

Megan Adamson Sijapati. 2011. *Islamic Revival in Nepal: Religion and a New Nation*. London and New York: Routledge.

Given the dearth of literature on the religious revival movements in Nepal, particularly Islamic movements, Megan Adamson Sijapati's book *Islamic Revival in Nepal: Religion and a New Nation*, can no less be considered as an academic oasis in the study of Islamic movements in Nepal. The book makes an important contribution in the field of Islamic studies via mirroring the dynamics and the anatomy of Islamic revival transpiring in contemporary Nepal. The book strives to scrutinize the fundamental premises and the intellectual roots upon which Islamic revival gained a foothold in a newly formed secular republic. With due consideration to the critical discourses and practices of two eminent Islamic organizations of Nepal and their implication in fostering the contemporary Islamic movements, the book maps out the significant impetuses underpinning the rise of Islamic consciousness among the Muslim minorities of a Hindu majority state. Drawing upon an analysis of wide range of textual materials and a large number of personal interviews conducted sporadically in Kathmandu valley during the period of 2005 to 2010, the book traces the historical precedents, antecedents and the key proponents of Islamic revival movements in contemporary Nepal. Moreover, via projecting voices emanating from Nepali Muslims themselves, the book legitimizes the *raison d'être* and the claims of Islamic revival and reform movements in Nepal.

To comprehend the nature and purview of Islamic revival and reform movements emerging in Nepal, the book endorses the concept of "double movement perspective." Via considering the "double movement perspective," the book informs that the Islamic revival and reform movements in Nepal have worked within the combined framework of local culture and the universal norms of Islam. Muslims of Nepal "strive to be—and to be understood by others as—Muslims who are concurrently part of a dynamic global umma and citizens of a Hindu majority secular state" (p. 3).

Overall, the book is readable in size comprising merely 200 pages. It consists of seven chapters, including introduction and epilogue. Each chapter draws in significant dimension of the subject of inquiry. At the outset of the book, the author orientates readers about the varied theoretical approaches to the understanding of Islamic traditions of South Asia, particularly Nepal. Via these approaches, the author explicates how Muslim minorities adapt and claim a space for themselves in a larger non-

Islamic milieu. Regarding Islamic revival in Nepal, the author considers Peter Van der Veer's theoretical conception of "dialectic of inclusion and exclusion," as theory par excellence in understanding how Muslim minorities negotiate religious boundaries and identities in a non-Islamic ambiance.

Considering the propensity of 'Islamic revival movements' to be dynamic and varying across communities and nations, the author uses the term "revival" in context of Nepal to implicate the adoption of the authentic form of Islam based on Quran, rather than Islamism, fundamentalism and radicalism. Refuting vehemently the conventional theories of Islamic revival, the author suggests that the contemporary movements of Islamic revival in Nepal should not be construed exclusively as a response to the external pressures from Saudi or Salafi Islamizing forces or the opportunities for upward social mobility. For the author, movements of Islamic revival in Nepal have to be conceived of, as an integral part of the nation's socio-political developments, wherein morphing of a Hindu kingdom to a secular democracy is a *sine qua non*. In other words, contemporary Islamic revival in Nepal is attributable foremost to the dynamic interplay of local and global events, change and opportunity, rendered by the metamorphosis of a religious state into a secular republic.

Regarding the history and social demography of Muslims of Nepal, the book projects Nepali Muslims as a heterogeneous group vis-à-vis geographical origin, schools of thought, traditions and practices. In the chapter entitled "The Fragmentary Pasts: The Historical and Social Landscape of Muslim Nepal" the author unfolds the "fragmentary past" of Nepali Muslims and the process via which the notion of Muslim *umma* is being inculcated among the diversified Nepali Muslims. While doing so, the author also sheds light upon the emergence of different Islamic organizations, at different historical periods and their contributions onto asserting a unified Muslim identity among Nepali Muslims.

While it is impossible to transpire the dynamics of movements of Islamic revival without ensuing its historical trajectory, chapter three viz., "Boundaries of Purity: a Hindu Kingdom and Muslim Alterity," addresses the crucial historical processes via which high Hindu caste rulers at different phases of nation's "modern history" reinforced Hindu nationalism. Within a Hindu cosmology and a kingdom, Muslims were perceived by Hindus as conspicuously others and impure. Since purity of Hindu state was consolidated via emasculating other religious groups, particularly Muslims, as manifested in Hindu legal codes, practices and

symbolism, Muslims' presence in the Hindu territory and their quest for authenticity posed the greatest predicament to the survival of Hindutva of Nepal and national identity. The dread of Muslims' presence in Hindu kingdom, was tacitly displayed by the Hindu extremists in the ominous anti-Muslim violence (marked as "Black Wednesday" or "Kālo Budhavār"), that escalated in the streets of Kathmandu Valley in September of 2004.

Drawing in Muslim narratives of Kālo Budhavār, against the historical backdrop of Nepal as a Hindu polity, chapter four examines the symbolic dimensions of anti-Muslim violence and its implication for Nepali Muslims. According to the author, Kālo Budhavār, unlike other incidents of Hindu Muslim tensions that occurred in Nepal between the period 1954–1981, was unique from other inter-religious violence, since it was, for the most part globally induced. However, although the incident was fomented by the killing of twelve Nepali laborers in Iraq by Ansar-al-Sunna, the event ostensibly posed a "political opportune moment" for the Hindu nationalists to orchestrate the "rites of violence" against the Muslims' presence in a Hindu state. Notwithstanding the very fact that they had no association of any kind (except for their faith in Islam) with the terrorist group, the anti-Muslim violence literally made Nepali Muslims realize their position in a Hindu nation as 'religious apartheid' and 'extraterritorial.' The violence immediately called for a significant response from the Muslim community. It was high time that the Nepali Muslims throughout the nation sorted out their differences, and build a collective identity to immunize themselves from the potential future onslaughts.

One of the most significant antecedents of Kālo Budhavār, and subsequently, the realization of an exigency to galvanize the nationwide Muslim Quam (nation) was the formation of National Muslim Forum at the initiative of Islāmī Saṅgh Nepāl. Chapter five and six contour the historical and the ideological orientations of these two leading organizations and their pivotal roles in forging contemporary Islamic movements. In chapter five, the author emphasizes the political overtures of National Muslim Forum and its commitment to the building of a Muslim nation. Based upon two major publications of the forum, the author suggests that the Forum primarily aimed at unifying Muslim population via a communal politicized religious identity that would exempt Muslims from the historically produced structural discrimination. In a similar vein, in chapter six, the author details an array of significant domains in which the Islāmī Saṅgh's revival and reform programs work

to form a modern Islamic tradition. The author also suggests that the contemporary Sunni revival of Islam, backed by the Islāmī Saṅgh Nepal and National Muslim Forum has resorted fundamentally to the scriptural sources of Islam for “authority” as per Mawdudi’s teachings. However, maintaining its eccentricity, Islāmī Saṅgh has sought to advance coexistence by reinforcing Muslim identity that would respond equally to the exigencies of Muslim community, and to the constrictions of a Nepali national identity or a Hindu majority state. Finally, in the epilogue, the author harkens back to the sundry political developments since Kālo Budhavār, and elucidates the ramifications of the burgeoning identity movements of the minority groups on the redefinition of Muslim identity, mobilization of Muslim political consciousness, and above all, revival of Islam.

Over all, Adamson Sijapati’s book, stands out to be very significant on the ground that it challenges the paradigm of modernization, which upholds secularization as responsible in negating the power of religious ideologies. Moreover, the book offers an alternative approach to the understanding of Islamic revival movements by transcending the legacy of social mobility theory and postcolonial approach to Islamic revival.

However, notwithstanding its academic contributions, the book does suffer from few shortcomings regarding its de-emphasis of some significant issues. To begin with, the author undermines the position of West in her theory of Islamic revival. Preoccupied so much with the criticisms of Hindu nationalism vis-à-vis Muslim minorities, the author somewhere leaves out the significant connection between the West and the Islamic revival movements in Nepal. Kālo Budhavār, the prime mover of contemporary Islamic revival movement, does not simply manifest the intention of Hindu extremists but the ongoing confrontation between the West and the Islamic world. Even the revival and reform programs instigated by the leading Muslim organizations do not merely reflect their commitment to global umma but also resistance against the Western intruders of Islam-cum-Islamic world, particularly US hegemony.

Although the author emphasizes on the external and global dynamics to the understanding of modus operandi of Islamic revival movements, she overlooks the obvious role of new global infrastructure in enticing different members of global umma to communicate and fulfill their Islamic obligations. To some extent, the author undermines the crucial role of modern communication and transportation system in fostering the consumption and distribution of global Islamic message, which entails “a global move towards re-Islamization.” In fact, the book has very little to

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say about how Islamic movements have been proliferating under the aegis of extreme globalization. In other words, how globalization has been obfuscating the geographical boundaries between the members of global umma through the provision of communication and “associative opportunities” for the “isolated Muslim communities” has been matter of less concern in the author’s analysis of Islamic revival movements in Nepal.

Finally, despite some shortcomings, the book is worth reading for the readers who are interested in religious studies in general, and in particular, Islamic movements in Nepal.

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