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BOOK REVIEW

MUSLIM MODERNISM: A CASE FOR NAYA PAKISTAN

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Over the period of last two decades, the ideological foundations of Pakistani nationalism are under severe stress. Myriad social, political and geostrategic forces are unravelling the mystique associated with national ideology. From *sab se Pehly Pakistan* (Pakistan first) to *Naya Pakistan* (New Pakistan) there are attempts by the governing elites to provide alternative interpretations for a beleaguered nation of 220 million. Nadeem Farooq Paracha's new book is an ambitious attempt to fill the gaps and respond to challenges that Pakistani (read Muslim) nationalism is currently facing.

The title, "Muslim Modernism; A case for Naya Pakistan" itself suggests the desire to provide logical grounds to a recurrent slogan. The book is an effort to explore the genesis and evolution of an intellectual current born in the 19th century British ruled India among Muslim Ashrafs. To whom the author entitled as Muslim Modernism.

This book is thematically divided into seven well-written chapters. The first chapter explains the context and laid down the premises of a very loose theoretical framework to expound the central arguments. Remaining chapters illustrate the birth, trial, rise and demise of what Nadeem calls Muslim Modernism. The final chapter is about resuscitating the ideological foundations of that intellectual current.

Overall, this book is a pleasant one session's read and the style of writing and use of language is also fairly simple. The author seems trying to knit an intelligible narrative for a new generation of readers who are oblivious to the progressive elements inherent within the political ideas derived from Muslim Modernism.

An analytically most important argument of the book is the distinction that Paracha introduces between *Jadeed* (modern) and other more conservative currents of thought in the 19th century. For him, the *jadeed* takes its epistemic roots from an *usul ul jaded* (modern principle) to develop rational expositions of Islamic sources (Quran, Hadees and Fiqh) in order to remain relevant to the colonial modernity (p,2). Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Chirag Ali and ilk were reckoned as Modernists

while others (ulema) put into opposite camp. Interestingly, the author accepts that the opposing camp was also 'modern' in some ways as they ... "pursued western education and ideas so that they could be systematically dismantled through an Islamic intellectual and political movement" (p,3). Thus, the central difference between both camps is not the use of reason but about the authority is for Reason or Tradition.

Paracha used periodization scheme intelligently to connect different periods and themes associated with Muslim Modernism. The 19th century and Syed Ahmed Khan precedes the emergence of Muslim Nationalism (the political expression of Muslim Modernism) in the 20th century. The transformation, from social to political, is presented through the persons of Syed Ahmad and Muhammad Iqbal. The first was the rationalizer of a new theology while the latter of political ideology. Syed Ahmad not just provided new intellectual orientations but also built modern institutions to consolidate his legacy, but Iqbal needed another companion, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, to realize his ideas.

Next important theme, discussed in the chapter titles as 'Rise' is about the post-partition period. The new state was achieved and now the task was to make a nation. This chapter begun with a reference to the often quoted speech of Jinnah delivered on 11 August 1947. Paracha argued that 'the speech is rooted in the modernist Muslim ethos which was first pioneered by the likes of Syed Ahmad Khan in the 19th century" (p,59).

Although the book dealt mostly with the universe of ideas that prepared, launched and won Pakistan. Yet, here it seems Paracha remained short of digging deep into the ideological conundrum of that particular political conjecture. The community has won a state and, he argues, now it was the time to embrace civic forms of nationalism. Yet religion that was the central feature separating it from its other (Hindu community) was abandoned immediately. The Muslim leaguers who were vehemently proposing the distinctness of Muslim-hood and role of Islam in making the contours of nationhood, suddenly started believing otherwise. The explication and arguments, in my opinion, offered in the book do not justify such a big change of heart by the Muslim governing elite.

The democracy vs authoritarianism was another theme that Paracha discussed at length to present a rationalization of the rise and demise of the modernist political currents. Ayyub and Bhutto represent the authoritarian and democratic forms of modernism in the post-independence milieu. Their policies and politics were discussed at length. While there is hardly any reflection on how and why with the emergence of democracy the demise of the most dominating political trend of last 40 (1930-1970) years started to unravel. While state-sponsored 'Quranic school' and its rationalist and modernist interpretations were supported and financed by Ayyub regime. But within ten years the counter currents not just took over the intellectual mantle, but the state also started looking towards more traditional groups to bolster its legitimacy (see, Nasr 2001, 2009). Why this shift has happened received very little attention in the book.

The last chapter mainly dealt with the contemporary period starting post-9/11 events. The rise of militancy, terrorism and social intolerance were stated as the outcome of ill-conceived policies of previous regimes. Musharraf, Paracha noted, was of the view that there is the need for reviving modernist thoughts again (p, 132). The state is still in the process of implementing its NAP

(National Action Plan) to curb terrorism and extremism. So, the rebirth of Muslim Modernism is still in the process.

Overall the narrative weaved by the author appeared seamless and well-knit. Yet, from an academic standpoint many facts and their exposition seem a little reductionist. For example Iqbal and Azad both tread different political paths and their intellectual and political journey kept evolving all the time. Using the categorization of Paracha, Iqbal is a modernist while Azad is otherwise. Although Shaikh (2009) has convincingly argued that Azad was always more pluralistic than Iqbal while defining the contours of a religious and political community. Similarly, to limit Muslim modernism and its political expression only to AIML (All India Muslim League) could also be questioned as many leading Muslims who were not 'traditional or conservative' in any way were against the idea of a separate state for Muslims (Qasmi and Robb 2017).

Lastly, Paracha's innovative distinction between the social and political aspect of Muslim modernism is original and laudable but it ignored that the ideas underlying the Muslim nationalism (product of Muslim modernism) like community, nation and polity were always greatly contested (Shaikh 1989, 2009) among and within Indian Muslims. And this contestation did not stop even after Pakistan came into being.

I would also like to argue that there is an organic relationship between community, nation and polity. Muslim Modernism was an attempt by the Mughal gentry (Ashrafis) to advocate a socio-political standpoint that favours and safeguard their interests. It was not just exclusionary but anti-democratic from its very beginning (Jaffrelot 2015). This is why from Jinnah to Bhutto every single Muslim Modernist supported and strengthened the centralization of power. Similarly, Muslim Modernism also failed in defining a proper and demarcated role for Ulema (clergy) and religion in the public sphere. It is not possible to domesticate any religion while wishing that it will not colonize the public space. Folk Islam was displaced by a conservative religious worldview and with deepening democratization masses rejected Sir Syed and accepted Maududi. There is a dire need to take up these questions in non-binary fashion to find a way out of the existing ideological conundrum.

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