

REVIEW ARTICLE

‘*Muslims in India Since 1947...’

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The 130 million Muslims living in India form the second largest Muslim population in the world. Scholarship has traditionally focused, however, on a limited range of issues surrounding this community. These include the well-known debates concerning Muslim separatism and the genesis of the Pakistan demand, the differentiation within the Indian Muslim community, and the micro-level studies of the changing political economy of communal violence during the past two decades. Useful work has also been done on the roles of Aligarh and Jamia Millia Islamia in colonial and post-independence Indian politics, but this in itself reflects the emphasis in most of the literature on Muslim elites.

Yoginder Sikand is concerned with a broader perspective that includes non-elite groups. He thus provides insights (Chapter 8) into the largely unstudied subject of the All-India Backward Muslim Morcha (AIBMM) and the ‘Dalit Muslims’ identity. The AIBMM was established in 1994 in Bihar, India’s poorest state. Its aim is to secure for the ‘Dalit Muslims’ the same reservations of jobs, parliamentary seats, and development programmes as currently held by Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist Scheduled Caste groups (p. 112 ff.). The connecting theme of the volume, however, is the Indian Muslim approach to inter-faith dialogue in the changed international context of 9/11 and in the local situation of the rise of Hindu extremism. Indeed the book is dedicated to the ‘sacred memory of the victims of Fascism in India’. The issue of how a faith tradition that emerged within the context of political power adjusts itself to a situation of Muslim minority status is not of course new within the Indian context. Some of the most creative and influential movements, such as for example Deoband, that emerged in the nineteenth-century Muslim world in response to colonialism, were rooted in the Delhi context of post-Mughal political decline. Similarly, contemporary Indian Muslim responses arising from the challenges of religious pluralism and the need to adjust to the secular state are likely to have a resonance for minority Muslim communities across the globe. It is thus especially useful for Yoginder Sikand to provide, in Chapter 4, a careful analysis of the writings of the Indian alim Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan who was born in eastern Uttar Pradesh in 1925. Wahiduddin Khan provides a critique of Islamist, ‘political-oriented religion’, despite fifteen years of involvement with the revivalist Jamaat-i-Islami. In reaction to disillusionment with this experience, he turned initially to the Tablighi Jamaat with its opposing focus on individual religious reform ‘rather than the capture of state power’ (p. 51). The Tabligh movement’s hostility to creative interpretation of Islam through *ijtihad* led Khan to disassociate himself from it also. He formed his own Islamic Centre in New Delhi in September 1976 and launched the Urdu monthly *al-Risala* as its mouthpiece. Khan argues for the path of peace and constructive dialogue rather than that of confrontation. The duty of missionary activity (*da’wa*, invitation) must be undertaken in a spirit of ‘esteem’ and ‘respect’ (p. 56) for other religions. He calls for the ‘abandonment’ of the false ‘Islam of pride’, replacing this with a truly Quranic ‘position of modesty’. He rejects ‘useless confrontation’ with others and understands *jihad* as ‘struggling one’s utmost’ in many forms, almost all of which are entirely peaceful. He declares that there is no reason for Muslims to resort to violence in the name of *jihad* (p. 61). This belief, which comes out of his reading of the Quran, the Hadith and the Indian Muslim situation, has much wider application at a time when a number of Islamist groups have taken to the path of violence in the name of *jihad*. Islam, a religion ‘of peace and mercy’ has been given a bad name, Khan argues. Indeed, the cause of Islamic *da’wa* has been undermined by making Islam synonymous for many with violence and terror (p. 64). The task of conveying the message of Islam is for

Khan more important than efforts by Islamist groups to use force to establish an Islamic state. Indeed, he insists that there is no guarantee that such an ideal state can ever be established in this world (p. 64).

Yoginder Sikand presents a variety of other responses by Indian Muslims to the issues of dialogue and pluralism. These range from Asghar Ali Engineer's 'contextual Islamic theology' to the conservative Islamist approach of the Jamaat-i Islami and the more radical stance of the Students' Islamic Movement of India. Activism based on an understanding of the original sources of the faith, while jettisoning the formulations of medieval *fiqh*, can result in 'liberal' and 'radical' readjustments to the contemporary situation. The political outcomes can vary from a call for Muslims to join hands with tribals and Dalits in resisting 'upper caste' Hindu hegemony (p. 71), to a commitment to violent *jihad* to establish the *khilafa* (p. 189). In both situations, Sikand usefully reminds the reader of the growing challenge to the traditional Indian Muslim leadership of the ulema. This is illustrated by means of the expanding English language Muslim press, represented in this volume by the Bangalore-based *Islamic Voice*, founded by a local businessman Sadatullah Khan in 1987.

The volume brings together the fruit of detailed research and reflection. Much can be learnt about movements, institutions, and individuals that remain relatively unknown outside of a specialist field of study. There are the beginnings of a non-elite approach to the study of Indian Muslims. The varying responses to the Indian Muslim 'minority predicament' come across strongly. It is clear that they possess wider implications than for the immediate South Asian setting. A minor quibble is that perhaps just a little more historical and contemporary socio-economic context could have been provided for the reader. This would have heightened the appreciation of the richness of Indian Muslim intellectual responses to the challenges of modernity and loss of political power since the late eighteenth century. It would also have grounded the study more. The transformed political situation since the emergence of Hindutva is brought out clearly, but there is little evidence of the changing economic fortunes of the variegated Indian Muslim minority. The inclusion of maps would also have helped in contextualizing the intellectual approaches examined here. These minor points aside, this is an extremely well-written and valuable contribution to an increasingly important area for study. □□□

*Muslims in India Since 1947 : Islamic Perspectives on Inter-Faith Relations.

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