



Reviewed By:

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‘A Leadership Odyssey: Muslim Separatism and the Achievement of the Separate State of Pakistan’, is the latest book of the prominent historian Dr. Sikandar Hayat, in his continuing interest in discussing different contours of history of the Pakistan Movement. He has taken a leap in historiography by focusing on the actors and not on the act. This book under review, talks about the separatist movement, through an appraisal of a decisive moment in the history of the subcontinent.

Sikandar Hayat in this scholarly volume has refreshingly used an instrumentalist method of creating a symbiosis between political aspirations and human development: benchlearning. It ensues to learn effective practices for adopting them while dealing with specific circumstances. This process is not limited in its approach; it is integrative by being flexible. The author discusses the idea of separation ultimately to materialize in a separate state.

Very wisely he makes a choice of six eminent persons, towering in their own right – Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Agha Khan, Syed Ameer Ali, Maulana Muhammad Ali, Allama Muhammad Iqbal and finally last but not the least Quaid- i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. It is refreshing to note that these diverse leaders, had a common cause -to instill in the Muslim mind the value of the opportune moment- to accept the political challenge as India was becoming a territory of concern for Muslims. These leaders shared the choice of rational over emotional - while envisaging identity as a key factor. The concerns were similar, yet each one of these leaders had different perceptions for a meaningful critical discourse.

These leaders of eminence were deconstructing and reconstructing almost conflicting aspirations. In a climate of mistrust and suspicion, political and moral quest was the main concern. The author has uncovered some very difficult but important truths in a compelling narrative, untangling age-old issues. All these leaders initiated an odyssey to emphasize the realm of knowledge for moving forward. Their stated aim and not stated intention was to lead knowledge formation, so that Muslims could realize the urgency to match their footsteps mapping the political mindset for their future. The one who grasped the moment was Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, bold enough to challenge Muslims for their belligerent state of mind and fallacious sense of by-gone grandeur. He diagnosed modern education as the harbinger enabling Muslims to accept changing times, for a distinct political identity. Sir Syed has not been given the attention and the credit that he deserves as the first voice among Muslims to impress upon the value of separatism. He was sure that this alone could never be realized until the Muslims came to understand the value of modern education. Generally, he is blamed for keeping Muslims away from active political participation in the event of Indian National Congress.

Such criticism is blind to one basic element, Sir Syed was deeply concerned that without a proper education matching the needs of the times, Muslim "Quam" will not be able to establish itself in political endeavors. He was rightfully convinced that Muslims must equip and prepare themselves if they wish to make political claims.

Education was profound enough to meet the challenges of the times and was the sure path to develop. Sir Syed faced worst opposition even insults over this issue, but this did not deter him from his mission. He believed social reconstruction needed to recognize principles of justice and liberty. Here is a man who initially opposed political participation without essential education and later established that education has a political motive: to empower the Muslims to familiarize them with the idiom of the day. As Sikandar Hayat moves to prove that Aligarh College was to bring into focus an organizational climate of opinion that would serve as an equalizer. This is when Sir Syed perceived the inevitability of political participation of Muslims so that they do not remain ignored as rightful citizens.

Agha Khan institutionalized the political question, as he believed that a political organization can be the key for conflict resolution. Following Sir Syed, for Aga Khan, this was one way to provide peaceful interaction among the two contending communities. For Muslims, most importantly, conflict recurrence could be minimized by being actively involved in social institutions. Sikandar emphasizes Aga Khan's contribution in the meltdown of planning epoch of Muslim representation in the separatist movement of India.

Proceeding with political schism Syed Ameer Ali, joined in a systematic way, and very confidently led the Muslims to show respect to constitutionalism, thus highlighting the impact of benchlearning. While charting out a distinct scheme of things, to avail practical advantages of organizational performance, Syed Ameer Ali advocated elections for a separate entity, so that all the previous efforts do not evaporate as a mirage.

Maulana Muhammad Ali, a passionate believer in the supremacy of Muslim politic beyond borders, and an ardent believer in Muslim renaissance, was known for his power of pen to express his idealistic predilections. His anti-British stance exposed in the Khilafat Movement, was a proof of a separatist movement related to Muslims.

Interestingly Allama Iqbal's cultural reconstruction of Muslim mind began with a different premise, yet he recognized the plight of Indian Muslims and felt for their compromised condition. His role in the achievement of a separate state can never be emphasized enough. He was a great admirer of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and wholeheartedly followed the former's two nation theory. When Iqbal pleaded for the establishment of a separate Muslim state in India, it was not another independent territorial unit in the subcontinent. In his address of 1930, he emphasized the life of Islam as a cultural force in India, very largely depended on its centralization in a specified territory. He was of a firm belief that there could be no possibility of peace in India unless and until the Muslims were recognized as a nation under a federal system.

Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, an unparalleled leader of political insight and constitutional command came to full circle in engaging himself with the idea of a separate state for Muslims - a numerical minority. It was he who etched in the Muslim thought process that history is not only a collective memory, but also a collective conscience to lead to a life of equity and dignity. It was nothing less than a miracle in an ambience of selfish and mutilated negotiations. Jinnah was conscious that the worst was the dissension within the Muslim community, a hardship that was most difficult to surmount. Yet nothing could deter him from achieving his goal of a separate state. In the introduction Sikandar Hayat has hinted to the reader:

“...through the conscious, careful and deliberate role played by the Muslim political leadership in promoting and securing Muslim interest in an inherently biased system of representative government introduced in the country. This role was political and for political ends.”

Overall, the book is a pleasant and refreshing read, while adding to the scholarly literature on the subject. The title of the book, borrowed from Homer, reflects the parallel that the author draws with the turbulations and obstacles of times and heroes, encountering the unknown, to end in a resolution of the identity conflict.

It is a serious read, presenting the facts of the times through the eyes of great leaders, each taking a different path to a common destination, building a compelling narrative, that the effort for the separate state and empowerment of the Muslim minority was not an individual act, but a collective movement of different leaders, each taking a different approach but united in their struggle for a separate nation for the Muslims.

The book is well researched, relying on prime resources, hence presenting an accurate analysis of the circumstances and the choices made by the great leaders, to build the separate nation brick by brick. True to its title, the book is a self-realization and a spiritual quest, of the varied and wide opinions on the subject, to find and share the common thread within this diversity. The author's deep knowledge and keen understanding of the history is reflected in his ode to the separatist movement where great leaders rose to the opportunity to create new and varied interpretations to the future existence of the political minority of Muslims. Even as Sikandar Hayat has explored the various approaches, he has stayed loyal to the subject, keeping the focus on the common goal of nationhood.