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M. A. Sherif’s *Facets of Faith* is an interesting attempt to compare the lives of Abul A’la Maududi (1903–79), prominent Islamist ideologue and founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, with the philosopher Malik Bennabi (1905–73), known for his writings and theorisations on colonialism and Muslim civilisation. The author begins by documenting a meeting that occurred between Maududi and Bennabi. Although Sherif narrates nothing of specific interest to have occurred in that fateful meeting, his description of them as “two great thinkers of the twentieth century” as suggested in the title itself and again as “two titans of their times”, rather than confining their stature to the Muslim world, provides the reader an early indication of how the author intends to place the subjects of his study historically. The book is an attempt at retracing the trajectory of the theories of societal change put forward by these two thinkers and their parallel biographies are employed as a lens to measure British and French colonialism in the Indian sub-continent and Algeria respectively. It presents a thematic comparison of how Maududi and Bennabi made sense of the subsequent geopolitical shifts occurring around them and hence this book is less of a comparative biography and falls more within the history of ideas. This work also reflects a renewed trend in Western academia in mapping the thoughts of Islamist intellectuals, especially that of Maududi (Ahmed 2017; March 2019). Studies and analyses on Bennabi on the other hand are scarce in comparison not only to Maududi but to other similar personalities like Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, Ayatollah Khomeini, etc. and the work helps to fill this biographical vacuum by inserting Bennabi into this train of thinkers and activists.

These latest works on Maududi and the works on Bennabi (Bariun 1992) predominantly engage their works as isolated texts but what sets Sherif’s work apart is the deployment of rich yet hitherto unutilised archival material in Urdu and French respectively, providing a window into their formative minds constructing a genealogy of their thoughts. In the case of Bennabi, the scarcity is partially due to his works not being considered part of the Islamist canon. Rather he is known for his writings that are more concerned with analysing Muslim civilisational stagnation than being part of any revivalist movement or Islamist organisation per se. Despite this seeming chasm the author locates common ground between Maududi and Bennabi by focusing on the evolution of their thought and the contexts that shaped their ideas. Sherif centres on Maududi’s call to young Muslims to focus on the
social sciences to aid in a civilisational anti-colonial revival (277) and Bennabi’s framing of colonialism as disrupting the soul itself in his advice for transformation of Muslims from consumers of knowledge into producers of knowledge to mark this common ground. The book is thus a revealing insight into how they traversed this terrain of (external) colonialism tangled with the machinations (internal) of a section of Muslims within the Ummah.

The book is divided into four sections covering nine chapters. The sections are divided not merely by stages charting the intellectual growth of Maududi and Bennabi, but are principally demarcated by the orbit of colonialism, its subsequent entrenchment, and the emergence of the post-colonial reality. Each section, save the first, is divided into two chapters; one each for Maududi and Bennabi, detailing how they responded to the changing world around them. Based on interviews and memoirs of both thinkers, the first section intersects their early adolescent life with the developments in the Muslim world from the early 1910s to the late 1920s. Their religious education at madrassas, and later experience with modern syllabi, aligned with the study of English and French respectively, sheds light on their nascent intellectual development against the backdrop of Muslim engagement with colonialism. For Bennabi, his early colonial experience was more direct and of a personal nature, whereas for Maududi the experience was from the standpoint of colonialism’s impact on the Muslim community in the sub-continent. Bennabi’s defiance of colonial authority and subsequently being fired from his job as a clerk at a court in rural Algeria and his subsequent decision to go to Paris to continue his studies are placed alongside Maududi’s stint as the editor of the newspaper of Jamiat Ulama Hind. These biographical interventions help in discerning the variations between British and French colonialism’s impact on Muslim communities respectively. Another theme referred to is the travelling of both men; the book covers the constant migrating that influenced both Maududi and Bennabi; Maududi’s journeys to Hyderabad, Lahore, Pathankot, and Bennabi’s forays to Paris, Algeria, and Tunis, significantly shaped the development of their ideas.

The second and third sections cover the beginnings of their prescriptive thinking about the state of affairs for Muslims around the world. Maududi’s editorial commentaries on the anti-colonial resistance in Morocco and his developing insights into the complex dynamics between the British colonial authorities, the Indian nationalist movement, and the fledging Muslim League provides historical background to Maududi’s theorisation of Islam as a system of life and his systematic study of jihad which were later to attain landmark status as foundational texts in Islamist literature. At around the same time, Bennabi’s time in Paris as an engineering student is employed to identify the racism suffered by Algerians, which Bennabi remarks as being viewed as “animals in a zoo”, the institutional Islamophobia which spurred Bennabi into a direct action campaign, and the police
surveillance of the activities of Muslim organisations and leaders which he was associated with (109–16). Bennabi’s intellectual sparring with Louis Massignon points to his foundational critique of the Orientalism manifest in France’s *mission civilisatrice*. This anti-Muslimness of the French as observed by Bennabi is repeatedly cited (241), leading the reader to compare it with the current French Republic. This period is also important in that it furnishes a nuanced framework to contextualise debates surrounding not only women’s rights and sexual ethics (a critique that comes up in contemporary discussions on Maududi), but importantly questions of Muslim autonomy and the evolution from expressing disillusionment and dismay to articulating paradigmatic political alternatives. The political theorisations of both Maududi and Bennabi are presented as transcending party politics, questioning fundamentally the very nature of the political itself.

The final sections of the book mark the conceptual theorisations that would be fundamental to Maududi’s political language – namely the concept of the Islamic state, *Jahiliyya*, revivalism, and his critique of Muslim secular nationalism represented by Mohammed Ali Jinnah and the demand for Pakistan. This exercise in reconceptualisation coincides with debates and the turmoil preceding the formation of Pakistan and the end of the British era in the Indian sub-continent. This era also marks the launching of the Jamaat-e-Islami as a revivalist movement to propagate and establish this language of reconceptualisation. The book directs attention to the shift in Maududi’s concerns from that of British colonialism and Hindu hegemony to one of contestation for the soul of an emerging Muslim nation. Bennabi’s psycho-temporal approach to forging an Islamic civilisational project giving primacy to the psyche over the physique is also framed against the backdrop of tumultuous movements in the Arab Muslim world: the resistance of Emir Abdul Qadir and the resistance in Palestine. These sections dwell in detail on Bennabi’s works, specifically his only work of fiction, to extract the driving force behind his idea of renaissance. The author draws attention to Bennabi’s factoring of collective environmental action into his theorisation of his concept of *colonisabilité* (colonisability) (318) for analysing Muslim malaise and charting routes for recovery, setting a precedent for linking environmental degradation to colonialism and the West. The book’s treatment of Maududi and Bennabi terminates by the 1950s but it provides a quick survey of the remainder of their lives while re-tating that this work is an unfinished biography.

The book’s primary strength lies in its meticulous use of archival information and its attention to detail and is hence a mine of information. Secondly, the book offers intellectual biographies of two thinkers by focusing on their ideas and refraining from the dangers of anachronism. The ideas espoused by Maududi and Bennabi are interpreted as interventions in the ongoing political debates of their times and the ideas and thoughts of a myriad of other Muslim intellectuals and
scholars are factored in to provide the context for Maududi’s and Bennabi’s conceptualisations, which represented the shift from the legal to the political. Thirdly, such a method helps transcend the understanding of Maududi as an aberration from standard Islamic orthodoxy as is argued by many contemporary thinkers (Devji 2013; Hartung 2014), and also helps to place Bennabi as a predecessor to Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. Fourthly, the book successfully dispels the notion of confining Maududi and Bennabi to a limited sphere of what is called Islamic thought; rather, it places them within a wider category of social theory. Although the author does cite writers critical of Maududi and offers clarifications, nevertheless a critique could be made about the book veering towards a hagiographic narrative. Also, the book does not offer a comparative analysis between the ideas of Maududi and Bennabi nor provide points of contestation as the title would suggest. Rather, it offers the development of congruent worldview connected through a shared heritage of figures like Ben Badis and Muhammed Iqbal. For Maududi, Muslims were a community based on ideas (khayali jamaat) and for Bennabi, ideas were the catalyst for Muslim civilisation. In drawing out this foundational feature of their thought, this book is more a story of ideas rather than the story of two men. This book is essential reading not just for those with an interest in Islamism and Muslim politics, but also for those interested in the analyses of British and French colonialism. Despite being a comparative biography, Facets of Faith acts as an introduction to ideas that attempted to transcend Eurocentric paradigms and is decolonial in its orientation; hence it should be rightly placed within the oeuvre of Critical Muslim Studies.

References