THE NIZAMI CURRICULUM
A HISTORICAL GLIMPSE & CRITICAL PROPOSALS

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If the purpose of making changes is simply to modernize the curriculum so as to appeal to the secular system and gain their acceptance, then not only should the curriculum be left unaltered, but such intentions should also be rectified. On the other hand, if the purpose of revising the curriculum and making required amendments is to equip students with stronger abilities, effective services and broader outreach to the people of the community, then we should deem such changes as the need of the time and fully consider their implementation.
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Introduction

Since centuries, Dars-e-Nizami has been one of the top Islamic curriculums to produce — and continues to produce — thousands of Islamic scholars, clerics, authors and community leaders. From a humble class of a single teacher and student sitting under a pomegranate tree, to now hundreds of madāris around the globe, it has become vital for us to constantly stay updated with the role of the Dars-e-Nizami in modern society. With people of various ethnicities, languages and socio-political backgrounds developing an interest to studying the Dars-e-Nizami, it is important to analyze the overall compatibility of the curriculum in multicultural and multilingual countries. Lastly, in order to provide maximum benefit, it is also very important to understand the aims and objectives of the curriculum and the ways of achieving those objectives.

As once a student of Dars-e-Nizami, and now a junior teacher, I have noticed a few of the struggles that students face during the course of learning, and after graduating. Likewise, I have understood the areas in which most students continue to lack. With a great passion of encouraging high standards in learning, I have decided to write my dissertation on a brief history of the Dars-e-Nizami and really focus on some areas of it which can be developed in order to become more compatible with the current multinational student group and worldwide societal customs, and thus provide more benefit. Having recognized my extremely limited knowledge and experience, I have based most of my proposals on what I have read and heard from senior scholars. All of the proposals are aimed only for the madāris of the Western world. Also, not all Western madāris are the intent of this dissertation and neither is it targeted at any particular one.

Finally, it should be bore in mind that the aim of this dissertation is not to divert from the way of our senior teachers, modernize the curriculum, or to criticize any aspect of it. Rather, the aim of this dissertation is simply to suggest certain elements that can be developed in order to meet the needs of change of time and customs. I ask Allah Almighty to forgive all the shortcomings of this work. Āmīn.
Chapter One
The Stages of Islam in India

Long before the advent of Islam in Arabia, Arab traders would often visit the coastal areas of Southern India, especially the Malabar region, which linked them to the ports of Southeast Asia. Thus, Islam’s first presence in the southern coasts of India and Sri Lanka was established in the 7th century with the Arab merchants and traders on the Malabar Coast. Arab governors ruled Sindh from 715 C.E. to 856 C.E. under the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties respectively. Later, Sindh was ruled by the Habbari dynasty for nearly two hundred years from 856 C.E. to 1026 C.E. The Habbarids were also Arabs who belonged to the Quraish tribe. The next stage of Islam in India was the Ghaznawid rule, which spanned from 1004 C.E. to 1186 C.E. This was followed by the Delhi Sultanate from 1206 C.E. to 1526 C.E.

It was the Delhi Sultanate that carried the flag of Islam from western and northern sides into central, eastern and southern India. It established strong Muslim rule in Delhi and united several parts of the country under its control. The Islamic sciences, especially Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), flourished and expanded during this period. Fiqh had a central position among the other Islamic sciences and being a scholar of Fiqh was the zenith of academic excellence. The rulers adhered to the Hanafi school of Fiqh and thus, the administration of the Delhi Sultanate was based on Hanafi Fiqh. They established madāris (schools) where the Hanafi school of Fiqh was taught. They sponsored ‘ulamā’ (scholars), qadāt (judges), and Fiqh experts in producing great works on the Hanafi school of Fiqh, such as al-Fatāwā al-Ghiyāthiyyah, Fawāid Fīrozshābī among other fatwā and Fiqh texts. The encyclopedia of Hanafi Fiqh, Fatāwā Tātārkhanīyyah, is a matchless legacy left behind by the Delhi Sultanate. There were numerous great scholars of Fiqh during the Sultanate period who contributed greatly to the promotion of Hanafi Fiqh in India.

Hanafi Fiqh was prevalent in India even before the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. The overwhelming majority of Muslims in the Indian subcontinent followed the Hanafi school of Fiqh. The Delhi Sultanate, as well as the Mughal Empire, also adhered to this school of Fiqh. Only the few small states and areas ruled by the Shia minority did not follow Hanafi Fiqh.
The thirteenth century (or seventh Hijra century) was an era known for its interest in Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and Uṣūl al-Fiqh (principles of Islamic jurisprudence). Being a muftī (Muslim legal expert), qādi (judge) or jurist was the zenith of academic excellence in Islamic studies that one could achieve. This was the reason that the subject of Fiqh was paid greater attention and it resulted in the production of many Fiqh scholars and many works on matters of Fiqh. The syllabus of Islamic schools at this time included the following books of Fiqh.

2. *Al-Qudūrī*, work of Aḥmad bin Muḥammad al-Qudūrī (d. 1036)
3. *Majma’ al-Baḥrain*, work of Muẓaffar al-Dīn Aḥmad bin al-Sāʿāṭī (d. 1294)
4. *Al-Muttafaq*

The syllabus of Uṣūl al-Fiqh (principles of Islamic jurisprudence) included the following books.

1. *Al-Ḥusāmī*, work of Ḥusām al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 1246)
2. *Al-Manār*, work of Abu’l Barakāt al-Nasafī (d. 1310)
3. *Uṣūl al-Bazdawī*, work of Ἄλι bin Aḥmad al-Bazdawī (d. 1089)

The credit of introducing *al-Hidāyah* in the syllabus goes to Mawlānā Burhān al-Dīn Balkhī (d. 1288) who was a direct disciple of the author, Shaykh Burhān al-Dīn al-Marghīnānī. From that day on, *al-Hidāyah* has been considered a base of the Fiqh syllabus in India.¹

The fourth stage was the Islamic period of the Great Mughals in India, which lasted from 1526 C.E. to 1857 C.E. This was one of the leading periods of the Islamic history, most renowned for intelligence and talent. The prevalent system of education during this period was known as *Dars-e-Niẓāmī* in the Urdu and Farsi language. The term *Dars-e-Niẓāmī* means “the Nizami curriculum,” in reference to its founder, Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn Sahālwī [d. 1161 Qasmi, *M. Hanafi Fiqh in India During Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526)*]
A.H./1747 C.E.], or literally, “the systematic curriculum.” It was through this system of learning that the Indian subcontinent produced thousands of religious scholars and intellectuals who possessed expertise in various sciences. From the inception of this system of learning until the final stages of the Mughal Empire, the majority of Muslims in the subcontinent were all under the same system of learning. This curriculum consisted of the following three fundamental categories of education.

1. Sciences related to the Arabic language, such as Ṣarf (morphology), Naḥw (grammar), Balāghah (eloquence), and so forth. However, among these sciences, more focus was given to the subject of Arabic grammar. The Arabic language sciences were collectively known as the “Lisāniyyāt.”

2. Sciences that dealt with the practicalities of ‘ibādāt (worship) and mu‘āmalāt (dealings), such as Qurʾān, Tafsīr, Ḥadīth, and Fiqh, which were together known as the “Dīniyyāt.”

3. Sciences that were complementary to the studies of Lisāniyyāt and Dīniyyāt, such as math, health, logic, philosophy, farsi language, and literature, among others. These together were known as the “Ma‘qūlāt.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Book Quantity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 ‘Ulim ‘Alīyah (Tafsīr, Ḥadīth, Fiqh, Uṣūl)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ‘Ulim ‘Aqliyyah (Manṭiq, Ḥikmah, Riyāḍīyyāt)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ‘Ulim Lisāniyyah (Ṣarf, Naḥw, Balāghah)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to the year 1857 C.E., different variations of this curriculum existed in the subcontinent. The Islamic institutions, or madāris, at the time primarily focused on teaching the Ma‘qūlāt sciences. Thereafter, subjects of Arabic grammar from the Lisāniyyāt sciences were
given importance. The least emphasized subjects taught were the *Dinyyāt* subjects, which contained topics most relevant to religious practicalities. Fiqh, however, was considered the most significant subject in the curriculum, as previously mentioned. The heavy regard for Fiqh studies resulted in the science of Ḥadīth losing the predominance and value it deserved to have.

In order to revive the science of Ḥadīth in Hijaz, it was the likes of Mawlānā Ḥayāt Sindhī, and his teachers and students, who exerted great effort and played essential roles in accomplishing this. In the Indian subcontinent, two dominant scholars strived extensively to revive the study of Ḥadīth. One of these personalities was Shāh ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Muḥaddith Dahlawī [d. 1642 C.E./1052 A.H.]. He spent four years in Hijaz studying the science of Ḥadīth after which he exerted much effort to restore the study of Ḥadīth in the subcontinent. The second scholar was Shāh Wālī-Allāh Muḥaddith Dehlawī [d.1762 C.E], whose hard work ultimately proved to be more fruitful. In the Ḥadīth curriculum of the time, for example, which only consisted of *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ*, Shāh Wālī-Allāh added the six canonical books of Ḥadīth, famously known as the *ṣiḥāḥ sittah*. Consequently, most institutes today with the *ṣiḥāḥ sittah* as a part of their curriculum, possess a Ḥadīth *sanad* (chain of transmission) that can be traced back to Shāh Wālī-Allāh.

Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn Sahālwī’s father, Qūtb al-Dīn, was a part of the Aurangzeb Alamgir project which aimed to produce an encyclopedia of fatāwā. The encyclopedia, known as *Fatāwā ‘Alamgiri*, is still used by scholars today. Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn was, however, the third son of Mullā Qūtb al-Dīn Sahālwī. In 1696, when Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn was 14 or 15 years of age, his father was killed in a political dispute. Sometime after, Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn and his brother, Mawlānu Muḥammad Sa’īd Sahālwī, travelled to Alamgir, where Aurangzeb, the Mughal Emperor, entrusted them the famous Firangi Mahal (lit. European mansion) in Lucknow. There, after years of acquiring knowledge, the brothers laid the foundations to the *Dars-e-Niẓāmi* now prevalent in madrasas originating from the Indian subcontinent. It was during this same era that the Nizami curriculum began gaining recognition.

The Firangi Mahal’s educational chain has left behind many great books such as *Fawā’īḥ al-Rahamūt bi Shahr Muṣallām al-Thubnī*, a famous work on the principles of Fiqh
written by ‘Allāmah ‘Abd al-‘Alī Muḥammad bin Niẓām al-Dīn al-Lucknowī [d.1810 / 1225 A.H]. ‘Allāmah ‘Abd al-‘Alī Muḥammad al-Lucknowī, the son of Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn, was known as Bahr al-‘Ulūm (the ocean of knowledge) due to his mastery of knowledge. Another great book produced at Firangi Mahal was Fatūnā ‘Ālamgīrī, the famous encyclopedia of Ḥanafi fatāwā compiled by select scholars at the request of the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb Alamgir. Many scholarly figures were also produced at Firangi Mahal, including the eminent author and researcher, Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Ḥayy.

**Darul Uloom Deoband— A Revolutionary Organization**

After the unsuccessful Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the commencement of British Raj, Muslim intellectuals in India felt the need for a revolutionary institution, whereby peaceful means could be employed to repel British influence from Muslims in the country. The British education policy aimed to spread Christianity in India by means of numerous British colleges and institutions. As for the Muslims, the British wanted to divert them from the sharīʿah (Islamic law) and impose British culture. This was one of the chief causes that compelled Muslim intellectuals to establish madāris (Islamic institutes) such as Darul Uloom Deoband. Darul Uloom Deoband was established in order to provide Muslim students with Islamic education, as well as a place of residence. The expenses of the institute were paid through funds provided by the community. Darul Uloom Deoband and Mazahir Uloom (Saharanpur) both had the most significant impact on Wifaqul Madāris (the union of Islamic institutes).

Following were certain curricular guidelines implemented at Darul Uloom Deoband:

1. **Leading the General Public by Establishing a Continuous Bond With Them**

   After establishing the madrasah, the scholars shifted their focus towards the Muslim public and organized ways to maintain regular communication with them. Mawlānā

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Tabassum, F. *Deoband 'Ulama's Movement for the Freedom of India*
Qāsim Nānotwī, the founder of Darul Uloom Deoband, had advised accordingly in his will, saying, “It [Darul Uloom Deoband] should always remain connected with the general public so that this relationship in itself may create a system within the public that would assist them in standing firm upon Islam and the true form of Muslims.”

2. **Utilizing Revised Versions of Education in the Curriculum**

From the very inception of the Darul Uloom, the founders and heads of the madrasah made it imperative that Islamic knowledge be imparted to the learners through the most updated form of learning. Such a rule was never anchored in previous Islamic curriculums of learning. This may have been due to the balanced approach that Mawlānā Qāsim Nānotwī had, as he had acquired most of his education from Mawlānā Mamlūk 'Alī, who was the head of the Arabic College in Delhi. Mawlānā Manāẓir Aḥsan Gilānī alludes to this in *Sawāniḥ Qāsmī*, writing that opting for the most updated and revised model of learning was a crucial principle of the institute.

At the time, not only was the notion of a systemized curriculum foreign to the Muslims, rather it was also highly frowned upon, especially since the systemized curriculum that was suggested by Mawlānā Aḥsan Gilānī, resembled that of the Westerners. Mawlānā Gilānī writes: “The modern-day learning system which the Westerners have adopted includes teamwork, examination, keeping track of the student's attendance and other similar necessities. A great portion of these regulations have been allowed in the Nizami curriculum; in fact, we should uphold them with great seriousness and consistency. The reality is, however, that even little attention is not given in following such regulations in the Indian Universities and Islamic institutions.”

3. **The Effects of Shāh Wali-Allāh’s Contributions to the Nizami Curriculum**

The longest-lived principal of Darul Uloom Deoband, Mawlānā Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib, has said that the 76-year history of the madrasah, is, in actuality, a continuous chain of Shāh Wali-Allāh’s methodology of teaching. Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib credits Shāh Wali-Allāh for the curriculum of Darul Uloom Deoband, although it is

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3 Gilānī, M.A. *Sawāniḥ Qāsmī* [2/275]
commonly attributed to Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn, due to Shāh Wali-Allāh’s vital contributions. Until Shāh Wali-Allāh’s time, the Nizami curriculum in practice contained very little Islamic knowledge that dealt with the Islamic practices related to worship, i.e. ḍīniyyāt. This was especially true when it came to the science of Ḥadīth. As a result of Shāh Wali-Allāh’s addition of the ṣiḥāḥ sittah, as well as other books of Arabic literature, Ḥadīth was elevated to a distinctive rank in the Nizami curriculum.

4. Amendments to the Original Nizami Curriculum

The three notable amendments made to the Nizami curriculum were: [1] the sciences of ḍīniyyāt became the central focus of learning. This is why, on one occasion, while addressing a convocation, Mawlānā Qāsim Nānotwī said: "We ought to prioritize the naqlī (textual) sciences and the sciences that assist us in understanding the standard modern subjects.” [2] Books of Arabic literature were increased, and [3] books of old philosophy were largely reduced. Lastly, [4] the completion time for the curriculum was set as six years with three periods daily.

As time progressed, the books that were once removed from the curriculum, such as books of the maʿqūlāt sciences, were restored. The reason for this was the notion that a student could not achieve complete expertise in knowledge without also studying the maʿqūlāt sciences. As such, the removal of such books resulted in the censures and objections of those who had clung to the old curriculum that included the maʿqūlāt. Darul Uloom Deoband chose not to challenge the criticism, and in order to uphold the connection and authority it had over these gatherings, it restored the maʿqūlāt sciences in the curriculum. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that the curriculum implemented in Darul Uloom Deoband is the authentic Nizami curriculum, albeit further amended by Shāh Wali-Allāh.

After the Establishment of Pakistan: The Founding of the Union of Islamic Institutions (Wilāqu’l Madāris)
Pakistan is a Muslim country which was a part of India before the Partition of 1947 C.E. India was a magnificent empire that included Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Jew, Sikh, and Buddhist communities. These communities remained under the service of Mughal leaders before entering into British imperialism and bearing the hardship of being shackled into British slavery for the next two hundred years. When the independence movement commenced against the British Raj, the Muslims of India demanded a separate land for themselves. They demanded such a land over which they would have complete control, where any non-Muslim nation would never have authority. As such, their demand was fulfilled, and since Sindh, Punjab, Baluchistan, and the South-Western borders were heavily Muslim populated, the Muslims were given these territories to govern. This new country appeared on the 1947 world map as a new Islamic country known as Pakistan. It is due to this that the history of Pakistan's educational system is connected to that of undivided India.\(^4\)

After the establishment of Pakistan, a system known as *Wifāqu'l Madāris al-'Arabiyyah* was created in Pakistan in order to assemble the *madāris* (Islamic institutes) linked to the education system of Darul Uloom Deoband and unify their curricular and examination systems. The founders of Darul Uloom Deoband also felt the need to establish institutions with the Nizami curriculum in other areas. The first gathering hosted to discuss this matter was in Jāmi'ah Khairu'l Madāris on the 22nd of March, 1957 under the supervision of the head-teacher, Mawlānā Muḥammad Jālandhrī. In the gathering, it was decided that all Islamic institutes in and outside of Multan, will unite with the Khairu'l Madāris institute of Multan and accept its leadership, and follow its curriculum and examination system. In Pakistan, there did not exist one leading institute like Darul Uloom Deoband of India, such that people would accept its leadership. Due to this, instead of choosing one institute as a leading head, many leading institutes assembled under the roof of a single uniting madrasah, which also hoped to draw other institutes under it. It becomes evident from the works of Mawlānā Qāsim Nānotwī and other founders of the Darul Uloom that they indeed strived to establish such madaris in other areas. In the 1875 C.E. convocation, Mawlānā Qāsim Nānotwī expressed his happiness at the establishment of Madrasah Mazahir Uloom in Saharanpur.

\(^4\) Uthmani, M. T. *Hamārā Ta'limi Niẓām*
The aims and objectives of Wijāqūl Madāris were as follows: [1] To provide a complete system of education that allows students to successfully graduate with a degree. [2] To create unity and organization among the Islamic institutes. [3] To develop necessary updates to the currently implemented system of learning as required over time and publish books according to the need of the time. [4] To create unity and harmony in the examinations, as well as in the layout and system of education of those madāris that are connected to this union. [5] To author and compile books per the requirement of the era in order to spread and propagate Islam. [6] To select correct and active modes of preserving and advancing Islamic institutions and improving the guidelines of education. [7] To arrange appropriate and effective ways of training male and female teachers.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) Rashīd, N. H. *Dars-e-Nizami*
Chapter Two

Preserving Islamic Education and Unity Among Scholars

Alongside the establishment of \textit{Wifāqul Madāris}, preserving Islamic institutions and teachings was also a point of concern. As one year elapsed since the establishment of the Union, Mawlānā Shamsu’l Haqq Afghānī, emphasizing the importance of a Union, addressed a gathering saying: “After the establishment of Pakistan, there has been a rise in Western ideologies that can weaken Islam and thus there is a greater need for the unity of the scholars.” He then used his insight and experience to compare the Islamic education systems in Egypt and Turkey and said: “The reason why Islamic teachings have remained in Egypt is that their learning system was firmly established and united from its very commencement, while Turkey’s was not. Although there are many Islamic learning centers in Turkey, they were not organized and coordinated with one another. As such, when they received a light blow, their systems collapsed. Their Islamic peaks faded in the darkness of the West. This danger awaits Pakistan. Hence, the establishment of a union among the madāris is the need of the time.”

Since the establishment of the \textit{Wifāqul Madāris}, it was clear that the government had no interference in it. It was genuinely established based on the decision of the heads of the madāris. Subsequently, it was recognized from the very beginning that the Union would become the ‘bridge’ between the madāris and the government. Thus, in the same meeting, Mawlānā Shamsu’l Haqq mentioned the Union’s vital role in connecting the madāris to the government and said: “The \textit{Wifāq} has gathered 150 madāris under one union in the short period of one year. A few months ago, an order was made from the government to present to them a report of the number of Arabic institutions. As such, in very little time, a certified advisor was appointed who composed a form as per the governmental guidelines and sent it to all the madāris. These forms enabled the madāris to collect information required by the government with much ease and made their answers identical.”

The Nizami Curriculum and Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn Sahālwi

The foundation of the Nizami curriculum today is based on the curriculum prepared by Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn Sahālwi approximately two centuries ago. The curriculum, known as \textit{Dars-e-Niẓāmi}, is also named after him. Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn was a great scholar who was born
in Sahalah in 1088 A.H./1678 C.E. He studied under the likes of Shaykh Ghulām Naṣḥbandī Lucknowī (d.1126 A.H.) and Shaykh Amānullāh Banārṣī. Post-graduation, he stayed under the mentorship of his father and was soon recognized as one of the finest scholars of his time. Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn later organized a system of learning for his madrasah and put it into practice. The Dars-e-Niẓāmi was in fact heavily influenced by màqūlāt (rational sciences) as opposed to manqūlāt (traditional sciences). The syllabus reserved fifteen books on logic, and several books on Greek philosophy, mathematics, history, medicine, and engineering. It also included texts on Persian literature and Arabic grammar, rhetoric, and literature, as well as books on Fiqh and Usūl al-Fiqh. For Tafsīr, Baydāwī and Jalālayn were taught, and for Ḥadīth, it was thought sufficient to study Misbāḥ al-Masūbih. Engineering and astronomy were also taught as part of the curriculum. Students were also taught the skills of official letter writing and calligraphy, which they would need as prospective civil servants. Due to the specialties of the Dars-e-Niẓāmi, many other Islamic institutions followed in putting this curriculum into practice. Hence, by the end of the British Imperialism, the Dars-e-Niẓāmi was in practice in most of the madāris of India.⁶

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⁶ Uthmani M. T. Hamārā Ta'limi Niẓām
subjects. As for the students who do not have an interest in these subjects and study it with little enthusiasm, their knowledge remains shallow. They are not able to gain in-depth knowledge and wisdom.”

Along with those who opposed the changes, there existed many who supported the idea of making certain amendments and changes to the curriculum, and their opinion had its own weight in pushing many institutes into considering the idea, at the least. That being said, despite the oppositions, gradual modifications and alterations began to be recognized in the curriculum. After passing through many stages of amendment, the widespread curriculum we find in many madāris today is known as the Dars-e-Niẓāmī merely as a historical attribution. Otherwise, compared to its original form, it has been changed by approximately eighty percent.

Changes and modifications continued after the Partition of India in 1947 C.E. Commenting on the name of the Nizami curriculum, Mawlānā Muhammadullah Khalili Qasmi writes: “The curriculum of Darul Uloom Deoband is given the name Dars-e-Niẓāmī, which is valid to some extent. However, this has caused some people to misunderstand the curriculum to be the same exact curriculum that existed in the 12th century. Although the foundation of this curriculum is certainly that of the 12th century, which existed in India at the inception of the Darul Uloom Deoband, this curriculum has undergone much change due to the demands of the time. If we were to compare the Dars-e-Niẓāmī of Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn to the Dars-e-Niẓāmī of present day, then one would hesitate (to call it Dars-e-Niẓāmī). There have been foundational changes made to the curriculum. Many books have been removed, many have been added, and many subjects have been replaced. The act of changes, removing, and adding books in accordance to the need of time still continues in the Nizami learning system today.”

**Clarifying Some Objections**

Likewise, Mawlānā Shawkat ‘Alī Qāsmī writes: “It is often said with great frustration that an old and putrid curriculum is taught in Darul Uloom Deoband and those institutes connected to it, which prioritizes the ma‘qūūāt (intellectual) books and abandons the religious books. It is also said that the sciences of the Holy Qur’an have been abused in this
curriculum and that only certain sections of Tafsiru’l Jalāleyn and Tafsiru’l Bayḍawi are taught. However, if one observes carefully, it becomes clear that the science of Tafsir is introduced as early as the third year of learning. In most cases, for almost three years following that, the students learn the translation of the entire Qur’an, alongside the exegesis. Moreover, Tajwid is a mandatory subject every year. As for the claim that the curriculum prioritizes intellectual studies and leaves out traditional Islamic texts, we find that books of Fiqh are taught in every year of the course, except the first and last year. Books of Ādāb (manners), ‘Aqāid (beliefs), and Sirah (Prophetic biography) are also a part of the curriculum. In the past, only two books of Ḥadith were taught but now around thirteen books of Ḥadith make up the Ḥadith category of the curriculum. Ḥadith is taught in Darul Uloom Deoband with so much respect and honour that it probably cannot be likened to any other place today. That being said, the religious sciences are taught in Darul Ulooms day and night, such that the echoes of Qāla Allâh and Qāla Rasūlillâh are not as loud elsewhere; may Allah accept.”

Although a lot of what Mawlânâ Shawkat ‘Alî has said above relates to the curriculum of many leading madaris, it does not represent the curriculum of all the Darul Ulooms around the globe, especially the West. Madâris in the West generally focus on the leading Islamic sciences of Qur’an, Ḥadîth, and Fiqh, but not exhaustively at a specialization level. This is understandable considering that the purpose of the ‘âlimiyyah course is not for students to achieve specialization in any given field; rather, the course aims to introduce the respective sciences and produce graduates who have a well-grounded, sufficient understanding of every science. This equips them well in order to further specialize in a science, if they wish to do so. That being said, it is not feasible for madâris to include higher level books of Tafsîr and Fiqh in their curriculum. Moreover, considering the shortage of time, governmental policies, and the expenses of studying facilities, maintenance, student certification and so on, it is difficult for some madâris to include additional subjects, such as Tarîkh, Sirah, Tibb, and Akhlaq, among others.

Another concern often put forward is the inattentiveness toward Arabic literature that is present within the curriculum. In the beginning, this might have been true. However, gradually books of Arabic literature were added to the curriculum. This was possible with the likes of the exemplary Arabic teacher, Mawlânâ Waḥîd al-Zamân Qâsmî Girânwî, who
prepared a comprehensive Arabic course to be implemented within the curriculum. Accordingly, during the first two years of the curriculum, Arabic exercises are studied abundantly. Over the next few years, students are taught *Naqīfatun l-'Arab* of Mawlānā Iʿzāz ʿAlī, *al-Qirāʿatun l-Wādiḥab* of Mawlānā Waḥīd al-Zamān, *Miftahu l'Arabiyyah* of Mawlānā Nūr ʿĀlīm Aṃnī, *Qaṣṣ al-Nabīyyin* of Mawlānā Abūl Ḥāsān ʿAlī Nadwī, and other Arabic literature books. Although these amendments have significantly improved the curriculum itself, the only concern that remains is that students have trouble understanding, applying and retaining the knowledge. This is especially true when it comes to reading and speaking Arabic, as one remains deficient in knowledge so long as he remains deficient in the language itself. This matter will be further discussed in Chapter Three.

Making required changes to the curriculum started under the guidance of the scholars of the *Wifāqu l Madāris al-'Arabiyyah*. Gradually, changes continued to be made to the curriculum, but not all of the senior scholars approved. For example, Mawlānā ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq of Akora Khatak says: “The respected late Mawlānā Rasūl Khān is the teacher of the teachers of Deoband. In a gathering of *Wifāqu l Madāris* held in Lahore, Mawlānā condemned the negligence towards the books of Manṭiq (rhetoric) and said, “Due to this (negligence), the roots of knowledge and comprehension will be cut off.”” Muftī Shafiʿ Uthmānī once said: “If books of Manṭiq (rhetoric) and Falsafah (philosophy) are removed from the curriculum, then no one will be able to find someone who can understand and teach the book of Imām Rāzī.”

**Tackling the British Imperialism Spiritually**

Most, if not all, of the Darul Uloms around the world are unanimous in teaching the principal subjects of the curriculum such as Arabic literature, Qurʾānic sciences, Ḥadīth sciences, Fiqh sciences, ʿAqīdah (beliefs), etc. A number of renowned madāris also teach subjects like Riyāḍiyyāt (mathematics), Tarikh (history), Geography, Tibb (medicine), etc. from an Islamic perspective as a part of the ʿālimiyyah course. On the other hand, many madāris, especially in the Western countries, only teach the principal subjects and usually end classes earlier to allow younger students to complete their secular studies. Students do this by studying
online, homeschooling, or attending classes onsite. Due to its inclusive curriculum, Muftī Taqī 'Uthmānī suggests that a graduate of the Dars-e-Nizāmī curriculum could carry out the responsibilities of any job sector. Therefore, after graduating, every person is allowed the liberty to choose whichever profession matches his or her skills and interests. In other words, a graduate is provided with all the means of advancing in their respective field. As a result, along with great muḥāfīzūn (exegetes), muḥaddithūn (Ḥadith experts), fuqahāʾ (jurists), and authors, graduates have also gone on to become experts of law, medicine and science.

What Muftī Taqī has suggested mainly applies to the graduates of the renowned madāris who are taught secular studies as a part of their curriculum. For other students, it can only be true provided that the student independently completes their secular studies alongside the ʿālimīyyah course; however, many students find it difficult to balance both studies, hence postponing secular education until after their ʿālimīyyah graduation. On the same note, one of the main objectives of this curriculum is to train students to become well-grounded in their spiritual life and their knowledge of theology so that after graduating, it would be safe for them to enter into any learning field such as science, without the fear of being deceived or swayed by foreign ideologies.

It is important to mention that since many students postpone their secular studies, by the time they graduate as ʿulamāʾ (scholars), they are of marriageable age and have not yet been able to learn a skill or obtain a degree. This becomes a burden for many male students who are considering marriage but many have not yet completed high school, let alone established a means to provide for their family. With that said, it is vital that madāris think of ways to make available the essential academic studies students need in order to pursue a career or skill in the future. Students must be taught that using ʿilm (Islamic knowledge) as their principal means of income should always be the last resort.

Following the British Imperialism, the English arranged a learning curriculum that supplemented the learning systems of India with many new subjects, such as science and philosophy. Therefore, there was an immediate need for Muslim scholars to add such subjects to the Nizami curriculum to educate students about these subjects under Islamic supervision and counter the doubts that British teachings aimed to plant in their hearts. The British did everything they could in order to waver people’s adherence to Islam and remove the love that
the people had for Allah and His Prophet. To achieve this, the British changed the entire learning system in order to discreetly propagate their ideologies and oppose Islamic teachings.

The very first change that the British made was that they removed the subjects of Qur’an and Sunnah from their curriculum. They argued that they intended to introduce new sciences to the Muslims. However, the real objective of the British was to gain supremacy over the Muslims by instilling Western philosophy and culture into them. This new culture would provoke Muslims to deem their own education, culture and religion as something outdated and low, and they will eventually submit to the British agendas. Lord Macaulay, while delivering a talk on India’s educational matters, expressed this goal saying: “It is vital for us that we change the minds of the youngsters of India. We want to use them as a bridge between the public and the leaders. We need to nurture them in such a way that they remain Indian through lineage and race, but culturally and mentally, they fully become English.”

The new curriculum introduced by the British slowly but surely was put into practice all around Hind. The Muslims at the time also welcomed it, assuming that they will have the opportunity of benefitting from its contemporary sciences and electronic advancements, and progressing forth like the other communities in Hind. However, it was not long before the government announced that only graduates of the British curriculum would be accepted in the jobs sectors. This restriction eliminated all means of income for workers that had been certified by the Nizami curriculum. As a result, many people began to focus on the new British curriculum and only a few people were left who were concerned about the traditional Islamic sciences. Furthermore, the number of Islamic madāris that taught the Nizami curriculum began to decrease. This condition of Hind grieved its scholars as they witnessed the derogation and abandonment of the Islamic sciences. Therefore, in order to preserve the Islamic teachings, scholars turned their full attention towards opening new Islamic institutions. The scholars who took on this task chose to accept hardship and poverty in order to devote their lives to the protection of Islamic knowledge.

In hopes of preserving the Islamic knowledge, some scholars established madāris in which they aimed to teach the old curriculum which included subjects from both the Islamic curriculum and the new British curriculum. They strived to combine the religious and secular studies, such that the secular studies would be taught in a way that would prevent students
from falling into apostasy or secularism and developing hatred towards the religion. However, this was an extensive project which demanded full access to different tools and materials, as well as educators who were well-grounded in the old and new curriculum and were capable of producing new textbooks that fulfilled these objectives. Such books were essential to avoid using the textbooks offered by the British, which were filled with ideologies that could potentially lead students distant from the religion. It was also crucial for the madāris that the government certify their curriculum. Unfortunately, the British government cooperated little with the scholars and the goals of this project were ultimately left unachieved. As a result, the scholars were forced to continue teaching Islamic studies alone in madāris.

There is no doubt that the Islamic madāris of Hind did an outstanding service for the Muslims. Despite the disapproval of the British and the obstacles they faced, such madāris imparted Islamic knowledge through the Nizami curriculum and produced great scholars who published countless books due to the vastness of their knowledge and piety. Many such scholars did not suffice with only gaining Islamic knowledge; rather, they went on to learn the newly introduced sciences so that they may refute them, as well as understand and respond to the objections of the British. The madāris of Hind at that time did everything they could in order to restore Islamic religiosity within the general masses. Many scholars endeavoured to write books in every language spoken in Hind at the time, while other scholars strived to revive the Islamic practices and God-consciousness within the Muslim masses through sermons given in masājid (mosques) and propagation in Islamic gatherings and programs. As a result, they were able to substantially counter the British efforts to drive the Muslims away from their religion and influence them with the British ideologies and lifestyle.

After the establishment of Pakistan, scholars believed that they would now be able to produce an updated curriculum that included both the academic sciences as well as the Islamic sciences. Such a project required experts besides scholars, such as academic educators, authors, government-certified professors, etc. It also required the government’s involvement, such as in matters of certification, which would allow madāris graduates entry into various job sectors. However, Pakistan faced issues from the first day of its establishment; hence, this was a project that was never completed. As a result, madāris today still utilize the same curriculum which was used in India, with minor changes and additions. This unstarted project is the reason why today, in Pakistan, there are two curriculums: the academic studies, which are predominantly
taught in public schools and universities, and the Islamic studies, which are taught in madāris. This division meant that the government did not certify those who studied in Islamic institutions as graduates of academic sciences.

Since the government had no connection with the madāris, it neither provided funds nor covered its costs and expenses. Thus, from the students’ dorms to their daily meals, all expenses were fulfilled by the madāris. The madāris, from their very inception, have functioned by means of community funding, without the slightest government support. According to the 1972 C.E. statistics, the total expenditure of all the Islamic institutions in Pakistan totaled to $8,157,706. The shocking truth about this is that when the total expenditure is divided by the total number of students, the yearly allowance for each student amounts to 180 rupees, which logically cannot be enough. It is difficult for the mind to accept that it would be enough for a student to spend only 180 rupees in a year. This was mainly possible because the teachers and students of Islamic institutions chose to live simple, ascetic lives, due to which they were satisfied with the little income. Another undeniable reason for this is that Allah bestowed the madāris with immense barakah (blessings) in students’ meals, residency, clothing, and all other necessary supplies. The Islamic institutions are open proof for this.

Although the madāris of Pakistan followed the same curriculum as the madāris of India, the madāris of Pakistan were not united in their implementation and educational system. They were in no way connected to each other. After some time, they felt the need to become united and organized in their educational curriculum, its implementation, and the examination process. Therefore, in 1958, the madāris of Pakistan gathered under one union known as the Wifāqu’l Madāris (the union of the Islamic institutions). This union consisted of 171 madāris that adhered to the Hanafi school of thought. The foundation of the curriculums of these madāris was the Dars-e-Nizâmi. Nevertheless, the seniors of the madāris would make changes to the curriculum as per the need of the time and place. Accordingly, in some grand madāris, many books of Falsafah (philosophy) and Manṭiq (logic) were removed and other books were added to the curriculum, such as: al-Nahlwâl Wâdib and al-Balâghatâl Wâdîbâh in the subject of Arabic, Tashînu’l Wâṣâl ilâ ‘Ilmi’l Uṣûl in the subject of Fiqh, and al-Intibâhâtûl Mufidab fi ḥallî’l Mushkili’l Jadidab in the subject of Kalâm (theology).
After some time, the chief madāris of Pakistan sensed the need to include certain new sciences into the Nizami curriculum. In reality, due to the immense love for the Islamic sciences, the scholars did not want to add academic sciences to the curriculum. However, these sciences would aid students in preaching Islam and responding to objections on Islam, and this was the main reason why the scholars highly considered adding these additional subjects. As such, many madāris added new subjects such as English and common and federal law into the curriculum, although the number of Islamic institutions that were able to achieve this was not high. This small number was due to the absence of tools, equipment, and educators— who were well-learned in both fields— required in order to implement the new sciences effectively. Due to such shortage, numerous madāris were forced to stay upon their former curriculum.

There were certain factors due to which the madāris were not able to implement the plan of adding certain academic subjects to the Nizami curriculum. One of these factors, which was a hindrance to the plan, was the shortage of new updated textbooks and educators experienced in both fields as previously mentioned. Islamic madāris are established in order to not only give students Islamic knowledge but to also influence them into portraying an Islamic character, etiquette and behaviour. Students are taught to abide by the teachings of the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him), his ṣahābah (companions) and the tabiʿūn (noble successors), so much so that they are even taught to imitate the pious predecessors in their outer appearance and dress code. On the other hand, the professors of modern-day academic sciences are not generally concerned about such practices, which is the second factor that hindered the implementation of the plan. The scholars of the madāris feared that the Western-minded professors would have a negative influence on the students, albeit indirectly, should they be appointed to teach the students. The last factor was the difficulty in producing sound academic literature and finding the right educators. Academic sciences on their own do not contradict Islamic teachings. However, since the textbooks were compiled by non-Muslims in a way that would cast doubt and suspicion into the hearts and minds of students, there was a dire need to recompile such books and remove problematic texts. In order to achieve this and ultimately teach madrasah students academic studies, they required expert academics who are also well-versed in Islamic teachings. However, both of these tasks— recompiling textbooks and finding academic experts well-versed in both academic studies and Islamic teachings—
was something the Muslims were unable to achieve at that time, leaving the madāris to only focus on teaching the Islamic sciences.

With all that said, this does not mean that the Nizami curriculum today does not require revision or refinement. However, before considering any changes, it is vital to determine the purpose of our objective behind those changes. If the purpose of making changes is simply to modernize the curriculum so as to appeal to the secular system and gain their acceptance, then not only should the curriculum be left unaltered, but such intentions should also be rectified. On the other hand, if the purpose of revising the curriculum and making required amendments is to equip students with stronger abilities, effective services and broader outreach to the people of the community, then we should deem such changes as the need of the time and fully consider their implementation. One of the primary questions in order to establish the purpose behind making changes is: what are the main expectations of students of knowledge and does the current curriculum meet those expectations? If not, then what is the hindrance and how can it be resolved?

The curriculum implemented in many Islamic institutions today is still fundamentally the original Nizami curriculum, but with some differences. This curriculum was initially founded with all the necessary sciences that a scholar of din (religion) at the time required knowledge of. It specifically took into consideration the 'urf (societal customs), language, habits and demands of the time, as well as students' mentality. With that said, there were little obstacles that arose in the early stages of the curriculum's development. However, as Islamic institutions spread further, into Western countries, they were introduced to students who had different mentalities and were influenced by their respective societies. They also spoke many different languages other than the traditional Urdu or Farsi and were brought up in environments with different customs and habits. These differences demanded that the curriculum undergo certain alterations, additions and reductions. One example of an addition to the curriculum can be the addition of the šīḥāḥ sittah by Shāh Wali-Allāh Muḥaddith Dehlawī, as mentioned previously: and an example of a reduction can be the removal of the Farsi language from many Islamic institutions, as it was no longer a necessity of the time.
With all that said, looking at the current curriculum, scholars have noticed a deficiency in some areas. In order to implement a required revision to the curriculum today, many proposals have been made, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.
Chapter Three

The Role of the Arabic Language in the Curriculum

Determining the role of the Arabic language in the Nizami curriculum is important. Not only are the Islamic sciences dependent upon the Arabic language on a fundamental basis, but there is no doubt that the Arabic language holds a high status in general. The language of the Qur’an is Arabic, the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him) spoke Arabic, and the language of the people of Jannah will be Arabic.7 That said, it is noticed that in many madāris, very little importance is given to the mastery of Arabic language and there is little zeal for the matter. Students have insufficient skill when it comes to writing or speaking Arabic, except those whom Allah has willed. It is an unfortunate reality that many students are not even able to read Arabic texts correctly and fluently, while students with better expertise are not able to author books or deliver lectures in Arabic with absolute quality.

Indeed, the main objective behind teaching the Arabic language in Islamic institutions is to equip students with enough ability to thoroughly understand Islamic literature, and this does not necessitate their fluency in the language. However, a large number of students are not able to comfortably understand Arabic texts either. Muftī Taqī ‘Uthmānī suggests that the lost practices of lecturing and writing regularly have affected the students' ability to efficiently read and understand the texts of their books. In our times, having a strong understanding of the Arabic language is very important in order to establish a connection with the Arab world. It is undeniable that the scholars of the subcontinent have written numerous books in Urdu and Farsi and other languages, so it is important for students to gain proficiency in Arabic so that they may be able to also familiarize the Arab world with the treasures of the non-Arabic literature. This is not possible without a strong understanding of the Arabic language.

There are many ways in which students can strengthen their Arabic skills, with the facilitation of the madāris. Muftī Taqī ‘Uthmānī suggests the following main three methods:

1. In the early stages of learning subjects of Naḥw (grammar) and Șarf (morphology), books containing extensive practice material and exercises should be utilized. This will

7 Imam Hakim, Mustadrak Hakim [4/97 #6999]
aid students in memorizing and fully grasping the grammatical rules and principles. The books should be taught in a manner that would not allow students any leeway to slack. Students should be made to repeat the subject if they have not fully grasped it.

2. Another effective way of strengthening the student's ability to understand Arabic and expanding their vocabulary is to create an atmosphere of communicating in Arabic within the madrasah. It can be said that the amount of Arabic that students hear on a day to day basis is massively limited to the text of the books that they are studying and unfortunately, it is hardly ever beyond that. Majority of the students simply communicate in English among themselves and very few consider speaking in Urdu, although they tend to speak in Urdu more than Arabic. Mufti Taqī ‘Uthmānī suggests that from the fourth year onwards (this can vary from madrasah to madrasah), all the discourses should be delivered to the students in the Arabic language. However, since it is difficult to make this change so abruptly, it would be beneficial to commence by delivering all the announcements, newsletters, exam papers, morning assemblies, and teachers’ naṣḥāb (advice) sessions in Arabic. Through this, the madrasah should aim to gradually make the means of education and communication for the students to be entirely in Arabic. After a certain point, they should no longer be permitted to speak in any language besides Arabic.

3. It would be beneficial for every madrasah to have monthly, if not weekly, sessions of student lectures. Many madāris have already put this into practice in English and Urdu, in order to develop the students’ speaking ability, and have begun to notice its fruits. Students are divided into small groups and deliver lectures among themselves. It would be highly beneficial to gradually make it mandatory for students to deliver these lectures in Arabic. This will not only give them confidence and practice, but also develop their expertise in Arabic and expand their vocabulary.

The Medium of Learning: Farsi, Urdu or English?

One of the main objectives of learning subjects such as Ṣarf, Naḥw, Adab, Balaghah etc. is to help students gain deep expertise and skill in the Arabic language, so they may access
Islamic sources directly without any mediums. However, it is generally noticed that far too many graduates of Darul Ulooms are unable to communicate and write in Arabic comfortably. One of the main reasons behind the lack of proficiency in Arabic is that students are required to learn Arabic— which is a complex language on its own— by means of a third language, which is generally Urdu, instead of the language which they are already accustomed to in their locality. For example, students who are generally accustomed to English are still required to learn Urdu in English before proceeding to learning Arabic in Urdu. Perhaps it would be easier if both Urdu and Arabic were taught in English and after gaining a considerable ability in both Urdu and Arabic, students proceed to learn Arabic in Urdu. However, this is not the case in most madāris; rather, students, some of whom do not know a word of Urdu, are taught Urdu at the primary level and thereafter are tasked with learning a third language through a language in which they lack proficiency. This not only burdensome for many to achieve but also creates difficulty for students to fully grasp the Arabic language on its own.

Many important subjects, such as Arabic grammar and morphology, are introduced to students in a language unfamiliar to them, such as Urdu. Since these subjects make up the foundation of the students’ studies, teaching them in a foreign language can prove harmful as students advance in the curriculum. One may wonder why such books were authored in Urdu in the first place. With Shāh Walī-Allāh’s advancement towards authoring Islamic literature, books at that time were in Farsi, as he spoke Farsi which, for some time, was the mother tongue of his locality. And with the first Darul Uloom being in India, at that time, it is understood as to why books were authored in Urdu; that was the language that the people of that locality were accustomed to. When more books were authored in Urdu, students’ reference to Farsi books decreased. Similarly, now that Darul Ulooms have moved to Western countries, and the graduates of such institutions are well-spoken in English, it only seems appropriate if Darul Ulooms in these countries transition into teaching the subjects in English, the language of these countries. Shāh ‘Abdu’l ‘Azīz (1746-1823 AD.), son of Shāh Walī-Allāh, who issued the first ḡatwā approving armed struggle against British rule in 1803 AD., said, "Go and learn English; it is allowed."

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8 Khan, S.A. Ashāb-e-Baghāwat-e-Hind
The Significance of Learning English in Modern Era

The requirement of incorporating the language of the country into the Nizami curriculum is very important. In the early stages of the Nizami curriculum, Farsi was the medium of learning, thereafter it was replaced with Urdu. Current time and place demands the incorporation of English since it is not only the language of our countries, but has also become the first language of many of our children at home. Similarly, reaching out to the non-Muslims and spreading Islam to other communities will not be as successful unless this language is instilled and taught professionally to Dars-e-Nizāmī students. This requirement is also found in the Hadith, when Zayd (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him) said to him: “Letters come to me from people that I do not like if other people read them. So is it possible for you to learn Hebrew (‘Irāniyyah) — or he said, Syriac (Suryāniyyah)?” Zayd (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “Yes,” and learned it in seventeen days.9 If this remains something that little attention is given to today, and students graduate, only having the capability to communicate or explain what they have learned in Arabic or Urdu, the university graduates with bachelor and PhD degrees will grab the attention of the laypeople with their eloquent English, despite the reality that they possess no formal scholarship in the Islamic sciences.

Some may hesitate to consider the addition of this Western language into a curriculum of this sublime level. It may be true that the curriculum has always been taught in Urdu, Farsi, and other Middle Eastern or Muslim-spoken languages. However, looking at the rising number of Darul Ulooms established in Western countries and the increasing interest of students from various backgrounds, including reverts, how can the curriculum be restricted to these languages? We have witnessed change in certain subsidiary juridical rulings as caused by the change of ‘urf (custom) and ‘ādah (habit). These changes are made in order to maintain the aim of the religious injunctions and avoid harm. Similarly, with the change of time, since many years, a need has arisen to make certain amendments to the curriculum, such as giving students the option to learn in English, a language that they are accustomed to, as opposed to a language they have no knowledge of. It may surprise many, that Mawlānā Qāsim Nanotwī, the founder of the first Darul Uloom, expressed his desire to learn English after he felt limited on one

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9 Ibn Sa’d. *Tabaqātu’l Kubrā* [2/273-274]
occasion. Whilst he was on traveling for Hajj, it so happened that he got into a conversation with an Italian Captain, who was interested in speaking to the Mawlānā in regards to religious issues. Since the Italian spoke English, a translator facilitated the conversation. The Italian was so moved by Mawlānā Qāsim’s answers, that it seemed like he was very close to accepting Islam but did not. Mawlānā Qāsim made a firm intention then, that upon his return, he will learn English himself because he felt that his answers could have been more effective to the Italian Non-Muslim if he were directly speaking to him, as opposed to speaking through a translator. However, upon his return, before fulfilling this wish, Mawlānā Qāsim returned to his Lord. May Allah have mercy on him.
Chapter Four

Additional Subjects

‘Aqidah (Islamic creed and belief)

With the passing of time, we witness changes in religious ideologies and sects. We notice a decrease in traditional deviant groups and an increase in new modern sects. Despite this, Dars-e-Nizami students seem to learn more about the olden groups such as Qadariyyah and Murji‘ah in ‘Aqidah class, rather than groups such as Ahmadiyyah, Quraniyum, Salafiyah, Shia, etc. As a result, when students graduate and encounter adherents to such groups and face criticism or interrogation from them, they find it difficult to defend their positions confidently, or even worse, begin to doubt their own methodology. ‘Aqidah students should be required to listen to the dialogue of different sects and assigned debate projects. They should be instructed to research and refute the corrupt beliefs of these sects until they develop a strong debating ability and the ability to stay firm on the correct methodology and avoid being influenced by misguided groups. If such debate sessions take place twice, or at least, once a month, it would be sufficient.

Tarih & Sirah (Islamic history and Prophetic biography)

It is likewise important to add those books into the curriculum that relate to the topics of History and Sirah. These are subjects that are not as emphasized in the madaris as they ought to be, which may lead to students lacking in their knowledge of History and Sirah and finding it difficult to truly grasp many juridical or traditional incidents related to these subjects. Although many madaris have included certain books of Sirah into the curriculum, they do not seem to be studied and taught as seriously as other subjects. In fact, some madaris just assign these books to students, expecting them to read independently. The importance of studying these subjects can be understood by observing the practice of our pious predecessors and how they would study Tarih & Sirah. Ismā‘il bin Muḥammad bin Sa‘d bin Abī Waqqāṣ (may Allah be pleased with them) relates: “My father [Muḥammad bin Sa‘d bin Abī Waqqāṣ] would teach us about the Islamic battles and expeditions and say, “O my son! This is the honour of your forefathers, therefore do not waste its discussion.”” Zaynu‘l ‘Abidin ‘Alī bin Ḥusain (may Allah
be pleased with them) would say: “We would study the battles of the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him) as if we were studying a chapter from the Qur’an.” [Tarīkh Dimashq 2/186] Ibn Ḥajar (may Allah have mercy on him) mentions that during the reign of 'Umar bin 'Abdu'l 'Azīz, there would be a formal gathering dedicated to the study of history, battles and the biographies of the ṣaḥābah (companions of the Prophet). He writes: “There was a lecturer who was well informed regarding battles and historical events. He was instructed by 'Umar bin 'Abdu'l 'Azīz to sit in the masjid of Dimashq and relate to the people the battles and the biographies of the ṣaḥābah.”

Switching Roles: Improving Student Performance

The regular practice in conducting the daily lessons at madāris is that teachers spend the nights researching and studying the texts, and thereafter present the core of it as a summary to students during class. On the other hand, although students are generally encouraged to study the text beforehand, they are not obliged to know the next lesson before it is taught. As a result, many students actually lack in muṭālaʿah (preparation) and are unable to develop any skills of intelligence. Students are likewise encouraged to takrār (repetition) of the lessons after class. Although takrār is more emphasized, many students still get away with not revising the daily lessons until they need to start preparing for the exam season. The harmful effects of this method, wherein the teacher is the only one that studies the text before presenting it in class, are clear. Mawlānā Zakariyyā relates regarding his father, Mawlānā Yaḥyā, saying: “My father was strictly against the modern-day method of teaching. He would say that a student cannot develop a [learning] expertise this way. A teacher spends the whole night researching and studying, spends the day lecturing in class, and does a great favour upon the ‘esteemed’ students who may or may not listen attentively and get distracted here and there. [My father’s] method of teaching was such that he would place the responsibility upon the students. They would prepare for the lesson, deliver the lecture in class and [he would say that] the teacher’s job is only to say ‘uh-huh’.”

10 'Asqalani I.H. Tabzību’t Tabzīb [5/53]
11 Kandehlawi Z. Aap Beeti [2/16-17]
The present-day method of conducting lectures has adverse effects on the student’s learning, especially for students of the primary years in which fundamental books are studied. It makes them lazy and decreases their learning abilities. Once the students complete the initial crucial years of learning, then for the classes of Ḥadīth, Fiqh and Tafsīr, this method can be adopted, wherein the teacher delivers the lesson and the students simply take notes and understand. There can be no harm in this as the students should have already developed a steady knowledge of the basics.

**The Professional Alim Course, Customary Maktab, and a ‘Preparatory Program’**

Nowadays, all kinds of students are given admission into Islamic institutions with very little or no distinction at all. ‘Alimiyah institutes do not assess whether the student holds the qualifications to be provided entry, nor is it considered whether he has enough familiarity, sophistication, and an upright character for the noble sciences that he or she will be honoured to learn. The effects of not assessing these qualities and prerequisites are many; mentioning two main ones should suffice.

Firstly, those students that are not genuinely interested in learning and are only there due to the will of their parents or in order to remain in the fellowship of some friends and family will, instead of becoming a means of benefit and honour for the religion in the future, may become a means of harm and bring a bad repute to the madrasah. After giving in to the order of their parents and enduring long years of burdensome learning, when they obtain their degree and cast it to the hands of their parents, they will finally see the opportunity to go distant and do as they had wished to do in the very first place. It is true that some students who initially do not like the studies, end up developing an interest for the studies, as a result of which they start putting in hard work and graduate successfully. However, students who do not have the slightest interest or capability cannot be granted admission with the mere hopes of them eventually growing interested in the course and understanding its sciences. This can be dangerous which can lead to handing knowledge to those unworthy of it.

Secondly, the time and efforts of the educators will be in complete vain. What will be the benefit of propagating and delivering the sacred sciences to students who do not possess receptive and willing natures to embrace them and pass them down? Therefore, in order for
institutes to create more beneficial scholars for the Muslim ummah (community), it is vital that instead of granting admission to every student, they should choose only the most competent and trustworthy students. Ibn ʿAbbās reports that the Prophet of Allah (may peace and blessings be upon him) has said: “When Prophet ʿĪsā was delivering a sermon to the Banū Isrāʾīl, he said to them, “Do not speak words of wisdom in front of the ignorant because you will obliterate it, and do not give it to the undeserving people because you will conceal it.”” Similarly, Imām Zuhrī says: “Indeed for Ḥadīth, there is a calamity, a defect, and a corruption. Its calamity is forgetting it, its defect is mixing it with falsehood, and its corruption is delivering it to those unworthy of it.”

The difference between the following two systems of learning should be clear: the typical reformatory educational system found in maktab—part-time schools wherein students are taught the basic Islamic studies—and the advanced scholarly system, which is the nature of the Nizami curriculum found in the ’Ālimiyah institutes. The reformatory educational system found in a customary maktab is allowable for young children, youth, and the general community to gain admission. They can expect to learn the basic Islamic knowledge which they require in their day-to-day life without having to delve into any of the advanced Islamic sciences, for which they have no previous experience and which requires long years of commitment and hard work.

It is obvious that many parents consider sending their children to an Islamic institute due to the concern of safeguarding their children from falling into the wrong crowd and losing their Islamic identity and principles. However, what some parents do not recognize is that the institutions that provide the Nizami curriculum are not the standard Islamic maktab and cannot accommodate beginner students who have just graduated anew from their middle or high school. Instead, it is designated for elite students who already possess a noble character and have presented notable achievements in the primary fields of their Islamic studies. As a result of this, their mentors advance them forth to delve into the complexities of the specialized Islamic sciences. Hence, such a place cannot be the appropriate space to train and discipline students who do not possess knowledge of the basic Islamic laws and etiquettes, are

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12 Ibn Abdil Barr, Jāmiʿ Bayānīl Ilimī Wa Fadhlīhi pg.153
13 Qadhi ‘Iyadh, Al-Ilmā’ [1/219]
having trouble practicing the basics of what is required, and more importantly, they are having doubts about the very core of their faith. Hurling them into such an environment may have detrimental effects on their faith instead of benefiting them. Thus, designing a program solely for such beginner students would produce ease in mentoring them at their own pace, instead of holding back competent students of the advanced studies so beginners may catch up.

Before discussing the new program, it is important to discuss the social and cultural attitude that has developed in recent years towards makātib. Children who grow into their teen years have developed the incorrect perception that as teenagers, they are now too old to attend maktab classes. This notion may have arisen from the fact that teenagers who attend high school generally require more time to dedicate to their academic studies, such a load of work which they genuinely cannot escape. Others simply assume that since they have already learnt how to recite the Qur’an and memorized several surahs and du’as, they are now “too old” to be attending maktab. Unfortunately, many parents have also started believing this.

In response to this, setting up a “preparatory program” would be ideal. This preparatory program should not be mistaken for another maktab. Instead, it would be ideal that parents who do not want their children to become religious scholars, may enroll them in maktab instead. This is because makātib are usually scheduled for the evening hours and, keeping in mind that students attend school during the day, they may still attend a facility that will keep them connected with the Quran and its basic sciences, at the very least. This will also be a fulfillment of the statement of the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him): “Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim,” as students will be taught the essentials of all that which they face in their daily lives. As for parents who want their children to become religious scholars, or want their children to stay connected with Islamic teachings and be in a good environment without becoming religious scholars, the I’dādiyyah Darajāt (preparatory classes) have been proposed for them.

This preparatory system is suitable for parents who prefer to transfer their children to an environment in which they stay connected to their Islamic practices and morals but are not overburdened by the complex Islamic sciences which may end up discouraging them and deterring them from religion completely.
Extending Daur-e-Ḥadith to Two Years

The final study year in the curriculum is known as the Daur-e-Ḥadith year in which the students mainly ‘run through’ the major Ḥadīth compilations. Although the number of Ḥadīth books differ from madrasah to madrasah, it nevertheless ranges from the six canonical Ḥadīth books to a total of nine books assuming the addition of Muwattā’ Imām Mālik, Muwattā’ Imām Muḥammad and Şarḥ Ma‘ānin’l Āthār. The obstacle that is often faced in the Daur-e-Ḥadīth year is lack of time. With a total of six books of Ḥadīth, it is almost impossible to study each and every chapter of every book with its translation, commentary, and Fiqh. Therefore, students only study selected chapters from each Ḥadīth book in depth and run through the rest of the chapters. It is said that by the end of the year, the students study the most relevant chapters of Ḥadīth in sufficient detail. Muftī Taqī ‘Uthmānī believes that Ḥadīth books such as Sahihul Bukhārī, Muwattā’ayn, Taḥāwī, etc., should not be run through, rather each and every chapter is worth studying in depth. He suggests that if the Daur-e-Ḥadīth year is extended to two years, then this would prove to be very beneficial. It would allow students to study all or most chapters of all books in detail. They may also study the principles of Ḥadīth in great detail from Tadrību’r Rāwi or Fathul Muḥīb.

To conclude, with an exception of some minor contemporary issues mentioned above, the Dars-e-Nizami has been one of the greatest Islamic curriculums yet to produce scholars of the finest quality. It is evident that the issue has never been the curriculum itself, but rather it is certain external factors which hinders us from applying the curriculum fully such as language, society, time, and funds as discussed. Aside from that, if we hold on to the curriculum while simultaneously make the required changes and additions that ‘urf demands, we will — InŞbā’Allāh — continue to witness the fruits of this noble curriculum which has been established and continuously revised by the greatest scholars of our predecessors.

This was all that Allah Ta’ala has facilitated for me to write. Alhamdulillah.
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