

Review of Madrasa Education in India in the Light of NEP 2020

Bhism Dev Singh¹, Prof. Yogendra Panday²

¹Research Scholar, ²Professor

Department of Education, Banaras Hindu University

Abstract

The significance of madrasa education in India is vital amid the broader discussion on minority rights, educational opportunities, culture maintenance, and social justice. In several regions of the country, madrasas have been continuing to offer free or low-cost education to children from poor economic and social backgrounds while at the same time maintaining religious and linguistic culture in Muslim communities (Husain et al., 2024; Khatua et al., 2026). It has become imperative to reconsider the value of madrasa education since the enactment of the National Education Policy 2020 as the policy focuses on issues such as equality in education, literacy and numeracy, multilingualism, curriculum flexibility, vocational experience, teacher training, and digital learning. In this research paper, madrasa education in India is critically reviewed in the context of NEP 2020 based on a qualitative review of policy documents, scholarly literature, and institutional texts. This research paper contends that although NEP 2020 does not offer an alternative operational scheme for madrasas, its principles provide a strong normative foundation for reform when understood in terms of constitutional guarantees, inclusion in education, and diversity of institutions (Ministry of Education, 2020; NCERT, 2017.; Press Information Bureau, 2020). The review indicates that no reform can be achieved through mere curricular change and administrative standardization, but madrasa education needs a balanced approach to modernization where religious identity is maintained along with the expansion of modern subjects and certification, professional development of teachers, digital infrastructure, and university education (Khatua et al., 2026).

Keywords: Madrasa education, NEP 2020, minority education, curriculum reform, inclusion, India

1. Introduction

Educational tradition at madrasa is one of the most ancient and persistent institutional educational systems of the Indian subcontinent. Traditionally, the madrasas did not only play a role of institutions for training in religious matters but also served as centers for teaching language, logic, philosophy, law, and intellectual culture in Islamic scholar community (Basheer, 2023; Khatua et al., 2026). However, in modern India, the phenomenon of madrasa education is considered in a limited public context where people see it either as a symbol of religious conservatism or modernization deficit (Akhtar, 2021; Husain et al., 2024). Diversity is key to any scholarly investigation. There are madrasas that continue focusing on Islamic teachings and religion, while others have subjects like Hindi, English, mathematics, sciences, social sciences, and computer education as well (Kayoom & Hassan, 2024; Husain et al., 2024). The governing mechanisms in these institutions vary too. Some are governed by communities, while others

belong to the state madrasa boards, and there are others that remain independent religious organizations having little to do with conventional schools (Khatua et al., 2026). This clearly indicates that there is no single institution of madrasa education in India; it exists in a variety of forms.

However, the educational value of madrasas needs to be understood with respect to the social position of the learners attending them. Many madrasa learners belong to poor families or families that lack education due to limited availability or social accessibility of quality education within mainstream education system (NCERT, 2017; Husain et al., 2024). In many cases, the madrasas serve not only as religious centers but also as inexpensive and reliable sources of education. However, there are worries about the shortcomings of infrastructure facilities, inadequate teacher preparation, limited diversification in the curriculum, weak connection with mainstream certification systems, and limited avenues of accessing higher education and employment opportunities (Husain et al., 2024; IOSR, 2023).

issues assume even greater importance in light of the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020. The NEP 2020 offers an innovative vision of the country, which aims to provide equitable, inclusive, multidisciplinary, flexible, and foundation-based education that reflects constitutional values and the requirements of socioeconomically disadvantaged communities (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2024). Even though the policy does not include a special chapter on madrasa education, its ideas are highly pertinent to the issues of minority education, curriculum inclusion, language policy, teacher training, and educational mobility (Ministry of Education, 2020; NCERT, 2017).

In this context, the present paper is a critique of madrasa education in India in relation to NEP 2020. The main thesis of the paper is that NEP 2020 provides a legitimate framework for reform of madrasa education, but not if madrasas are reformed by way of coercion but by consultation, constitutional awareness, consistency in pedagogy and financial assistance. This becomes more crucial in a democratic society characterized by plurality.

2. Aims & Objectives of the Study

Aims & Objectives of the research paper:

- To explore the role of madrasa education in India in history as well as presently
- To highlight the main elements of NEP 2020 pertaining to madrasa education
- To discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with integrating madrasa education within NEP 2020
- To develop a policy-sensitive approach towards reforming madrasa education

3. Research Questions

Questions addressed by this study include:

- What is the current importance of madrasa education in India
- Which of the principles set forth in NEP 2020 can be used in evaluating madrasa education

- What are the problems in modernizing madrasa education in today's policy environment
- How can madrasa education be reformed without compromising minority rights and culture

4. Review of Literature

The extant literature on the education in madrasas in India may be classified broadly into four streams. First, there is a body of literature dealing with the history of development of madrasas. As revealed by the works of (Basheer 2023; Akhtar 2021; and Khatua et al. 2026). The education in madrasas developed as an enduring intellectual tradition which was then modified differently according to colonial and postcolonial educational systems.

The second set of literature focuses on madrasa education from the angle of social access and minority issues in education. The researchers Husain et al. (2024) state that madrasa students in Bihar are socially disadvantaged, and the issue is related to poor infrastructure, poor access to the Internet, and minimal educational connections. The issue of social access, socio-economic background, and educational marginalization is raised by the researchers IOSR (2023). From the analysis of the two studies, it can be concluded that madrasa education needs to be considered not only from theological perspectives, but also from those of inequality.

The third theme is concerned with modernization and the issue of reforming the curriculum. The research paper on the Board of Madrasa Education in Uttar Pradesh highlights the issues of curriculum differences and the uneven inclusion of modern subjects in the madrasas (Status of the Curriculum of Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasa Education, 2024. & Khatua et al. 2026). It is pointed out that both state affiliation and the inclusion of modern subjects have changed the madrasa institution, but reforms have been unsuccessful due to lack of funding, preparation of the teaching staff, and outdated approaches.

The fourth thread is particularly pertinent to the topic at hand and deals with the implications of NEP 2020 on educational reform. According to the official government policy documents, NEP 2020 aims to achieve equity and inclusion, foundational learning, multilingualism, flexibility, and holistic development at all levels of education (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2024). Nevertheless, the current literature lacks an adequate and consolidated discussion of madrasa education in the light of NEP 2020. Although there are studies focusing on the modernization and integration aspects of madrasas, there is no consolidated analysis connecting minority institutional autonomy with educational restructuring in the context of NEP (Khatua et al., 2026; IJNRD, 2025). The current paper attempts to fill the identified gap through a structured review of madrasa education in India with respect to NEP 2020.

5. Methodology

The current study makes use of qualitative review methodology. The review is based on secondary data of official policy documents, institutional publications, and secondary scholarly articles on madrasa education, minority rights, access, curriculum, and educational reforms in India (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2024; Husain et al., 2024). Because the objective

of this paper is to provide an interpretation and analysis rather than measure empirically, a review approach is more appropriate in order to synthesize the debates on madrasa education reforms.

Thematic analysis on six related dimensions, which include access, curriculum, language, pedagogy, teacher training, and institutional mobility, is utilized in the current paper. This helps in drawing the connection between normative aspects of NEP 2020 and the structural issues in the madrasa system (NCERT, 2017; IOSR, 2023; Khatua et al., 2026).

6. Discussion & Findings

6.1 Madrasa Education in India

The system of madrasa education in India has gone through various historical phases and hence cannot be understood in terms of one type of institution alone. Historical literature presents madrasas as key centers for religious and intellectual education, but current academic literature highlights how the structure of madrasas is very diverse across different states and communities (Basheer, 2023; JETIR, 2021; Khatua et al., 2026). Some madrasas offer exclusively traditional Islamic disciplines, while others function as dual institutions where religious instruction takes place alongside contemporary school subjects (Status of the Curriculum of Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasa Education, 2017; Husain et al., 2024).

This diversity is often ignored in discussions on policies. If madrasas are considered to be uniform in their nature, then efforts at their reform become inefficient and sometimes even impossible. In reality, there are informal madrasa-type institutions called maktabas, there are state board-type institutions, there are independent seminaries, there are girls' madrasas, there are also madrasas that are defined by the specifics of the region, the language, and the history of its community (Khatua et al., 2026; IJFMR, 2024).

Social implications of madrasa education also hold a lot of significance. The experience of Bihar and other areas suggests that many students enrolled in madrasas hail from marginalized families and join the institution due to its cost-effectiveness, proximity, familiarity of culture, and lack of alternatives in formal schools (Husain et al., 2024; IOSR, 2023). As such, the study of madrasa education can no longer be limited to just religion.

6.2 NEP 2020 and Its Relevance

The NEP 2020 aims at bringing about transformation in education in India by ensuring equal access, learning foundations, multidisciplinary education, multilingual education, vocational exposure, teaching quality, and integration of technology (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2024). The NEP 2020 places special importance on socioeconomically disadvantaged communities and emphasizes that education should offer opportunities to people and not deprive them of opportunities (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). This particular tenet of NEP is very significant for madrasa education since a large number of madrasa students belong to disadvantaged communities (NCERT, 2017; Husain et al., 2024).

The policy also rejects rigid boundaries between academic streams and promotes holistic and multidisciplinary learning. In the context of madrasa education, this provides an important conceptual

opening. It allows the possibility of integrating theology with mathematics, science, social science, language competence, life skills, and vocational learning without treating such integration as a betrayal of institutional identity (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020; Khatua et al., 2026).

Another important element is multilingualism. NEP 2020 supports the use of home language, local language, and regional language in learning while recognizing the cognitive and social value of linguistic diversity (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). Since many madrasas already function in multilingual environments involving Urdu, Arabic, Hindi, Bangla, or regional languages, this provision is particularly relevant to designing effective and inclusive learning models (NCERT, 2012; Husain et al., 2024).

6.3 Curriculum Reform in the Light of NEP 2020

The most visible issue in madrasa reform is curriculum. Public debate often reduces the matter to whether modern subjects should be added to traditional religious syllabi. However, a deeper analysis shows that curricular reform is not merely additive. It concerns educational purpose, sequencing, pedagogy, textbooks, language policy, assessment, and learning outcomes (Status of the Curriculum of Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasa Education, 2012; Khatua et al., 2026).

NEP 2020 provides a broad framework for curriculum redesign by encouraging conceptual understanding, flexibility, critical thinking, and integration across fields of learning (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). For madrasa institutions, this suggests the need for a layered curriculum where theological education continues but is accompanied by foundational literacy, numeracy, science awareness, social studies, digital literacy, constitutional values, and where possible vocational orientation. Such a model would preserve religious identity while expanding academic competence.

At the same time, superficial reform can be counterproductive. If new subjects are introduced without teacher preparation, age-appropriate materials, assessment systems, and manageable workload distribution, students may experience curriculum overload rather than meaningful learning (Husain et al., 2024; IJFMR, 2024). Therefore, NEP aligned madrasa reform must be gradual, carefully designed, and institution specific.

6.4 Foundational Learning and Language

NEP 2020 places exceptional emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy, identifying them as essential for all future learning (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). This is especially important in madrasa settings that teach children in the early years. Without strong reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, students cannot easily transition into wider educational opportunities.

Language is equally central. Madrasa education often operates across multiple linguistic codes, including Urdu and Arabic for religious learning and Hindi, English, or regional languages for wider communication and academic participation (Husain et al., 2024; Basheer, 2023). A well designed reform model should therefore support multilingual proficiency rather than create a hierarchy in which traditional and modern languages are artificially separated. This approach is consistent with NEP 2020 and can also help strengthen both cultural continuity and learner mobility (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020; NCERT, 2012).

6.5 Teachers and Pedagogy

Teacher quality is one of the strongest determinants of educational reform, and NEP 2020 repeatedly emphasizes professional preparation, pedagogic innovation, and learner centered instruction (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2024). Madrasa education faces serious challenges in this domain. Studies report limited access to teacher training, insufficient exposure to contemporary pedagogy, and heavy dependence on traditional memorization based methods in many institutions (Husain et al., 2024; IOSR, 2023).

A meaningful NEP based reform process must therefore invest in teacher development. This includes professional support in multilingual pedagogy, child development, inclusive classroom practice, digital tools, foundational numeracy, and formative assessment. Such development should not be designed as an external corrective imposed upon madrasa teachers. Rather, it should emerge as a collaborative process that respects theological expertise while expanding professional competence.

6.6 Technology and Digital Inclusion

NEP 2020 gives considerable attention to educational technology and calls for appropriate integration of digital tools across levels of education (Press Information Bureau, 2024; Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). For madrasa institutions, this can create new possibilities in open learning, digital content access, online teacher support, and supplementary instruction. At the same time, digital inclusion remains deeply unequal.

Research on madrasa communities shows that many institutions lack stable electricity, internet access, digital devices, and technologically trained teachers (Husain et al., 2024; IJNRD, 2025). As a result, technology can function either as an equalizer or as a new source of exclusion. A serious review in the light of NEP 2020 must therefore insist that digital reform be linked with public investment and infrastructure support rather than policy rhetoric alone.

6.7 Recognition and Educational Mobility

One of the most persistent structural problems in madrasa education is limited academic mobility. Learners often face barriers in obtaining recognized certification, entering mainstream school systems, accessing higher education, or connecting learning with employability pathways (Husain et al., 2024; Khatua et al., 2026). This is where NEP 2020 becomes especially relevant because it promotes flexibility, multiple pathways, open learning, vocational exposure, and stronger access across educational stages (Press Information Bureau, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2024).

For madrasa learners, this means that policy reform should include equivalence frameworks, bridge courses, board linked certification routes, and counseling systems that support transition into colleges, universities, open schooling, and skill programmes. Without such mechanisms, modernization remains symbolic. Educational justice requires that madrasa students not only study but also move forward through recognized pathways.

6.8 Minority Rights and Constitutional Balance

Madrasa reform in India cannot be discussed outside the framework of minority rights. Institutional literature on minority education reflects the constitutional protection available to minority communities in establishing and administering educational institutions of their choice (NCERT, 2012). This constitutional context is crucial because it means that reform must be negotiated through accommodation rather than coercion.

NEP 2020 itself recognizes diversity, inclusion, and local context as important educational values (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). Therefore, the most defensible interpretation of the policy is one that treats madrasa reform as educational enrichment rather than cultural erasure. In a democratic and plural context, institutional autonomy and academic improvement should be understood as mutually reinforcing rather than inherently conflicting goals.

6.9 Challenges in Implementation

Although NEP 2020 creates a useful normative framework, implementation remains difficult. The first challenge is politicization. Debates on madrasa reform are often shaped by suspicion, identity anxiety, and partisan framing, which weaken the trust required for collaborative educational change (Khatua et al., 2026; JETIR, 2021). The second challenge is resource inequality. Many madrasas work with limited infrastructure, scarce teaching materials, and weak administrative support, making policy expectations difficult to realize in practice (Husain et al., 2024; IOSR, 2023).

The third challenge is institutional variation. Since the madrasa sector is diverse, a single reform template is unlikely to succeed everywhere (Status of the Curriculum of Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasa Education, n.d.; IJFMR, 2024). The fourth challenge is the absence of a direct madrasa implementation blueprint in NEP 2020. As a result, actual policy translation depends heavily on states, boards, community leadership, and local educational initiative (Press Information Bureau, 2024; Khatua et al., 2026).

6.10 Recommendations

A balanced and practical framework for madrasa reform in the light of NEP 2020 should include the following measures

- Earlier stage focus on foundational literacy and numeracy in madrasa settings
- Multilingual curriculum models linking Urdu and Arabic with Hindi, English, and regional languages
- Inclusion of mathematics, science, social science, digital literacy, and life skills in age-appropriate forms
- Continuous professional development for madrasa teachers in pedagogy and assessment
- Institutional support for libraries, digital infrastructure, and learning materials
- Formal bridge mechanisms for certification, equivalence, and transition into higher education
- Consultative policy forums involving madrasa scholars, minority representatives, curriculum experts, and state agencies

These measures are consistent with the inclusive and flexible vision of NEP 2020 and are more likely to produce durable reform than top-down standardization (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2024; Husain et al., 2024).

7. Conclusion

The review establishes that madrasa education in India remains a socially significant and institutionally diverse component of the educational landscape. Its importance cannot be understood only in religious terms because it is equally connected with access, community trust, minority rights, and educational survival among marginalized groups (NCERT, 2012; Husain et al., 2024). NEP 2020 does not offer a separate madrasa policy, yet it provides a substantial framework for reviewing madrasa education through the principles of inclusion, foundational learning, multilingualism, curricular flexibility, teacher development, and educational mobility (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2024).

The larger conclusion of this paper is that madrasa modernization should not be framed as a choice between tradition and progress. A more intellectually responsible and policy sensitive view recognizes that constitutional autonomy, religious identity, academic quality, and social justice can be brought into productive relationship. In this sense, the future of madrasa education in India lies in balanced integration supported by dialogue, institutional trust, and right based reform.

References

1. Afsal, T.M. & Mehaboob C.K. (2025). Advancing Madrasa Education in India: Embracing Digital Learning Platforms and Teaching Tools. *International Journal of Novel Research and Development*, 10(8). <https://www.ijnrd.org/papers/IJNRD2508028.pdf>
2. Akhtar, K. (2021). History and present status of madrasa education in India. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, Vol.8, Issue 10, page no. a790-a793. <https://www.jetir.org/view?paper=JETIR2110099>
3. Basheer, M. (2023). An introduction to madrasa education system in India. *Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*. [https://www.srjis.com/downloadPdf/169105558320.Mohammad Basheer.pdf/6266/50](https://www.srjis.com/downloadPdf/169105558320.Mohammad%20Basheer.pdf/6266/50)
4. Husain, S., Nehal, R., & Ahmad, G. (2024). Challenges of socio economic marginalisation: A study of madrasa education in Kishanganj district of Bihar, India. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 12(4). <https://www.ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT24A4858.pdf>
5. Kayoom, H. & Hassan M. (2024). Status of the Curriculum of Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasa Education. *National Journal of Education* Vol. XXII No. (2). [https://bhu.ac.in/Images/files/12\(6\).pdf](https://bhu.ac.in/Images/files/12(6).pdf)
6. Khatua, A., Nandi, R., & Lahiri, S. (2026). A journey of Madrassa education system in India: From traditional and religious hubs to modern and state affiliated institutions. *International Education and Research Journal*, 12(3). <https://ierj.in/journal/index.php/5174>
7. Ministry of Human Resource Development. (2020). National education policy 2020. Government of India. https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/userfiles/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

8. National Council of Educational Research and Training. (2017). Minority education. <https://ncert.nic.in/degsn/pdf/FAQ-E.pdf>
9. Press Information Bureau. (2020, July 28). Highlights of new education policy 2020. Government of India. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1654058>
10. Press Information Bureau. (2024, February 6). Implementation of NEP 2020. Government of India. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2003660>
11. Salma1, U. & Nehal, R. (2024). Development of Madrasa Education in India: A Historical Overview International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research. 6(2).
12. <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2024/2/14827.pdf>