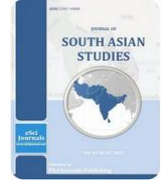




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Book Review

JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI WOMEN IN PAKISTAN

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By Amina Jalal, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York, 2013. pp. 304. ISBN: 978-0-8156-3327-3, USD \$39.95

The book *Jamaat-e-Islami Women in Pakistan* is a ground breaking work by Amina Jamal who is an associate professor of Sociology at Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada. This scholarly work is constructed on the basis of extensive interviews with the Jamaat women, case studies and corroboration of brilliant literatures from different but relevant fields. The entire book is divided into six broad chapters along with introductory and concluding parts. First chapter is *Newly Emerging Subjects- Feminism, Islamic Feminism, and Post Islamic Feminism*. The second is *The Spaces of the Public Religious*. The third one is *Politics of Morality*. The fourth is under the heading of *Vanguard of a New Modernity? Cultural Politics in a Post-Colonial State*. The fifth is *Gender and Development and Its Discontents, Jamaat Women and the Women Question in Pakistan*. The sixth chapter is *To Forbid and Enjoin Virtue, Creating Moral Citizens*. This is a work that reflects an essence of tradition and modernity. The author starts his writing with the opposition of observing the system of borqa as unacceptable as it lowers the freedom and autonomy of women in public spheres. But as a social scientist, she has deliberately taken a curiosity as to why contemporary Muslim women are to opt for such a system. Against this backdrop, she engages herself with Jamaat-e-Islami women in Pakistan who are religious but not veiled.

Jamaat-e-Islam is a movement for moral reform of Muslims initiated by Maulana Abdul Ala Maududi in 1941 in British colonial India to resist colonial cultural dominance on the one hand and distinguish Muslims

from an emergent Hindu nation on the other. Jamaat-e-Islam gained ascendance in politics after 1977 during the period of proxy war between America and Soviet Union in Afghanistan. At the same time, the military regime under the dictatorship of General Gia-Ul-Haq has sought the support of Jamaat leaders for raising a war at home and in other Muslim societies as a form of jihad or moral struggle. All these historical events are beautifully presented in the book. But what attracts the readers in a convincing way is her effort to combine religion and modernity, though both are not mutually inclusive in any way. She has tried to invent Jamaat women's self-cultivation morality, cultivation of religious subjectivity, and the restoration of Islamic political, economic and legal system which, for Jamaat women, are necessary qualitative virtues not only to react against Western colonialism and imperialism, but a part of the project of decolonization and recovery from process of degeneration of Muslim subjectivity that began after the early centuries of Islam and culminated in the complete subordination of Muslim societies by imperial powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The author being educated in Pakistan and Canada with a profound impact of western humanist and social science tradition was also impressed by the doctrinal implication of Jamaat-e-Islami women in order to understand Islam and Muslim history in South Asia. Islam has always been a part and parcel of public discourse and discussion of nation and identity of Pakistan. It is misleading to discuss Islamist politics in Pakistan through ideas about the deprivatisation of religion, as is manifested in studies of Western societies, or as crises of secularism, as has been used in contemporary debate in Indian politics. Jamaat

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women's project of bringing together Islam and modernity is definitely a novel approach, but in the long run it has helped the shaping of gendered Muslim citizens and subjects. The author is not critical about Moududi who blamed the decline of purdah system on the cultural influence of colonialism and the slavish mentality of Muslims who have succumbed to the forces of Western standard of civilized behavior and modern subjectivity. Professor Amina Jamal has not raised any voice against the Jamaat women who are critical of such kind of Islamic reformation that reinterprets Quran and Hadith regarding gender relations and women's right that encourage the community to adapt to the social, educational and political system imposed by the colonizers in India.

For the Jamaat, revolution does not symbolize a violent overthrow of the existing order, but rather a gradual cultural and political transformation aimed at society's leading classes. Rather than begin at grassroots, this type of social change that was seen at the top and permeated downward. Thus, class is the pivot of Jamaat-e-Islam. The division between higher class and middle class lies in core of Jamaat's school of thought which was not adequately captured by the author. The entire treatise supports the confinement of women in domestic sphere both in a manifested and latent way. To Jamaat, the only legitimate sphere of activism for Muslim women is the domestic and social space where women interact with other women in charitable activities, social welfares, and political reformism. Jamaat women are not religious subject seeking to survive in a modern world that has been imposed on them; rather, their religious activism is expressed through the manner in which they embrace both Islam and modernization. Jamaat women linked their emergent modern identities and modes of existence with the fulfillment of both the citizenship rights and other

obligations that they believed were enjoined on Muslim women by Quran and Hadith. Like the women feminists, Jamaat women voice a commitment to fighting violence against women and ending the exploitation of women in marriage, divorce and the workplace. But they strongly disapprove of women's struggle for equality with men under the agenda of women's rights as universal human rights since the Jamaat is ideologically committed to men's superior status as provider of sustenance for women. Like all women's NGO in Pakistan, Jamaat women believe that education for women and the poor is a dire necessity for the country's social and economic progress. But Western scientific and humanist education, for them, is not enough. The moralizing logic of religious education is equally necessary since, they argue, it is also the educated westernized upper classes who engage in outdated, oppressive, and backward practices that subordinate women. It was clear that, without expressing obvious disagreement, not all women shared the idealized notion of Muslim women content to remain permanently confined to the home and family while being provided by a supportive and moral Muslim man who would represent her in economic and political life. On the question of women's employment in case of dire necessity, the Jamaat accords such permission to middle class women only to use their talent and capabilities in their workplace maintaining a proper balance between work and home. The notion of class consciousness is not a liberally constructed by the Jamaat, rather encouraged class differentiation like higher class, middleclass, and male-female, Muslim nationalism and other nationalism.

Still, the book is very much important to understand the contemporary socio-cultural life of Pakistan. Sense of belongingness is a pride of every nation and nationality. The book emphasizes on Muslim identity and Jamaat-e-Islam is a vanguard of that identity.