

Mr. Bruce Riedel & Dr. Ayesha Siddiqi—Correction

Respected scholars and friends,

As you know I often comment on the latest literature on Pak-US Relations and books and reports on Islam, FATA and any other topic affecting Pakistan's relations with the US in particular and the west in general. My aim is always to be objective, value-free and impartial. I also don't want to engage in any polemics, arguments after arguments or making scores on some advertent or inadvertent mistakes. I had once commented on Bruce Riedel's book "*Deadly Embrace*" in my regular Urdu coloumn which is now published in my first collection "*Khama Bajosh*". Most of this current literature from the west, in my opinion, is not producing a salubrious effect on the minds and hearts of Pakistani people. The stuff is more radicalizing in nature than many other things. We need scholarly interaction, and should promote evidence-based dialogue between the suffering population here and the anxious think-tanks in DC and NY. Having said that, let see briefly the two authors on some points:

1. Mr. Bruce Riedel, a well-known thinker and writer, admits that, "History has shown that American actions can make a bad situation worse, and it has shown only limited evidence that they can make things fundamentally better." This sentence can be read with what Mr. Vali Nasr states at the end of Chapter-3, Who Lost Pakistan, in his recent book '*The Dispensable Nation*'. In addition to my conceptual disagreement with what Riedel says in most of his work and even in this book, '*Avoiding Armageddon*', the usual 'mental engagement or obsession' of the US think-tanks with the Pakistan Army and especially the ISI is evident from the fact when Riedel says, "The Governor of the Punjab, Salmaan Taseer, was assassinated by his own security guard in January 2011 for his outspoken opposition to extremism and his criticism of the ISI". (page-174). Who doesn't know that why one Mumtaz Qadri killed the Governor? It was merely due to Governor's remarks about blasphemy. It was Qadri's own sensitivity about the issue. Everyone knows that. Qadri was a policeman, not a member of Al-Qaeda or Taliban. His own school of muslim thought is not like that of AQ or Taliban. Its extension to the 'Criticism on ISI' by Riedel is just an "innocent" addition. Such writings clearly convey the message to the Pakistani scholars and policy-makers that a deliberate campaign is unleashed against them and a vicious propaganda is started to malign the ISI for "obvious reasons" on unwarranted pretext.
2. Dr. Ayesha Siddiqi is another well-known name. She has written a report, "*The New Frontiers: Militancy & Radicalism in Punjab*", produced by Centre for International and Strategic Analysis

(SISA), Norway. In addition to many points she makes, which can be effectively debated and justifiably countered, the report speaks for her little knowledge about muslim history and the muslim thoughts, sects and personalities. At least, I didn't expect her to have so superficial knowledge of Islam and Muslim theology. Not going into detail, I briefly quote from her report:

“The Deobandi militants refer to jihadi outfits who subscribe to and are guided by Deobandi ideology, which, in turn derives its strength from the revivalist movement started in Deoband, India by a Muslim scholar Shah Waliullah (1703-1762). The movement aimed at reforming Islamic practices with the purpose of improving the depravation and poor conditions of muslims. One of the ideas was to stop people from Sufi practices which were seen as taking muslims away from Islam. Later, this ideology was used in the 1980s to incite people to jihad against the Soviet troops in Afghanistan” (page.5-6).

The above passage is full of erroneous and misleading narrations. Shah Waliullah didn't start his 'revivalist movement' in Deoband. The term 'Deobandi militants' is Ayesha's own creation. Deoband Madrassah was founded in 1860s, almost a century after the death of Shah Waliullah. The history of Deoband and details of the life and reformation movement of Shah Waliullah can be read in many authentic books. Deoband had nothing to do with any militancy at that time. Dr. Ishtiaq Hussain Quraishi's 'Ulema in Politics' is a wonderful history on this point. Dr. Qureshi (1974) clearly indicates that, "it is anachronistic to use the word Deobandi for the school of thought by Shah Muhammad Ishaq because the seminary was founded much later" (page. 218). Let me quote from another book of Dr. Ishtiaq Hussain Quraishi, (1977) who says,

“With all its conservatism, the seminary of Deoband, which stood aside from the contemporary controversies, had a practical outlook and concerned itself with its work. It did n't throw any stones at Aligarh, though it could not approve of Syed Ahmed Khan's opinions or actions. It had a group of scholars who were no less ardent believers in pan-Islamism than Shibli or Abu-'l-Kalam; they, however, did not carry on any publicity to popularize the idea.”

(The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent-A Brief Historical Analysis, page.297)

It clearly speaks of 'non-exportation of any idea' of Pan-Islamism of that time, often equated by some people to the concept of today global Jihad of *Al-Qaeda*. Who was Shah Waliullah is not unknown to

any scholar in India, Pakistan or Afghanistan, or anyone interested in the history of Muslim India. He himself was a great muslim sufi (saint/mystic), so how a movement attributed to him can prevent people from Sufi practices. It is an utter ignorance of Sufism in the context of Indian history. For those who don't know Shah Waliullah, I will quote a remarkable orientalist of the recent past, Annemarie Schimmel, (1980) having copious and commendable works to her credit on Islam, Sufism and Pakistan, who writes in one of her books,

“One year later, in 1762, Shah Waliullah died. A most unusual personality among the mystically trained thinkers of the 18th century, he was ahead of his time in many respects, combining sublime mystical speculations, rationalism, prophetic energy and common sense in a strange way. The depth of his influence is only slowly coming to light. It shaped not only the members of his family, who continued his work by translating the Koran into Urdu and who were influential in supporting some of the most important religio-political leaders of the early 19th century, but is visible—though in a different style—also in Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and in Iqbal”.

(Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, page.209)

Can one draw a conclusion from the above? Was Shah Waliullah a predecessor of Iqbal and Sir Syed or the militants as Ayesha wants us to believe? Who does not know who Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was or who was Iqbal, the poet-thinker and dreamer of Pakistan? Anne Marie Schimmel comments on Deoband school (Darul-ul-Aloom) as,

“The school (Deoband) itself was founded by Hajji Muhammad ‘Abid Husain with the support of three scholars from the Education Department in Delhi; its patron principal was Maulana Muhammad Nanautawi (1832-1880), the nephew of Mamluk ‘Ali of Delhi College and disciple of Imdad Allah”.

Ayesha differentiates between Deobandi and Barelvi by saying, “A major difference between Deobandi and Barelvis, however, is that Deobandis reject bowing to graves”. What a scholarly description!. One can amuse the western population by this “mockery” of facts but one can't control one's laugh on this “subtle finding” between the two schools of thought who have many scholarly differences, though mostly on interpretation and not on so many practices. There is a bundle of literature on that and interesting literature on the overlapping practices of both of them but it needs in-depth enquiry. I have

yet to see such a superficial account of sects in Islam as Ayesha has described in her reports. Further in her report she says, “The major difference lies in the notion of Jihad”. I don’t think it is a correct statement. It needs qualification. It is not the notion of Jihad but there are some modalities and conditionalities which can be debated amongst the tow sects.

However, I came to the conclusion that the West, and esp. the US think-tanks have a tough time ahead. They believe in those people who say and write things which sound music to them. The writers and analysts from our part of the world also take benefit of the distance of western scholars, both geographically and academically. Ignorance is blessing but such superficial knowledge is not less than intellectual death. Education removes our ignorance step by step. I can comment on many of the lopsided reports of SISA and even pinpoint some other mistakes of Ayesha’s report, but this is enough for this short write-up. Ayesha’s report is a research report but she has not quoted references for the above quotations. Ayesha and SISA’s reports are not of high quality stuff in my opinion as far as standards for valid and solid research are concerned. My personal view is that Ayesha’s report is far inferior to the work of Sana Haroon and Joshua White on the subject. Any comments will be appreciated.

Fasihuddin (PSP),
President,
Pakistan Society of Criminology &
Editor-in-Chief,
Pakistan Journal of Criminology
fasih68@hotmail.com
www.pakistansocietyofcriminology.com