

# Islam and Muslim Societies

## - a social science journal

### Book Reviews

**The Idea of a University Jamia Millia Islamia** (ed) Rakshanda Jalil, 2009, Delhi, Aakar books, pages, 80, list of contents, editorial, list of contributors, hard bound price Rs. 175

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This eighty paged hard bound book edited by Rakshanda Jalil had been brought out after the aftermath between police and alleged terrorists in the neighborhood of Jamia Millia Islamia. The articles contributed are from India and overseas with varied professional interests ranging from law, ethics, literature, history, security analysts, political scientist, social analysts and experts in Minority studies. The individual responses of these authors are in depth analysis with perception of the situation and apprehensions resulting out of it.

Irrespective of their background and academic interests most of the authors raise the issue of principle and idea behind the creation of Jamia. It was a shared concept believed by a handful of nationalists led by Maulana Muhammad Ali during 1920s where faith and education was committed to plural nationhood and composite culture. It started functioning from Badar Bagh, Aligarh and within eight decades established itself in Delhi as a centre of higher learning. This secular and nationalistic institution today is smarting under the ill effects following the September encounter. Rakshanda Jalil in the editorial gives a detailed account of this institution's contribution towards nation building, which seems to have been forgotten in the aftermath of infamous 'Batla House Encounter'.

Marth C. Nussbaum aptly titles her essay "the land of my dreams: Islamic liberalism under fire in India". Liberalism is contrary to the Muslim stereotype drawn out in the world media. By elaborating on the life and work of Hasan (Mushirul) and Hussain (Zakir) she highlights the spirit behind Jamia. Yet, the September encounter's repercussion had jolted the 14000 students and teachers of Jamia. She concludes her essay by quoting Jamia's official anthem which would surely help the institution to retain its semblance during these traumatic and testing times. Gita Hariharan's article, first published in Telegraph, is brief but incisive. She quotes from Sarojini Naidu, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Gandhi who perceived a peaceful haven in Jamia. The practice of "Qaumi Hafta" organised after Jallianwala massacre, sweeping streets of Karol Bagh way back in the twenties were agendas to reach to the neighborhood community. This spirit has been kept alive in Jamia by opening its library for the public on specified days.

Satish Chandra's depiction of Muslim psyche and "forced identity" created by the majority community can not save and protect the Muslims. "If 'we' fail to see our own 'terrorizing' we shall fail to stop what we call 'terrorism' are his words which need attention. In her article 'Reliving Gandhi's Legacy' Ayesha Siddiqui critically evaluates the response of the Vice Chancellor Professor Mushirul Hasan after the Batla House encounter and establishes the fact that he is carrying out Gandhi's legacy in word and spirit. In case India can find more such men it can restraint the internal violence and feuds.

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Mukul Kesavan's article demonstrates that he is unperturbed and has the forthright attitude and moral fiber to point out the bias existing in our country. An institution born out of non cooperation movement led by Gandhi is tainted as a terror bed. The violence against the Muslim, Sikh and Christian in Gujarat, Orissa and Delhi raise the question whether ours is a civilized nation or a sectarian country? The media and politicians have been largely responsible for this state of affairs.

Rakshanda Jalil highlights the two important aspects – bias and discrimination from the perspective of a resident of Jamianagar which need urgent attention. Rumki Basu's article vividly narrates the unease of the teachers and the challenge faced by the 12,000 students to restraint and remains peaceful in the face of the Batla House encounter. Mehar Fatima Hussain is working in the Dr. K.R.Narayan Centre for Dalit and Minority Studies at Jamia . She has noted the events of the 19th September, 2008 and the fear and 'un freedom' faced by not only the students and teachers but the residents of entire neighborhood of Jamia Milia Islamia. She has systematically analyzed the role of media vis-à-vis the minority based on the study conducted by the Centre for Media Studies during 2007, which revealed that only 0.9 per cent of the news coverage was related to minorities. She reiterates that only "politicized" coverage got higher visibility in television news than social change. Since media is the most influential newsmaker it has to work in the interest of the nation with responsibility and in an unbiased manner.

The last three articles are earnest attempts by Mushirul Hasan who expresses his apprehensions of Indian society being polarized along religious lines. He rightfully blames the media for trying to become the custodian of nation's interests which can not be achieved by being arrogant and intolerant. The belief pattern he has propagated and nurtured for decades, i.e., liberal, eclectic and pluralistic idea of Islam can not be accepted and practiced in the atmosphere of discrimination, mistrust and fear. The admission form of Jamia Millia Islmia does not have a column for identifying one's religion, is sufficient to prove the institution's secular and pluralistic antecedent and character as claimed by all the contributors of this volume. The book under review is an essential addition in any library and a must read for majority community. This book is a compilation of articles by people who have faith and confidence in India's secular values and cultural pluralism.

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