

Book Review

Dr Husnul Amin, *Observing Variants of Post-Islamism: Intellectual Discourse and Social Movements.*

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In 1990s, Muslim societies rose to the reality that they need to give a new face to their Islamic posture which has lived its natural life. The face they wanted to take off was that of Islamism as it had become a false identity for Muslim societies. Before we start discussion on that false identity, it is important to understand the contemporary concerns of our era.

In the first chapter of the book, the author noted that proponents of Islamic revivalism knew that Islamism would have to hit the path of reformation at one point.

Nonetheless, it is not that this wave of reformation had swept through the entire Muslim world as a whole. At some places, this movement was very vibrant, supported by institutions and society. At other places, it was a distant dream dreamed by intellectuals in the build-up of what the author calls a 'silent revolution'.

Pakistan, the author describes, is a Sunni-majority country with a tilt towards puritanism which is why the reformist movement was not very popular until after 9/11 during the era of President Pervez Musharraf. It was at that time when extra care was taken to preserve reformist ideas like protecting rights of women, minorities, youth and promoting pluralism, and tolerance.

This reformist movement was loosely called post-Islamism. Though it followed the era of Islamism, it would be wrong to state that it was a reaction to the earlier.

The author refrained from branding Islamism as “fundamentalism, extremism or radicalism” as has been in vogue in western countries.

Islamism grew from the urge to revive the past and bring a change in the world from top to bottom. However, there are many variants of Islamism. Similarly, there are many variants of post-Islamism too. In post-Islamism, the concept of othering is discouraged and in modern history in perspective of Pakistan, things got jumbled up when Islamists took up arms and got entangled in the fight against former-USSR in Afghanistan and in freedom struggle in Indian-held Kashmir. It was not possible to tell their militant activism from their political endeavors.

To understand rise of Islamists in Pakistan, Dr Husnul Amin laid out three interconnected parameters: a) when you politicize religion, you are not able to distinguish between collective and individual responsibilities; b) drive to enforce Sharia through socio-political means and believing that Islamism is a roadmap to redraft socio-economic order and c) excessive use of propaganda engaging all modern means of media to achieve these goals.

The author maintains that post-Islamism has not come as a result of failure of Islamism as has been seen by western researchers like Oliver Roy who said post-Islamism is the dead end of Islamism. The author described at least seven different ways to understand post-Islamism.

The book has a detailed account of the crises Islamism had landed in due to its tendency of mixing politics with religion and individual with collective responsibilities.

In this modern world, a thinking pattern that leads a society towards exclusionist and isolationist approach does not work because modern technology has brought people of different backgrounds closer to each other in a matchless way. There

is a need to understand that this new lifestyle is the revolution paving the ground for Muslim societies to be inclusive and caring for vulnerable segments.

It is due to these realities that the author maintains that post-Islamism shows the world a broader perspective on religion. He rejects the propaganda that post-Islamism is secularism. Precisely, he explains that post-Islamism does strive for ensuring “prevalence of religious ethics in society” and “secularization of state.”

In Pakistan, in 1980s and 1990s, economic activity picked up due to international developments and we had a sizable middle class in our society, ready to think about what we had lost and won in our fights. In Punjab, Sindh and KP, middle class is more than 30 percent of population and in Balochistan it is less than 30 percent. International financial and political institutions had constantly urged Pakistan on to the path of modernity and liberal democracy. Even puritanical societies like Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have been gradually pushed to this path as now they do not object to “new forms of transport including paved roads, new modes of building and printing, electricity, new medicines, and types of medical treatment”.

But focusing on Pakistan, the role of Javed Ahmed Ghamidi cannot be put down. The writer explains that Ghamidi is a reformist in Pakistani society launching a re-Islamization drive that does not call for individuals to pick up arms and go out in battlefields to enforce Sharia. Ghamidi asks for reforming individual behavior and as a result Pakistan now has a considerable number of people who understand liberalism and basics of democracy.

Dr Husnul Amin, however, is not satisfied with the current state of affairs and believes that post-Islamism is yet to pick up in Pakistan, a country still yoked under puritanical thoughts and ideologies, generated by Maulana Mawdudi and others. They gave the society a notion of Jihad that urges them to kill or be killed to enforce Sharia, regardless of state obligations and human cost of this project. They named this concept

Jihad. To modern non-Muslim scholars, this project is seen as “religiously sanctified colonialism”.

Chamidi explained that Mawdudi’s views have gone a long way to threaten global peace. Osama Bin Laden has taken a leaf from what Mawdudi had taught. Ghamidi has made it clear that the verses and precedents that Mawdudi put together to advocate his brand of jihad are mutually exclusive and have resulted in magnifying a wave of militancy in our society.

Ghamidi and other reformists have made it clear that the practice of invading non-Muslims and offering them the options like accept Islam or death or accept Islam or pay jizya were time- and space-bound. Such options were applicable only for a divinely specified territory, people and time.

The most important contribution of post-Islamist scholars is that they have concluded that armed jihad is not permissible for enforcing one’s religion on other others. Rather it is meant to protect individual freedom to exercise religion. Struggle should only be waged against injustices keeping into consideration international obligations and material realities. Hence, there is no room in Islam for guerrilla warfare and suicide attacks that have beset Pakistan for long.

This book has filled the research need on modern Islam. In Pakistan, its importance can be gauged from the fact that the country has long been subject to international criticism on account of its Islamist posturing.

Prof Dr Husnul Amin has no doubt made a considerable contribution in Pakistan’s journey to become a responsible state in the world. He is associate professor at the Department of Politics and International Relations, International Islamic University. He is also Executive Directive Director of Iqbal Institute of Research and Dialogue (IRD). Recently, he has won Fullbright scholarship to pursue his research in the US.

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