Book Reviews


Reviewer: Danial Mohd Yusof, Department of Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia.

The book under review is a collective effort of the members of the Department of Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia. Zeenath Kausar has managed to compile a cohesive and commendable array of scholarship to address the issue of political development and its related processes in the Muslim world. An accessible literature for the undergraduate and layperson, it nonetheless delivers, at the essential scholastic level, a solid philosophical and theoretical foundation in galvanizing a distinct identity for Muslims. Noteworthy on this point is the contribution of Dr. Louay Safi who articulates the dynamics of identity in complexities of Muslim development trends via a historical narrative that is organic in its mode of explanation, cyclical in its employment and morally focused in its implication. Equally noteworthy is Khurshid Ahmad’s leading contribution on the disenchantment with the modern development theory and loss of identity. Self-admittedly a pioneering work, this anthology is deserving of further elucidation on the power of identity and self-knowledge among Muslims. This is to dispel the West’s development myth and fin de siècle while undermining the increasingly popular postmodern slogan of pluralism and relativism and its possible trans-valuation of Islam as a precursor to its own neo-modernists or rational fundamentalist approach of development. However, the dynamics of development is admittedly more complex than the theoretical premise of such a ‘holistic’ programme by Zeenath Kausar. The intricacies presented through the following conceptual issues and case studies of this book highlight the necessity for academic sophistication and policy pragmatism to coincide. The growing rift between the two is of major concern for the relevance of future discourses.

The concept of democratic prudence, relativism in culture and the West’s own history of ideologies (and Christianity) are resources for
accumulative understanding which transparently indicate that humanity
doesn’t understand itself yet. John Jacques Rousseau expressed the
limitation of Thomas Hobbes’ locus of power (renunciation of original
freedom to an aggregation, which falls short of a body politic) by calling
for an aggregation of self-preservation and a body politic through
consent and reintroducing morality within the body politics as inherent
and a continuous labour with political, educational reformation. But he
concluded on a ‘degenerative’ existential cycle of temporal actuality:
“The march towards the perfection of society is as rapid as that towards
the deterioration of the species.” Paradoxically, development in the
modern world implies the universalism that conforms to secularism.
This is the task that must be undone by Islam in its own societies. It sees
the Western liberal experience as a ‘leviathan’ of sorts, two
dimensional, at the most. To the West, this process would seem
‘parasitic’ on its ‘universalistic’ discourse. As Islam is ‘exclusively’ its
own ‘universal’ and independent superstructure to Muslims, it would be
a highly intricate process for Islamic unity and development to ‘co-
habit’ Islamic values/principles and structures to secular humanist
perspectives on religion, science, and the social sciences. The problem
of political participation and the institutionalization of shârà
(consultative decision-making) represent a major conceptualization
‘migraine.’ Consider the words of Muhammad Asad:

No doubt a majority can err, but so can a minority…The fallibility of
the human mind makes the committing of errors an inescapable factor
of human life, and so we can have no choice but to learn through trial
and error and subsequent correction. (quoted by Fathi Osman, p. 97).

Fathi Osman and Rashid Moten both manage to articulate the
precepts of the Islamic polity along the lines of theocracy, monocracy
and democracy in their illumination of the shârà system admirably
without falling into the conceptual trappings of each of these concepts.
But the words of Muhammad Asad must be duly considered as
indicative of the bifurcation of Islamic policies and Political Islam.
Here, after all, lies the real predicament of Islamic ‘Super Rules’ be it
functional as a State’s constitution. The canon of democracy as a pre-
cursor to development and the incompatibility of Islam (thus Muslims
being uncivilized) as an assertion are symptomatic of the West as a
domineering ideological movement. The fundamental differences
between an Islamic political system and Western democracy in terms of
sovereignty, the constitution, role of religion and decision making not as
a channel of interest articulation and aggregation among morally
unregulated factions necessitates the centrality of a value system i.e.
religion. If Thomas Aquinas himself distinguished eternal law, divine or
revealed law, natural law and civil law - the notion of modernity and progress as an epistemological evolution disqualifies Islam as the West did away with the Church. The dynamism of the shûrâ is its ‘awareness’ of such different and over-lapping dimensions between the bond of tawhîd and human psychology, rationality, solidarity, political organization and development. It is within this context that an Islamic polity must be engineered where its association or similarities with all things civilized, developed, scientific and modern will be proven to be superfluous when compared to the West on civilizational terms. But as long as the shûrâ system remains un-operational in Muslims societies as a heritage of Islam’s political manifestation, the West’s ‘social engineering’ scheme will persist and even appear to be persuasive and, of course, operational.

The chronology of this book appears to follow the flow of thought of this reader as he contemplates, clearly anticipating his curiosity to a pivotal climax. The understanding of science in its socio-political set-up and civilizational exchange or interaction with more advanced idea systems becomes the ultimate challenge or preservation, integration or corruption of an identity. If identity can be sub-divided into beliefs, values and ideas—“the transfer of science and technology from a different normative system requires a complete reorientation and restructuring of the entire spheres of belief and value systems which include distorted elements (Louay Safi, p.139). Self-criticism, moral and value oriented administration, management and professionalism (read Abdel Rahman Ahmad) and a cohesive education system is required to mobilize this process. The criteria phase of transfer and reevaluation will see perhaps greater factionalism (in the form of adjectives before the word Islam) among Muslims of the West’s new millennium e.g. liberal, fundamentalist, extremist, postmodernist, socialist, nationalists, environmentalist etc. before a networking structure becomes operational. The problematic legitimation of Islam in the nation-state politics of Bangladesh (read Syed Serajul Islam); development planning and the quandary of religious, national and ethnic identity of the Malays in multi-cultural and bi-modal Malaysia (read Zeenath Kausar); and the historical complexity and factionalism of Sudan and its cancerous South in relation to Islamization (read ElFatih A. Salam) as case studies suggest a grim particularity in the politics of development in Muslim societies where theoretical sophistication and pragmatism do not configure, and this has to be distinguished from political development in Islam.

This book is thus commendable for its stark realization of the political predicament of Muslims and civilizational development. The
cold, impersonal but descriptive writing methodology from the authors provoke the reader to link, personally imbue and empathize with the conceptual issues and case studies as a loss of the Islamic axiology. If we have realized thus far, the book then obliquely invites us to fill that vacuum.

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*Lamḥāt* (moments) is a sort of memoirs where a person, dedicated to an Islamic movement, narrated precious experiences and critical moments of his life that shaped his ideological struggle. A person who has a distinct mission and whose entire activities in this world rotate around that mission is quite different from those who are engaged only in meeting the material demands of their existence. Khurram Murad was an exceptional person who was engaged in *da‘wah* work and in activating the Islamic movement. It is said that anything expressed with utmost sincerity and comes from the depth of the heart has tremendous effect upon the mind and soul and has the ability to reach great heights. The present work is an example of that. Every word of *Lamḥāt* manifests his sincerity, dedication and commitment to the doctrine for the implementation of which he sacrificed his life. As such, it leaves a lasting impact upon the mind and heart of the readers.

*Lamḥāt* is narrated by Khurram Murad when he was in the hospital waiting for heart surgery for the third time. He knew the operation was risky but there was no alternative. He had very short period at his disposal but in such a critical moment he decided to record his experiences not to satisfy his ego, which he never had, but to help people understand the nature and development of an Islamic movement (Jamā‘at-e-Islāmī). *Lamḥāt* aims as well to guide the workers to be a dedicated soldier in the service of Islam.

Khurram Murad, born in 1932, was brought up in a middle class religious family in Bhopal State (India). The home environment was very conducive to cultivating piety and reading. There was a separate room where books of different types were kept and served as a library. Khurram Murad, from childhood, took a keen interest in reading. Parents and other members of the house were practicing Islam with zeal