not clock determined. When a student attends both a TIS and an MS, the former adjusts its time and schedule to cause minimum inconvenience to pupils.

Period or years of stay of pupils in school are also flexible and task determined? Number of years spent in school is not meaningful. What a pupil learns is of practical significance. If a child can learn grade-specific skills in less than the prescribed time her act is commended. Nor the delayed-learners are shown out-way. Special efforts for girls' literacy are very important contribution of TIS. Female education is most depressed in culture-specific groups. TIS have potential to fill the gap. Here the intention is not to show the MS in low light or devalue them or to provide critique of MS. The point, however, is the comparable performance of TIS at costs far below, even fractional, costs of MS. TIS are more affordable to poor and destitute.

Traditional indigenous schools are alleged to be backward looking, sectarian and imparting an education not worth the name. But the allegations are not to be taken at face value. This study, however, found evidence of attitudinal change, flexibility, and modernity in the incidence of teaching of additional languages e.g. Hindi, English etc. and additional modern subjects like science, mathematics etc. Their use of modern teaching aids, acceptance of the official curriculum and modern subject teachers, subject to availability, is another indication of change and continuity.

Intervention Variables

Education is a merit good. It confers both private and social benefits. Primary schooling is a public good. It is public good because it creates social and economic infrastructure. Like physical infrastructure, primary education yields sum total of benefits more than the costs. Returns to primary schooling are comparable to any sound social investment in institutional structures.

The study found the output, performance and contribution of TISE to literacy significantly comparable to MSE, at far lower social costs of schooling. Modern schooling has pitfalls of its own. Despite abundant availability of primary schools, both government and private, large and significant literacy gaps and differentials across socio-economic demographic strata are indicators of something missing. System of official schools has failed to bring about desired results. They have their own limitations, internal and external dynamics, and a bureaucratic mindset, which puts the employee at the center and makes institutional goals peripheral, resulting in goal displacement.

There seems to be a contradiction between traditional and modern schools. The former are empty purse missionaries while the later are bulging bellies, lethargic and incompetent, and discriminatory as well. The differences of purse, buildings and pedagogical material along with quality of teachers get obliterated, when output of the two is compared. TIS have the potential and capability of becoming alternatives to official and commercial schooling. TISs face extreme and absolute resource poverty. On any inventory of educational inputs, TIS would be at the bottom. Cost index of TIS would be invariably low. The cases of closing and restarts can frequently be found. The incidence of TIS is crisis-ridden and limited. Distribution of TIS is agglomerated. If TISE could be formally assimilated and absorbed into the mainstream educational system, the literacy-map of India will certainly go through drastic changes.

TISs provide options and alternatives to mainstream channels. The efficiency and adequacy of indigenous schools will depend upon many intervening variables and require public intervention on multiple aspects. The first intervention is the *objective realization*, recognition, and acceptance of the educational value of TISs, in terms of their contribution to literacy and transmission of established socio-cultural- ethnic value-system at minimum costs. TISs spring up from the bottom. TIS are volunteer efforts. TISs are committed purposive instruments. TISs are created and sustained by the civil society. This form of social action needs motivation and moral support of society at large. A positive thinking on the role of TISs is urgently required.

A well-designed *legal status and legal personality of TISs* will provide a level playing field of legal recognition of TIS as formal channels of schooling. It would provide security and substance on a continuing basis. It will enhance the image and status of TIS in public eyes. Recognition of the courses, content and certificates of TIS is urgently required. Workable grade equivalence may be developed to rank and recognize levels of class or grade. Eligibility for public assistance entitlements may be indexed with legal characterization of TIS. However, the law should be for facilitation. Law must not be an obstacle. Prompt registration and provision of assistance package be essentials of legal process. *Legal equivalence of TISs*, then, should be converted into *public help entitlements*. TISs, almost as a whole, face the crisis of survival and growth mainly due to scarcity of financial and material resources. TIS must be provided both sorts of assistance on a continuous basis. It must be ensured that one-time grants for buildings, campus, playground and other physical infrastructure are provided on a 'token' matching basis, while the periodic maintenance grants mechanism is, also, evolved. Support in the form of teaching aids etc. may be provided at periodic intervals. The quantum and quality of assistance from the public exchequer should be indexed with the age, enrollment, and grade. Audit, at least, relating to public assistance part also can be made mandatory.

The form of assistance must be well defined in detail. It must be direct. It must avoid intermediaries. It must reach the target. Assistance must not be paralyzing, as in the case of government schools. It must be efficient, effective, penetrating and productive. The form, content, and procedural requirement must be made widely known. Free and adequate flow of information will avoid unnecessary costs and corruption. TISs should be provided equivalence with government schools in terms of eligibility for official scheme entitlements. A level playing field should be made

available to TISs along with MSs. All the official schemes should be made available to TISs, *sui-generis*. Temporal simultaneity of public intervention will provide comparable quality outcomes.

Horizontal, as well as vertical parity between TIS and MS, is essential in terms of distribution of official assistance. Generally, the curriculum adopted in TIS is traditionally determined, culturally dictated and resource-wise quantified. It lacks some initial components of modernity, like progressive-materialistic orientation, sense of competition and technological application etc. Sometimes much sectarianism may be found. Hence, a balanced curricular mix involving all aspects-traditional as well as modern is essential, to guard against isolationist sectarianism and promote mosaic way of integrative organic existence. The need is to expand the social base, coverage spectrum and develop the inclusiveness of TISs. The syllabi may be framed according.

External checks and balances will provide a control mechanism to maintain standards of teaching- learning as well as financial propriety and prudence. The system of checks may be interventionist, but it must not interfere with the working of TIS. *Functional autonomy* is the very characteristic of TIS as an optional channel at low cost. Checks must be periodic and regular with defined purpose and contents with respect to variables under scrutiny. External checks must be limited to examination of modern subject learning outcome and utilization of public assistance in any form. However, it must not result in institutionalization of corruption in the 'not corrupt' centers of learning.

Urgently needed intervention which may provide concrete results is introduction of an emergency measure to alleviate and mitigate the resource scarcity of TISs. There was found an extremely low level of pedagogical inputs, and physical, material, and financial resources. Even, in many instances, TISs are found on the verge of closure and collapse. Most of them would have collapsed but for the morale and motivation of organizers and zeal of local efforts.

The emergency intervention suggested is a large-scale operational project in the form of say 'operation blackboard' in existence with significantly positive results in government schools. TISs should be provided with, at least, a minimum covered area if already they do not have the same. Minimum space be ensured. And some minimum measure of furniture, teaching aids, blackboard, charts, tables etc. should be made available to all TISs. A textbook scheme may also be introduced.

As far as teachers are concerned TIS have a low-paid but fairly highly motivated multiple functionary teachers. Instead of replacing them and providing new official teachers, it may be better if quality up-gradation of existing teachers is undertaken. Short-term teachers' training camps, teachers' manuals and modules, orientation programs etc. are feasible and desirable necessity.

Governments may adopt or sponsor some teachers in terms of financial assistance at local wages and salary levels of TISs. Large-scale frequent interaction between teachers of TISs and MSs is necessary for attitudinal change, behavioral modification and dissemination of information from one to another stream. It is advised that instead of segregated compartmentalization, TISs and MSs should be viewed as *different colors of the single ray of light*. There must be found common meeting points for the shared purpose of universal education. A commission consisting of eminent persons from all walks of life and those belonging to TISs

and MSs be formed to suggest possible and feasible measures for utilization of TIS as optional channels for primary schooling. A word of caution must be added in the last. Education policy in Indian case has become a political implement. Instead of politicizing and criticizing we should look for what is positive and progressive in TISs, and what can be taken from TISs. TISs can become effective and efficient instruments to provide enrollment, retention and quality education to each and every child of the country.

Participatory Community Support for UP&EE

In the system of central planning, we are used to, only the resources required from the government or public sector agencies are taken into account. For an activity like education, there are considerable costs borne by the children and parents. The Constitution has directed that education for children in primary and upper primary levels of education should be free. However, the resources of a developing country like India are scarce and scarcely available to primary education. *In view of the paucity of resources, it may be pragmatic to switch over to tradition and traditional system of education to make the society of individuals bear the cost of schooling. TISE provide a paradigmatic shift from the concept of exclusive responsibility of the government for education to shared responsibility between the government and the community. This would not be difficult, keeping in view the tradition in India of community support to education from ancient times. This will also be consistent with the general approach of decentralization, community involvement, and people's participation.*

Implications for India and the Third World

Modern educational system represents a monolithic structure of government schools, strangely enough, following the same set of contents, curriculum, and teaching methodology. More strangely it provides for the variety in the name of private market and private enterprise. A plethora of private schools functions across the country. Some of them work for the cause of education and enlightenment, while most of them pursue commercial interest as much as possible, even stretching the limits of tolerance and entering zone of exploitation. Public schools present a whole new set of elite domination and enclavization in education. With liberalization, privatization and globalization a new structure of schools called 'globally competitive international schools' is capturing the space, not only perpetuating the inequity and inequality, but also formalizing, legalizing and stabilizing the forms of injustice. The elite education, the middle-class education, the lower class schools and the lowest traditional shades of schooling provide a hierarchy of options and opportunity residing in the economy. The enclaves of elite class education pose a real threat to the national outlook and future shape of destiny. They strike at the roots of the very concept of UPE by making the low end literacy subordinate to their form of schooling.

India and other third world countries suffer from these inefficiencies, inadequacies, infirmities and structural shortcomings. They have the problems of management and administration. They have conceptual ambiguity. They look toward and get attracted to the homogenizing and hegemonic west, overlooking their own treasure of the best solutions over here. For the universalization of primary education, resource constraint is a critical issue. Social cooperation and mass participation are also big issues. To ensure UPE a multifrontal approach involving a multitude of

options becomes a necessity. TISE present such an option with significant realization of indigenous literacy opportunity. Traditional literacy centers can do wonders with proportionate realization of indigenous literacy, with a little concerted effort on the part of the state, and with a marginal contribution of resources from the exchequer, on an incrementally wider space.

The ideology and political prejudices should not substitute rationality and logic emphasizing equity and equality in the country. No doubt, there remains a problem of 'majority vs. minority' which overshadows the reality. Traditional schools at primary level of any denomination, be it Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jain or Buddhist, do not pose communalism. Rather they teach humanism and provide literacy of indigenous quality. The state for the cause of equality and equity must ensure UPE through all possible channels including, of course, the TISE.

Viewed from a *subaltern perspective*, TISE have the potential of replacement and substitution of modern schools. As the prevalence, as well as the incidence of traditional schools, is widespread and deeply penetrated into the social and physical space, they provide an existing infrastructure just to be hauled up, geared up and speeded up for the purpose of UPE in developing world. Cost wise, too, TISE are better substitutes. Literacy skills are equally competent. In terms of social utility, they are more purposive. It is the ideology that runs away from convergence. An upper ceiling on contents for religious-cultural-sectional indoctrination and a floor prescription for minimum levels of learning in skills of modern relevance at primary level along with legal equivalence of status and resource entitlement will eventually bring education for all ensuring UPE at affordable low economic burden on the society and yield more than proportionate economic benefits, advantages and returns to the stakeholders including the pupils, the society and the state.

A Model for Developing TISE as Viable Alternatives

Education for all requires creation of new structures, premises, buildings and facilities on a large scale involving huge costs in terms of economic and social resources. Instead of new structures the existing infrastructure of TISE can purposively be developed and utilized for UPE. A few model suggestions are attempted here.

Exploration: A comprehensive status analysis of the prevalence, incidence, penetration, process and procedures along income-expenditure estimates is the primary requirement. Situation of TISE vis-à-vis MSE needs be explored in detail and results be used accordingly. TISE be precisely defined and categorized.

Legal Equivalence: Traditional schools need be recognized by the state. Their status must be ascertained. Provision should be made for legal equivalence of TISE with MSE for different courses at different levels of grade or class i.e. primary, junior, metric and so on. Legal equivalence must be comprehensive. It should lead to legal entitlements at parity with government schools allowing unrestricted exchange of pupils.

Entitlements: Traditional schools need be provided financial and physical entitlements based on principled policy prescriptions. Accordingly there should be:

- a. Sharing of the financial burden on a pro rata basis covering

- 1) Cost of teachers (traditional subjects);
- 2) Cost of maintenance; and
- 3) Input cost i.e. office, library, laboratory, furniture etc.
- b. Incentives to
 - 1) Organizers and providers: incentive honorarium, honor etc.
 - 2) Teachers: incentive wages, knowledge up-gradation, orientation, refresher courses etc.
 - 3) Pupils: midday meal, uniform, books, stationery etc.
- c. Physical inputs
 - 1) Teachers to teach modern subjects like national language, science, mathematics, computer etc.
 - 2) Teaching aids, equipment, implants etc.
 - 3) Physical infrastructure like land, building etc.

Linkages: To ensure efficiency and efficacy of TISE forward, backward and sideways linkages are necessary. Linkages will facilitate inclusion and interaction.

- a. Linkages within the educational system - inter-system and intra-system.
- b. Linkages with higher order schools of any denomination.
- c. Linkages with vocational agencies, training centers, business etc.
- d. Linkages with NGOs, SHGs, Panchayati Raj institutions etc.

Curriculum: Contents of curriculum of TISE are sensitive concepts. A Judicious and acceptable balance of curriculum

mix is vitally important, whereby modern and traditional subjects receive due attention within the constraints of

- a. A ceiling on the maximum of traditional subjects, skills, and content inputs.
- b. A minimum floor on minimum levels of learning and skills in non-traditional modern subjects like national language, mathematics, science, social science, computer literacy etc. and
- c. A zone of autonomy non-violating the above limits.

Control and Supervision: Control of traditional schools be cooperative and non-offensive, aimed at ensuring quality output and proper functional performance. It should involve all stakeholders like society, teachers, institution, students and state. Instead of policing or ‘big brother is watching’ control should be

- a. Participatory performance appraisal.
- b. Facilitator of change.
- c. In the form of stakeholder audit.
- d. Providing functional autonomy.

The following table 2 summarizes the important variables and suggested interventions for development of traditional indigenous systems of schooling (TISE) into an institutionalized form of cost effective and inclusive educational agency providing viable complementary avenues and alternate channels of schooling, especially at lower order of learning and literacy to all.

Table 2: Intervention Variables for Development of TISE

Equivalence	Entitlements	Linkages	Curriculum	Control
Institution	Financial assistance	Higher schools	Ceiling for specific course	Facilitator of change
Course	Teachers modern/traditional	Parallel schools	Floor for general course	Stake-holder audit
Class	Building	Vocational agencies	Zone of autonomy	Autonomy
Grade	Maintenance	Local agencies	Vocational	Grass root involvement
Certificates	Inputs books, aids, etc.	NGOs, SHOs.	Specialization	Social acceptance
Personnel	Honorarium and/or Incentives to organizers, teachers, pupils.	Panchayati Raj Institutions.	Teaching methodology	Participatory performance appraisal
Compulsory entitlement	Public scheme entitlement	Multiple exchange	Teacher training	Internal reforms

Conclusion

The discussion presented an overview of parallel systems and channels of education as complementary and alternative avenues for universalization of elementary education in multicultural societies like India and other third world countries. Islamic system of education was discussed in detail, along with the structure, performance and importance of all other traditional forms of schooling. Inter-system analysis was done to assess the comparative efficiency, relevance and utility of the TISE and modern system of education (MSE). It ended with a logical argument in terms of TISE being cost-efficient and more suitable to the needs of some cultural minorities and communities.

Abbreviations

- MS(s): Modern/Mainstream School(s);
- MSE: Modern/Mainstream System of Schooling;
- TIS(s): Traditional Indigenous School(s);
- TISE: Traditional Indigenous System(s) of Schooling;

UP&EE: Universalization of Primary and Elementary Education.

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