

The Way 'True Islam' was Supposed to be Unlike What We See Today

This is an interesting news from BBC. The real teaching of Islam is this, what has appeared in this news, not the ones what we see these days. Thanks.

Abdur Rahman Abid

What role for madrassas that teach Hindus?

By Sunita Nahar

BBC News, Calcutta

For poor Hindu students like Lakhan, this is the only school Narapatipara High Madrassa in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal is a double storied brick building with a large playground. It is surrounded by paddy fields and hectares of green farmland.

Its 320 pupils, many of them tribal children and first generation learners, come from the surrounding, largely poor, district of Nadia.

The girls outnumber boys and they are taught together in classrooms with their rickety wooden tables and benches.

Lakhan Soren, 15, is one of the 80 Hindu pupils studying at the Narapatipara High Madrassa. "I like it here," he says. "Along with Arabic, I can study all sorts of subjects like history and geography." His parents are not well-off and the madrassa is conveniently close to home.

"I have to juggle work at home with studies," Lakhan says. "When I hear the bell ring, I know it is time to stop working and go to school".

Secular madrassas

The headmaster, Mohammad Saffar Ali Mondal says the pupils at Narapatipara High Madrassa are taught in exactly the same way as they are at any other secondary school in West Bengal.

The madrassa is one of 500 registered with the government.

"They have the same syllabus, the same curriculum, the same

management, the same appointment of teachers, both Hindus and Muslims, same pensions, benefits and pay. Everything is the same."

"There is an emphasis on Islamic studies in senior madrassas but not in junior high and high madrassas like ours," Mr Mondal says.

Narapatipara High Madrassa is typical of the more than 500 officially registered madrassas in the state. These madrassas are quite unlike those said to be found elsewhere in India, and the rest of the world.

Traditionally madrassas have been seen as centres for Islamic learning where girls are often taught separately from the boys. But in West Bengal some 40,000 Hindus study in them and they are co-educational, in fact there are more girls than boys in some classrooms.

The West Bengal Board of Madrassa Education (WBBME) controls and supervises these madrassas and works according to the guidelines set by the state's school education department.

Abdus Sattar, the president of WBBME, says they fulfill the demand of poor, rural and backward communities where there is no school.

"As for the secular nature of education... there's been a long tradition in the state for such education", he says.

Islamic focus

This kind of madrassa was first established in 1780 by Warren Hastings, the first governor-general of the East India Company.

Girls outnumber boys in the madrassa.

The institution promoted the study of Arabic and its aim was to train Muslims to become officers for running the administration's revenue offices and judiciary.

The secular identity of the madrassas was established in 1915, also under the initiative of the then British government. It introduced general subjects like history and English in the madrassas, in addition to Islamic studies.

So does this mean that a madrassa affiliated to the WBBME is no longer a madrassa in the traditional sense of the school as we know it - a centre for Islamic learning?

Mr Sattar believes these madrassas are fulfilling the true meaning of the word.

"Madrassa is an Arabic word and means educational institution. In Bengali, it's known as Shiksha Pratisthan, in English, its called school, in Hindi, Vidyalaya and in Sanskrit, toll.

"It comes down to the question of what each individual school wants to teach its pupils," Mr Sattar says.

As a Muslim, he agrees, they have to preserve their culture, traditions and the Arabic language, but he says they have to also provide Muslims with modern education, to equip them for the 21st Century.