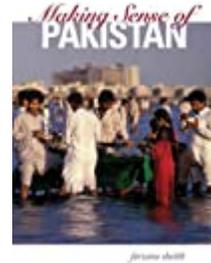




Farzana Shaikh. *Making Sense of Pakistan.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. ix + 274 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-14962-4.



Reviewed by Robert Nichols

Published on H-Asia (December, 2009)

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The Crisis of Identity in the Postcolonial State

Farzana Shaikh offers a scholarly and erudite study of the competition to define and establish a national identity for Pakistan. The author argues that contested visions of the religious nature of the postcolonial state in large part explain a history of instability, fragmentation, and power abuse. The tension from independence in 1947, but especially after the death of founding ideologue M. A. Jinnah in 1948, was the question of whether Pakistan was intended to be an Islamic state that privileged Muslims, or a Muslim nation-state that would guarantee the equality of all its citizens (p. 116). Six chapters trace the identity question through colonial roots and legacies, post-partition social and ethnic friction, the sacralization of party politics, incomplete and unequal development regimes, the evolution of an Islamic army, and claims to status and parity in foreign affairs.

Students of Pakistan's difficult and complex history are familiar with discussions of what the author summarizes as the country's key problems: its failure to withstand military dictatorships; its uneven social and economic development; its severe ethnic divisions, and even

the pursuit of questionable foreign policies (p. 9). In her analyses of these problems, Shaikh argues that these issues are to be understood not as causes of the weak state, but as symptoms of the underlying uncertainty about its identity—an uncertainty that stems from the lack of consensus over Islam (p. 9). As Jinnah's vision of a secular, constitutional state offering equal protection to citizens of all religions and backgrounds faded in the face of political divisiveness and economic hardship, other voices, representing other visions and agendas, especially in regard to Islamic initiatives and alternatives, pressed for influence over national policies. The failure, then and now, to reach consensus over the meaning of Islam, soon became the cancer that threatens Pakistan's body politic (p. 8).

Shaikh considers and reflects on colonial and post-colonial debates about Muslim nationalism, Islamic universalism, and religion as ethnic or sectarian marker. Subtle distinctions are made that add thoughtful contributions to well-studied dynamics and history. The core issue at stake was less a contest between a secular leader-

ship and a resistant religious establishment than between two rival discourses of Islam, one communal (an elite Muslim separatist and community vision) and one Islamist (a value-based vision, often with a political agenda attached) (p. 11 and chapter 1). Over decades, questions of who was a legitimate Pakistani and the meaning of citizenship were pressed by both Muslim communal and Islamist agendas to variously exclude Ahmadis in the 1950s, drive Bengalis to revolt and separation in 1971, divide out Mohajirs as a new ethnic identity in the 1980s, and generate support for a vigorous state sponsored program of Islamization in the late 1980s (p. 56). From the 1970s, Sunni-Shi'a sectarian rivalry and conflict, spurred by international sectarian competition, aggravated the lack of consensus over the terms of identity for Pakistanis. With Ziaul Haq's Ordinance 20 of 1984 institutionalizing discrimination against Ahmadis, the concept of citizenship moved far from Jinnah's vision and became dependent almost wholly on the definition of an individual's creed and religious profile, with an accompanying and ongoing erosion of the rights of Pakistan's non-Muslim citizens (pp. 63, 79).

Jinnah's own prevarication over the ultimate relation of religion and politics in the postcolonial state allowed multiple voices and perspectives to claim legitimacy from religion after an independence movement that under Jinnah came to represent all things to all men (p. 83). Ayub Khan's secular development state approach in the 1950s, Zia's Islamist initiatives in the 1977-89 period, and Pervez Musharraf's enlightened moderation after 1999, all attempted to define, and redefine, the state's relation to Islam and Sharia. At the same time, a host of parties and sectarian interests continued to espouse unique interpretations of the balance needed between spiritually and secularly guided authority.

Shaikh revisits the complex relationship with religion of succeeding political regimes and state institutions, discussing how each ruler sought to promote particular arguments about the appropriate role for Islam and Islamic oversight and legislation. Contested interpretations shaped debates on the 1949 Objectives Resolution requiring an Islamic Constitution; on the secularist 1961 Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, that then experienced limited enforcement; and on Zia's 1979 Hudood Ordinance, seen as restricting equal rights for women. Politicians, such as Z. A. Bhutto, sought to frame and manipulate Islamic issues even as they might be ultimately outmaneuvered, as was Bhutto, by competing discourses of appropriate Islamic conduct and political legitimacy. Zia's engagement with Islamist politics and

parties, from creating new provincial Shariat courts to Islamizing the 1980s Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union, had a double aim, to ensure that Islamization remained a state-sponsored and state controlled exercise and to provide legitimacy for the coup-maker who had overthrown Bhutto (p. 102). Institutionally as well, over decades, different Islamists and many in the Pakistan military were drawn together by mutual interests and agendas in East Bengal, Kashmir, and Afghanistan.

The author distinguishes between Zia's state policy of Islamization and the later, non-state politics of a partially class-based process of shariatization generated by different social and political dynamics (p. 107). The rise in Pakistan of so-called vernacular groups, which are neither Anglicized nor western but recognizably modern on their own terms, saw urban, private sector interests grounded in conservative cultural values, often mobilizing the language of religious sectarianism (p. 107). A cogent summary notes how Zia's state-sponsored Islamization, supported by the Jamaat-i-Islami party, who made no secret of their hostility to the traditional, mainly Sunni, clerical establishment, gave way after the mid-1980s to a religious establishment, led by the Jamiat-ul Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) party, that has undergone a process of radicalization that has enabled it successfully to appropriate the rhetoric of political Islam, typical of the Islamist lay intelligentsia represented by the Jamaat-i-Islami (p. 108). Importantly, with profound ideological and foreign affairs implications, shariatization was framed as within an Islamist conceptual world of a transnational community of believers existing beyond individual state-building concerns.

In the final chapters, Shaikh follows the nuances of state development rhetoric and military-foreign policy approaches as succeeding leaders and party positions strained to justify policies shaped mainly by class, party, or ethnicity through the use of Islamic symbols and moral values. If Jinnah's economic interests were overwhelmingly conservative and favoured private property, even as he expressed a public commitment to the objectives of economic and social justice, then what guidance did that leave for later framers of public policy (p. 119)? Ayub Khan's trickle down development strategy creating functional inequality generated limited results and alienation. Bhutto's populist Islamic socialism of nationalization that stopped without land reform, and Zia's efforts to nurture a conservative, urban, merchant middle-class reflected differing political constituencies and differing interpretations of how an Islamic framework might contribute to ending poverty and building

a national economy. What separated the two sides of this debate was not whether Islam should determine economic policy, but which Islam should serve as its engine (p. 125). Limited economic development and the failure of consensus building over an appropriate role for Islamic idioms and policies led to charges and countercharges of bad faith, corruption, and moral failure.

Over the years, the Pakistan military would respond to such political vulnerability and assert moral probity and patriotism to justify taking power. The military represented itself as best able to defend interests fixed by a problematic national identity. And it would reflect in its recruitment and policies the evolving interpretations of Islamic identity that transformed other aspects of Pakistani politics and society. The military would uphold the original claim of the two-nation theory, that Muslims and Hindus were two different, equal nations, by continuing to confront and challenge India in Kashmir, in conventional arms acquisition, and in nuclear arms development. In the 1980s, first in Afghanistan and then in Kashmir, there began to emerge signs of a recognizable symbiosis between the senior military leadership and parts of the religious establishment committed to a vision of transnational Islam (p. 153). A transnational religious focus might diffuse ethnic differences, even as it diverted attention from the problems of the nation-state.

Shaikh fully details the religious texturing of Pakistan political history as prime ministers, generals, religious parties, and ethnic and regional interests drew on

Islamic rhetoric, values, and interpretations to advance goals and visions of the nation. As political and military leadership supported more extreme and violent Islamic factions in Afghanistan and Kashmir they did so in part to further national claims to international prominence and to geopolitical parity with India as a power of the first rank. Rather than gaining such recognition, Pakistan had to struggle to convince allies and opponents of the legitimacy of these claims. Shaikh traces Pakistan's bitter-sweet search for national validation through decades of less than decisive foreign policy and diplomatic initiatives (p. 191). American connections would provide neither sufficient arms packages nor the permanent international status that would allow Pakistan to claim genuine equality with India. Instead, Pakistan reaped the unintended consequences of internal Talibanization and persistent sectarian violence.

For many, Pakistani self-perception remains that of America's sullen mistress (p. 199). Expectations based on unrealistic and unresolved notions of national identity continue to plague Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan, China, and the United States. The country's unending search for meaning continues (p. 208). The author closes by reflecting on the possibility of the nation turning away from transnational Islamism. By recasting its enduring quest for religious consensus in terms of a cultural heritage rooted in the discourse of Indian Islam, it may yet salvage a pluralist alternative consistent with democratic citizenship (pp. 211-212).

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Citation: Robert Nichols. Review of Shaikh, Farzana, *Making Sense of Pakistan*. H-Asia, H-Net Reviews. December, 2009.

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