By the end of the book the reader realises the significance of the word 'plot', that may have seemed value laden in the beginning, but through the excellent unravelling of the process and sequence of events that follow over the decade, the word used seems apt. The book demands the reader to see the need to defend and strengthen public health systems. Probably, the only thing lacking in the book is the public perception to the changes. Even if people were unaware of the changes at the policy level what were their experiences with the system? There is only one instance given where the community health staff resisted major changes but it would be interesting to note other voices of resistance and dissent within the system and the Labour Party itself, the Party that created the NHS as a public service in 1948 and was considered its proudest achievement.

Madhurima Nundy
Associate Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies.
Member, Public Health Resource Network
madhurima.nundy@gmail.com

Naveeda Khan, *Muslim Becoming: Aspirations and Skepticism in Pakistan*, New Delhi, Orient Black Swan, 2012.

DOI: 10.1177/0049085713493048

Writing an affirmative book on Pakistan, while critiquing its past and present, is undoubtedly a challenge. It becomes especially so for a scholar living and working on US soil at a time when the US Secretary of State is at pains to underscore the existential threat posed to the state of Pakistan by Islamist forces it seems unable (or unwilling) to rein in. Naveeda Khan, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University, attempts to do the impossible; she makes a valiant effort to pick out signs of plenitude from the chaos of contradictions and controversies and build a case for the future. *Muslim Becoming: Aspirations and Skepticism in Pakistan*—as the name suggests—tries to look at both sides of the coin. She uses a range of vignettes to bolster her argument: the religious conflicts and violence emanating from neighbourhood mosques, the appropriation of Iqbal's poetic legacy for political purposes, the nuances of religious praxis among ordinary Pakistanis, the threat of violent disagreement that simmers below the surface of civilised discourse on state and society.

Khan studies mosques as spaces of Muslim aspirations, as sites that allow Muslims to become better Muslims, as scenes that witness public piety but also as spaces for conflagrations to burst out through killings and bloodshed. Working on the oft-repeated assertion that Pakistan, the Land of the Pure, *is* a mosque, she goes on to probe what it means to *be* a Muslim in Pakistan today. Spelling out the different ways in which a mosque is appropriated ('*qabza karna*')—be it illegal occupancy of its land or building or hijacking it for sectarian differences among the Deobandis, Barelwis, Ahl-e-Hadis et al.—Khan views the proliferations of mosques in post-1947 Pakistan and their functioning either through elected

mosque committees as in the early days or the more blatant use of muscle power in recent times as a form of striving: 'These expressions of striving not only tie religious and moral developments to the development of the nation-state but also to the imagination of an earlier era of Islam'. In tracing the increasing politicisation of these essentially religious spaces she delineates the ties and tensions, the aspirations and scepticism within social groupings. Khan also takes in, among other things, 'everyday expressions of religiosity (that) simultaneously impinge upon the local, the political, and the spiritual, in the temporal registers of possible pasts and futures'.

Khan also revisits the legacy of Muhammad Iqbal, the visionary poet who first propounded the idea of a separate Muslim homeland. It was Iqbal who expressed—in hauntingly evocative poetry—the disquiet that afflicted the Muslim mind in a manner that no one had ever attempted before. This disquiet found expression in different ways: there was the sorrow over the loss of freedom or power of any Islamic race, whether in the distant past or the present; concern about the future of the Islamic countries subject to European hegemony; and suspicion and distrust of western powers that had, in the first place, plotted and brought about the downfall of Muslim rule everywhere. In a rejoinder to his own famous *Shikwa* (Complaint), *Jawab-e-Shikwa* (Answer to the Complaint, both published in *Bang-e-Dara*, 'The Call of the Road', 1924), Iqbal had declared:

> The tumult caused by the Bulgar onslaught and aggression
> Is to rouse you out of complacency and grid your loins for action.
> Presume not that to hurt your feelings, it is a sinister device
> It is a challenge to your self-respect, it is a call to sacrifice
> Why tremble at the snorting of the chargers of your foes?
> The flame of truth is not snuffed out by the breath the enemy blows. (Iqbal, 1981)

Iqbal is also single-handedly responsible for introducing modern philosophical concepts, gleaned from his study in Europe, and vastly broadening the scope of the existing intellectual discourses among educated Muslims, keeping it all the while tethered to a quintessentially religious mooring. Khan places Iqbal's political and religious doctrine with other Muslim thinkers whose writings continue to influence modern-day Pakistanis—Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi of a generation before and contemporaries such as Maulana Abul ala Maududi and Muhammad Asad, an Austrian Jew who converted to Islam in 1926. She writes:

> Comparing the three thinkers, Iqbal, Asad and Maududi, it is clear that each was interested in Muslims yet to come. In some ways Asad's understanding of Muslim aspiration was most similar to Iqbal's. He drew upon similar language of the Muslims to reconstitute themselves. He advocated a project of Muslim self-making that aligned itself both to the past of Islam and the historical present so that the new Muslim might be the best expression of Islamic renewal in the modern world. And he urged that Muslims always keep in mind their own finitude in striving towards absolute perfection. (p. 87)

Of course, it is a different matter that the aspirational model held out by early Muslim reformers and vision sullied soon after the dream of a separate homeland was achieved. The *mard-e-kamil* ('perfect man')—an archetype for a Muslim who would strive ceaselessly towards self-perfectibility—fell prey to sectarian strife. Khan studies the treatment of the Ahmadis, the anti-Ahmadiyya riots of 1953 and the role of the State in severing their relations to Islam through the constitutional amendments of 1974 declaring them non-Muslims and explores the consequences of this bit of 'legal history' in the everyday life of Pakistanis. She then goes on to include Urdu writers such as Mumtaz Mufti and the voices of dissent that make the literature coming out of Pakistan a valuable site for 'alternative visions and dissent'. She notes that the question 'Who is a Muslim?' is asked again and again by different writers with varying degrees of despair.

Regrettably, the affirmative note that Khan sought to strike sounds shaky and frail at best; the realities on the ground, attested by recent events, do not bode well for 'Muslim becoming', a theme that underscores every argument in this book. Surely it is a sad day when a scholar, 'making the argument of a contrarian', concludes by drawing satisfaction from the 'consistency' in the Pakistani State's relationship to Islam, 'a consistency in its myriad, many say insincere efforts, to establish authority over Islam'. One is also hard pressed to applaud Khan's eagerness to 'affirm' the aspiration she records among modern Pakistanis, the *aam admi*, while acknowledging its capacity towards violence.

Reference

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Rakhshanda Jalil
Delhi-based writer