

## Book Review

Sikandar, Hayat. *The Leadership Odyssey: Muslim Separatism and the Achievement of the Separate State of Pakistan*. 327pp. Oxford University Press 2021.

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Dr Sikandar Hayat is known for his intellectual engagement with Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, throughout his academic career. His doctoral thesis, culminating in a book-length study of the charismatic leadership of Jinnah, entitled *The Charismatic Leader* (2018) won an award and this book shows that he is still engaged with the subject of that book, namely the nature and course of Muslim separatism in South Asia. The book under review has seven chapters excluding an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction is a highly significant chapter wherein Hayat offers a succinct yet very useful theoretical input into the categories of historical scholarship which have attempted to analyse the phenomenon of Muslim separatism. This scholarship, he tells us, falls into two broad categories: primordialist and instrumentalist. The primordialists claim that separatism was ‘pre-ordained from pre-modern times’ (p.2) because of fundamental differences between Hindus and Muslims. The instrumentalists, on the other hand, argue that there were immediate reasons (jobs, quotas in education, relative power in state institutions, commercial interests etc.) which were responsible for separatism and that this was a modern phenomenon created by the ways of working of the colonial state. The author’s own view is also instrumentalist but he qualifies it by claiming that this ‘essentially had a religious basis’ and that the Muslim community ‘pursued Islam as a ‘religio-cultural force’ in their lives’ (p. 12). After this clearing of the tables, so to speak, the author takes on the subject of separatism in its historical context.

In the first chapter on the historical development of Hindu-Muslim separatism he gives a broad survey of Muslim rule over the subcontinent. He argues that syncretism did not work and that rulers like the Mughal king Akbar could not succeed in the face of both intransigent Muslim and Hindu separatism. He then argues that after colonial rule had established itself the Hindus adjusted better to it than the Muslims so they

became a minority in the new India where they were not a ruling power but subjects on an equal footing, at least legally speaking, with the Hindus. This being so, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the subject of the second chapter, took the lead in leading the Muslims along the lines of becoming subordinate partners of the British by learning English and acquiring new skills, asserting their loyalty to the new order and claiming that they were a separate community. This line of thinking inspired many new Muslim leaders, though of course not all agreed with Sir Syed’s open admiration of the British as a civilising influence nor did they assert their faithfulness in his candid—disparagers called it fulsome—style. Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III (1877-1957), however, followed in the footsteps of Sir Syed and, though he was instrumental in laying the foundation of the Muslim League, he tried to conciliate the British while struggling for such Muslim concerns as separate electorates and the establishment of the Aligarh Muslim University. However, the Aga Khan was confronted with new and potentially divisive issues. For example, he had to deal with the newfound Muslim zeal to save the Turkish caliphate from extinction. Eventually the Indian Muslims were left seething with frustration when the Turks themselves abolished the caliphate in 1924. This was a period of gentlemanly politics so, along with the Aga Khan, Syed Ameer Ali, a judge and intellectual who resided in London rather than India, could also be a leader of Indian Muslims. But since London was the centre of the empire and Ameer Ali’s letters in defence of Islam could affect British decision-makers, Sikandar Hayat is right in devoting a chapter (no. 4) to him. In the author’s view the principles of ‘separate representation’ and elections were converted into political principles mainly by the writings of Ameer Ali.

The next leader chosen by the author is Mohamed Ali (1875-1931). He was a dynamic personality whose writings in publications like *The Comrade* took India by storm. However,

Mohamed Ali deviated from Sir Syed and Aga Khan's loyalist politics to confront the British and was jailed for it. A major part of his effort went to the preservation of the Turkish caliphate which, as we have seen, came to naught. However, Sikandar Hayat points out that he also contributed to Muslim separatism though, says he: 'was still not ready to abandon his Indian connection and thus help charter a clear, separate, course for the Muslims, and their separate national goal' (p. 167). This being so, and one has to agree, it is not clear why the author has given such prominence to Mohamed Ali whose major contribution was to fan such fanaticism for the preservation of the Turkish caliphate that many Indian Muslims suffered immensely and entirely pointlessly when they migrated to Afghanistan.

It is, of course, quite understandable that the author has given pride of place to Allama Iqbal and Jinnah in the next two chapters. Iqbal, as is well-known, gave the idea of forming states within or without India for Muslims where they were in a majority and Jinnah eventually achieved this goal. While neither chapter contains any new piece of information derived from previously unused archival sources, they are theoretically insightful since they analyse and interpret existing knowledge to clarify the evolutionary significance of Muslim separatism in the late 1940s that made Pakistan possible. That both these leaders played significant roles in politicising Muslims, especially those of U.P and Bengal, their contribution in achieving the separate country of Pakistan is undeniable but the author has provided a fresh look into the way they did it. And, as expected, Jinnah's charisma was such that it converted a whole generation of Muslims to such enthusiasm for a Muslim state that what had seemed unlikely even up to the middle of the 1940s became a fact within a few years.

The author is right in expressing the dominant view among Pakistani historians that Muslim separatism was in the best interest of Indian Muslims; even those who might earlier have disagreed with this article of faith, at least in Pakistan, now agree—in the context of the anti-Muslim bias of the present BJP government—that this is correct. However, the author, despite his status as an independent scholar who cannot be accused of having state patronage, holds uncritical views of personalities who are revered in Pakistan. For instance, he refers to S. M. Ikram's quote about the 'path of sincere syncretism' or 'peaceful coexistence...[recognising] the separateness of the two [Hindu and Muslim] cultures', which, according to Ikram, Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624) 'advocated' (p. 29). Sikandar Hayat agrees with, or at least does not contest, Ikram's view, though Sirhindi's letters are anything but peaceful. In one of them he expressed pleasure on the execution of Guru Arjun Singh (1563-1606) saying: '*khwari-e-kuffar khwud naqd-e-waqt-e-ahl-e-Islam ast*' (the humiliation of infidels is for the Muslims a gain of this period itself).

Coming to the major issues of the book, Sikander Hayat has a soft spot for Iqbal, celebrated for his role in giving the idea of

Pakistan. Had it only been praise of this role, it would have been unobjectionable. However, he approves of Iqbal's celebration of Muslim dynamism—in fact of dynamism itself—but part of what Iqbal celebrates is conquest. This galloping of horses, as Iqbal would have it, led to colonialism. If European colonialism is wrong in Iqbal's worldview, is it logical to assume that Arab or Turkish colonialism is justified? Also, and expectedly, given his reverence for Jinnah, Hayat defends all his decisions. He takes it for granted that the division of the Punjab and Bengal were a great injury to Pakistan but discounts the idea that the logic of partition on the basis of religion made it necessary. Moreover, he does not answer the question as to what, if they had remained undivided, would have been the fate of their non-Muslim minorities, Hindus and Sikhs, in Pakistan. Seeing the way the contemporary remnants of these minorities are subject to discrimination, how is it credible that they would have prospered in Pakistan. And, if it is taken as an article of faith that they would, then by the same logic Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Azad might have been right in arguing that the Muslims of India, as a powerful minority in undivided India, would also have fared well. In the same way, despite his inclusion of Stanley Wolpert's *The Shameful Flight* in his bibliography, Hayat does not use it to critique the leaders of the Muslim League. While there is no doubt, as he points out, that Mountbatten's bringing forward the date of the partition was a blunder, he does not point out that the leaders of both the Muslims and the Hindus failed to visualise how many people would move across the borders, nor did they understand the hatred they themselves had helped raise among their followers. Thus, the facts that the border security force was totally inadequate and that the population migrations were neither planned nor organised, were not matters that anyone of our leaders had really thought through. Nor did anyone really look at the implications of the two-nation theory for India's Muslim minorities. It is now the extremist Hindu organisations which, on the basis of the two-nation theory, tell Indian Muslims that because they had claimed to be a separate nation and Pakistan had been created as a consequence, they had no right to live in India. Jinnah's decision to become Governor-General and not prime minister could also be questioned but since the book ends at 1947 and the implications of this decision came later we need not go into it. My pointing to what appear to me to be biases in this book reflects my own reading of the history of Pakistan and this can be faulty – I am not a professional historian nor a specialist on the particular topics the book covers. So, whatever my views, I would end by putting this book to the court of the readers and that of professional historians. Dr Sikandar Hayat's mastery of political theory, his analytical skills and scholarship is such that the readers will engage and benefit from it even if they disagree, as I have, with parts of it. In the end my view of this book is that it is right about its major theme i.e. the development of Muslim separatism despite the issues I have pointed out. It will be useful for students of Pakistan studies and general readers who are looking for a single, accessible text in order to understand the rise of Muslim separatism in the Subcontinent.