

Muslim Societies: Rise and Fall by **MIH Farooqi**,

Sidrah Publishers. P.208. Lucknow. 2011

Reviewed by **Saiyed Hamid**

Dr. Mohammed Iqtedar Husain Farooqi, specialized as a plant scientist, zeroed in on his discipline to conduct researches on plants figuring respectively in the Quran and Sunnah (PLANTS OF THE QURAN & MEDICINAL PLANTS IN THE TRADITIONS OF PROPHET by Dr. M.I.H. Farooqi). From there, Dr. Farooqi, moved into Islamic history and produced a very informative and scholarly volume on ‘Muslim Societies: Rise and Fall’. It constitutes a marvel of selective brevity and analytical subtlety. In a book dealing with society based on religion there always lurks the risk of rhetoric overtaking scientific analysis. Dr. Farooqi, with the rigorous training of a scientist, steered clear of this danger.

One sees in this book a scientific temperament coming to terms with faith. ‘Coming to terms’ perhaps are words not appropriately used as the author’s thesis is that Islam is compatible with Science. Author’s icon Sir Syed believes in the aphorism that Nature is the Work and Quran the Word of God. There could, therefore, be no discord between them.

‘Muslim Societies - Rise & Fall’, consisting of 28 chapters and spread over 208 pages, has not only delineated the Rise and Fall of Muslims ever since Islam’s emergence but it has collected, tabulated and analyzed a wealth of relevant information. This information is placed alongside counterpart statistics for other societies. This is evidently intended to spark dissatisfaction at their plight among members of Muslim Societies. The bare figures given in this volume about various aspects, moral, material and intellectual, are bound to create an urge for getting rid of the present predicament. The author religiously eschews the temptation to sermonize or over argue but lets circumstances and figures speak for themselves. At the centre of the book is the exhortation.

Khuda ne aaj tak us qaum kee halat naheen badli

Na ho jisko khyal aap apni halat kai badalne ka.

(God has not changed the condition of a nation, which does not wish to change itself)

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In a little over 200 pages, the author has condensed the highlights of Islam ever since its beginnings. One can imagine admiringly the vast canvas that has been covered and the exacting selection to which the copious material has been subjected. What impresses the reader even more, although very expectedly, is the scrupulously scientific approach. One realizes all the time that the book is from a scientist's pen. Although dealing with religion, history, society, it steers clear of sentiment and rhetoric. The author has kept a low profile and a silent visage. He has remained in the background and summoned thinkers of other times and climes to his assistance. This falls in line with the pattern of documentation which he has adopted in the interest of authenticity and sobriety.

It is not collection and tabulation alone that the book provides us with. Islam is juxtaposed meaningfully with other religions and societies. This technique brings out dramatically the status of Muslim Society viz-a-viz the other societies and the vagaries of their relationship. It is this analysis that highlights the main causes of the fall of Muslims. Turning the pages of a book packed with erudition, the reader is driven to the conclusion that a faith endowed so liberally with vitality and based on reason could not but come to grief when it forsook its moorings. Somewhere in its eventful journey it renounced the curiosity which has set it off on its ever-ascending adventure into the unknown. Inexorably and unwittingly it fell a victim to lethargy, superstition, tradition and convention.

The author has sedulously studied the history of Islam and picked up for adoption the factors that led to its rise. The factors that had an adverse effect were similarly identified so as to be avoided.

The book has two foci: its main focus is on the meteoric rise of Islam and its steep fall. The bane of Islam in the global context has been its refusal to take stock of the never ceasing changes and make provision for meeting them.

The centre-piece is Chapter 6 captioned as 'Ijtihad-Need of the Hour'. The author proceeds to explain Ijtihad as 'the modern interpretation of Shariah in the light of Quran and Sunnah' and describes it as 'the necessary tool for the Muslim religion to face the changed condition of societies'. The decline and lack of progress and of resilience in Islam is attributed to the giving up of Ijtihad. Dr. Farooqi has cited the views of great Islamic Scholars like Shah Waliullah, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Allama Iqbal, Hasan Al Turabi, etc.

The chapter, “Growth of Muslim Population-No case of Rejoicing” is thought provoking. Dr. Farooqi is absolutely right in pointing out that the increase in our (Muslim) global population could add to our misery unless drastic remedial measures are made and all-round improvement are undertaken. We have to set our priorities right.

The change of attitude which the Ummah needs desperately, as pointed out in the book, does require the unambiguous and almost undivided attention of the Ulema who wield immense influence among the masses.

Dr. Farooqi has been putting in very valuable work quietly and effectively. He is right that the distance from Science and Technology is a devastating deprivation for Muslims. The warning sounded by Dr. Farooqi has not come a day too soon. His book brings out in bold relief the alternatives that Muslims are facing today: ‘learn or perish’. The lesson has to be driven home from the platform and the pulpit and to be echoed in the media.

Dr. Farooqi is a scientist of repute; his approach is, therefore, analytical. We need analysis much more than rhetoric.

Dr. Farooqi has made extremely valuable information available to the reader and introduced him to an in-depth assessment of what Islam has gone through over centuries and how it has to prepare for a second renaissance.

(**Courtesy** : Countercurrents)