
As its title indicates, this book by Mr. Aslam Siddiqi attempts to explain the challenges posed by modernization to the traditional thought and practice of the Muslims. It emphasises the failure of the 'Ulamā to meet these challenges and calls upon the Muslims to exercise creative thinking in order to solve modern problems in the light of Islam. It also contains a forceful plea for the toleration of unorthodox thinking and the throwing open to a free national debate the great issues with which the Muslims are faced today.

Referring to the Pakistani commitment to order the national affairs in accordance with the Qur’ān and the Sunna, Mr. Aslam Siddiqi says that accommodation has to be found between ideology and reality. He complains that the Muslims are just imitating others and have developed a split personality not knowing how to relate their contemporary borrowings to Islamic principles and heritage. On the other hand, he is equally opposed to adopting ancient structural solutions of seemingly similar problems which have arisen in radically different social environments.

In the first chapter the author defines modernization as consisting in an attitude of mind which is dissatisfied with traditional ways of life. Social change is the hall-mark of modernization and economic growth its major achievement. The second chapter is entitled, "The Meaning of Revolutions". It traces the emergence of the modern mind in the western world after successive intellectual, industrial and political revolutions. The third chapter is devoted to the Muslim reaction to these western revolutions which transformed the life and thought of the western man. In the opinion of Mr. Aslam Siddiqi the intellectual response of the Muslims to western thought and practice is mainly apologetic, old tools are used to solve new problems, which are transferred to an age where they did not exist and thus the whole effort to solve them is fruitless and misdirected. He criticises Kamal Ataturk for lacking in intellectual restraints and deeper insights and for not realizing his own limitations.

The fourth chapter, "The Contemporary Islamic Society", deals with the recent conditions in the Muslim world and the cultural onslaught on the Muslims from the West, from Soviet Russia and from the Bharati Hindu expansionism. He says that India declared herself a secular state but this secularism has not prevented it from returning to Hindu ways. A silent ceaseless effort goes on for Hinduizing other cultures. Text books adopted for secular education in all schools bring out this policy clearly. In fact this fear of being Hinduized was the main reason why the demand for Pakistan gathered such an overwhelming force. Mr. Aslam Siddiqi should have added a few paragraphs for the analysis of the factors which led to the partition of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent.

In the seventh chapter on "The Fetters of Structures" Mr. Aslam Siddiqi complains that Muslims have chosen the divisive aspects of nationalism which is opposed
to the Islamic spirit. While others are preparing for one world or the global village, Muslims are cutting themselves into small slices; so they become easy to absorb.

In the eighth chapter on “Changing Environments and Adaptive Systems”, which is much too technical for a layman, Mr. Aslam Siddiqi criticises the popular prescription “Back to the Qur’ān” and “Back to the Sunna”. He says that this cannot mean going back to the days of the prophet, which is just not possible, for no one can wish away the intervening centuries and the deposits of history. The criticism is only partially justified. There is a vital sense in which we can go back to the days of the prophet, if we mean by this that we can capture the spirit of the Qur’ān and the Sunna and the values they uphold.

The chapter on the Islamic Framework refers to the social legislation of the second caliph, 'Umar, to prove the thesis that under changed social conditions, it becomes necessary to revise and modify the legislation of the past, while retaining its spirit and sticking to its objectives. This chapter leaves a sense of inadequacy and we hope that in the next edition Mr. Aslam Siddiqi will do some further elaboration and quote more instances where 'Umar took independent decisions to meet new situations. But it must be made clear that in these decisions 'Umar the second caliph was not in any way contravening the principles of Islam but implementing them in a more effective manner.

In the tenth chapter on the Concept of Knowledge, the author refers to the failure of early Muslims to observe Nature directly and employ other methods of interpreting the Qur’ān, besides the Sunna, the Hadith and History. He is of opinion that Muslim knowledge was mainly dependent on deduction. Finally, he comes to the conclusion that a blend of the deductive and inductive approaches seems necessary for the Muslims to qualify as the “midmost people”.

In the chapter on “The Creative Group”, Mr. Aslam Siddiqi pleads for the formation of an elite in the Muslim world who would consist not only of the 'Ulāmā' but also of distinguished people drawn from other walks of life, who would guide the community along right lines. In my humble opinion a new class of 'Ulāmā' should be raised which is well-versed in modern social sciences along with the traditional religious sciences. It is only this group of people who can properly function as the guides of the community.

In this chapter Mr. Aslam Siddiqi also pleads for the study of sub-cultures of different groups. He says that Islam is a supra-culture. What he means perhaps is that different regional cultures cannot claim autonomy and independence of Islam. But he has not made this point very clear. It is necessary to do so in the light of recent controversies on the subject.

On the whole, Mr. Aslam Siddiqi has written a good book which is recommended to all those who are thinking on the problems of the Muslims in the modern world.