Masla-e Qaumiyat Aur Marka-e Din-o Watan

By Dr. Abdul Qadir Khan**,** Fateh Publishers, Lahore: 2016**,** Pages 136, Price Rs. 300

The Controversy over Muslim Nationalism

The title speaks volumes about what the book contains. The perspectives on Muslim nationalism and religious justifications for acquiring a Muslim/ Islamic country are core subject-matters of this book. Predominantly based on abstract discussions, this small study is plainly an academic work having received strenuous efforts from the author. Though the views of various orientalists and South Asian scholars have been given the space, the main discussion rests on the ideas of Muslim scholars including but not limited to Ibn-e Khaldun, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Maulana Hussein Ahmad Madani.

In Pakistan debating on state ideology, even academically, is complex and sensitive as its entire paraphernalia is religiously composed and the people are religiously far too emotional to bear criticism or alternative version. If you, being an ordinary Muslim, having little knowledge of religious injunctions, argue with some cleric and he answers with reciting of something from sacred text, you know then well that what does confronting him mean: you have to face a fatal *fatwa*. We even see that not only the laymen but the counterpart erudite from other school of thought, sometimes, could not seek mercy. It is the common behavior of the Muslim theologians and other religio-political ideologues in South Asia that since they are but the ones who understand the religion best, assume their opinions be regarded as the only way to emancipation.

Such vanity showed by most of the religious scholars makes the situation hard that those who are lacking in-depth knowledge of religion but are well-conscientious could speak openly against those political issues which somehow are given religious color. Religion offers its followers the certain principles for restricted behavior and even the thought pattern; the ordinary followers having inadequate knowledge of Arabic language, which is the actual source to understand their religion far

down, are scared of developing their own thoughts against that what they listen frequently. They are frightened of being dubbed and punished as nonbelievers or heretic. Sensing this milieu of religiosity in India, the renowned Muslim poet of pre-partition times, Akbar Allahabadi once said satirically:

مذہبی بحث میں نے کی ہی نہیں
فالتو عقل مجھ میں تھی ہی نہیں۔

Never do I speak about religion,
As I never be redundantly wise.

This was the very reason due to which the ill-educated majority Indian Muslims resigned themselves to the wisdom of their religious ideologues to be guided at the time of crisis—a time of their plight during colonial era. Unfortunately, those theologians and intellectuals could not prove themselves conscientious and enlightened enough to provide the commoners with that what they expect from them.

… [A]s to British imperialism, the anxiety of [Muslim] scholars of the twentieth century produced unfortunate results than positive. In the wake of dialectic and historical process, British retreat from India was certainly a settled matter. Owing to unnecessary interference of the *ulema* into political chaos, or into volatile political situations, or the excessive involvement of religion in politics, the *ulema* lost not only their venerated stature but the trust of the people as well. It was a great dilemma that at this stage the majority of Muslims rejected political consensus (*ijtehad*) of the *ulema*. (p. 99) Extract from the book

Such impressions of socio-political conditions of the Muslim society in pre-partition India are the background from which the discourse of Dr. Abdul Qadir Khan's book *Masla-e Qaumiyat Aur Marika-e Din-o Watan* evolves and moves on. Divided into five chapters, the book addresses intellectual issues which arose as to Indian Muslims' struggle to overcome their vicissitudes brought about by their participation in the futile militant uprising against imperialist British East India Company in 1857. It discusses Muslim nationalism and evaluates its discrete interpretations presented by different Muslim intellectuals such as Sir

Syed Ahmad Khan, Iqbal, Maulana Hussein Ahamad Madani and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

The prologue and the first chapter of the book unravel the concept of nationalism and its identical elements in the light of the views of western political scientists. Khan explains that nationalism is originally a western concept, and later on during the period of British Raj in India imported to India; hence the territorial, racial and linguistic identities that develop a group-sense among people are the fundamental materialistic composing elements of the western nationalism. On the other hand, Islam, he contends, acquires from its followers the solidarity based upon the abstract and spiritual principles of equality, universality, justice and brotherhood among co-religionists.

He describes that Muslims of India generally and fallaciously translated nationalism as *qaumiyat,* and therefore explains the synonymously used Urdu terms translated for the word nationalism i.e. *Qaumiyat, millat* and *Ummat.* The explanations to these terms he has given by referring to relevant Quranic verses and the *ahadith* of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and expressed that the word *Qaum* used in Quran is a cliché and does not convey the sense of western nationalism. The word *ummah* used by Quran nonetheless corresponds to some extent with the connotation of that imported idea of group sense, nationalism. However, the most appropriate word in Urdu diction that implies the meaning of western concept of nationalism, Khan propounds, is *millat.* This linguistic discourse of the terms becomes the settings to tell further disputes and controversies among Indian Muslim intellectuals during colonial era; one of the chapters in his book has been devoted to highlight the similar ideological controversy arosing between the two towering Muslim ideologues i.e. Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani.

The author of *Masla-e Qaumiyat Aur Marika-e Din-o Watan* has made an attempt to shed off the myths established by the text books and the historical narrative produced by early Pakistani nationalist historians regarding freedom movement and evolution of Muslim nationalism in India. For instance, he propounds that Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, whom the text books declare one of the pioneers of Two Nations Theory, remained

Indian nationalist and an advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity in India till his demise. So as to reinforce his stance, the author quotes various speeches and statements Sir Syed Ahmad Khan delivered within a span of 17 years after 1867. Similarly, the last chapter in the book argues that although Iqbal was highly concerned with well-being of Indian Muslims, he was an Indian patriotic nationalist, well-wisher of Hindu-Muslim unity, wrote various popular poems demonstrating his love for the country and had life lasting friendship with many Hindus with whom he shared the correspondence show his regard for the Hindu fellows and Hindu scripture.

A figure often disparaged by Pakistani Nationalist narratives for his endorsement of joint efforts by Hindu and Muslim communities to demand freedom from British Raj, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani has been provided a sympathetic treatment by the author on the grounds of what line of action Madani proposed to Indian Muslims was not as such different from that of Sir Syed and Iqbal. By evolving an outline of the similarities and dissimilarities between the thoughts of both Iqbal and Madani, the author of the book shows that their ideas were not fundamentally contradictory and the differences were merely of secondary nature. Some of other historical figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who have received a great deal of despising treatment in historical narratives in Pakistan, appear in Khan's account being vindicated from that imprecation.

Apropos of the ideology of Pakistan, the Two Nations Theory, a subset notion of Muslim nationalism in South Asia, the author has discussed it a little in passing but come up with a disposition about it that might evoke annoyance of the majority Pakistani readership as he has regarded it a 'fake ideology.' For this, he has his own reasoning. He contends that the creation of Pakistan was a political need of Indian Muslims and an attempt by Muslim scholars of making it a matter of faith was extraneous to religious obligations. He propounds as Quran mentions all the obligations to its believers but none of those is to establish an Islamic government.

The small but enriched with brevity of ideas, the book provides the reader no space to lose interest. It furthers interest of those who find

themselves inclined to refined taste of Urdu language. Some may occasionally find some difficult Arabic diction author has used while explaining terms in the light of Quranic verses and relevant Arabic lexicon, it as whole is a smooth read. Logical sequence of assertions, explanations and argumentation is well-knitted that makes the book enjoyable read. Rendering new perspectives to various issues, this book is an admirable addition to the collection of ideological genre and reflects upon a new trend of thinking in Pakistan on the topic, particularly within the circle of those intellectuals who construe their argumentation through theological rationalism. The book may surely be recommended but to those research students who are unbiased and academically involved to resolve the ideological quagmire of Muslim nationalism in South Asia.

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