BOOK REVIEW

Reviewer's Name: Professor Arshad Syed Karim, Ph.D.*
Author of the book: Dr. Saulat Nagi
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Saulat Nagi's God's Republics: Making and Unmaking of Israel and Pakistan is a bold and intellectually ambitious work that undertakes a systematic comparative study of two states whose origins, though separated by a single year, share a remarkable structural parallel. Both Israel and Pakistan were founded in the late 1940s on explicitly ideological foundations, each presenting itself as a homeland for a people defined primarily by religion. Nagi's central argument is that this shared ideological premise has produced sharply divergent political outcomes, and his book sets out to explain why.

The book is organised across a substantial range of chapters, progressing from foundational concepts of the nation-state and the notion of a "chosen people" toward a detailed comparative analysis of the political, economic, and social trajectories of the two nations. Nagi's theoretical framework draws primarily on Marxian political economy, situating the analysis of both states within a critique of class structure and democratic governance. His approach is that of a political sociologist rather than a conventional historian, and this gives the work a distinctive analytical edge that sets it apart from descriptive comparative studies of the region.

One of the book's most substantive contributions is its comparative treatment of religious identity and internal cohesion. Nagi argues that Judaism functions as a combination of race, religion, and ethnic solidarity, which has historically provided Israel with a relatively unified communal foundation despite internal political disagreements. Islam in Pakistan, by contrast, has fragmented along sectarian lines. The country's Muslim population is divided among Sunni, Shia, Wahhabi, and Deobandi communities, as well as the Ahmadiyya community, whose members believe in a later messenger following the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and who have faced severe legal and social exclusion. Nagi's point is not merely descriptive: he contends that this internal fragmentation, compounded by the distance of many of these groups from the foundational teachings of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), has directly undermined Pakistan's capacity to function as a cohesive democratic republic. This is one of the more provocative arguments in the book and one that merits further engagement from scholars of comparative religion and South Asian politics.

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The economic dimension of the comparison is where Nagi's Marxian framework is most explicitly applied. He argues that Israel has largely avoided the entrenched two-class structure that has characterised Pakistan since its founding in 1947, a structure in which a narrow elite exercises disproportionate political and economic power while the majority of the population remains economically marginalised. Pakistan in 1947 emerged from the partition of British India, and Israel in 1948 was established on land that displaced much of the existing Palestinian population, a process that Nagi does not shy away from addressing. Yet despite these comparable conditions of foundational upheaval, the two states diverged significantly in their economic organisation and institutional development. This economic analysis is one of the more original contributions of the book and would benefit from engagement with more recent empirical data on inequality indices in both countries.

Nagi's comparative analysis of democratic development constitutes the political core of the book. Pakistan has repeatedly failed to sustain a stable democratic political order since independence, cycling through military rule, civilian government, and constitutional crises in a pattern that has yet to be broken. Israel, by contrast, has maintained the procedural institutions of parliamentary democracy, though Nagi is careful to note that both states justify their political systems through religious legitimacy. As he observes, both Israel and Pakistan define themselves as democracies while simultaneously grounding their political authority in religion, a tension that neither state has fully resolved. This insight is among the most incisive in the book, pointing toward a deeper contradiction in the very concept of a religious republic that deserves more sustained theoretical exploration than the text provides.

One aspect of the book that warrants critical attention is its treatment of the Palestinian question. While Nagi acknowledges that Israel was established partly through the displacement of the existing Palestinian population, a more sustained engagement with the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its implications for Israel's democratic credentials would have strengthened the comparative argument considerably. The question of whether a state that maintains a prolonged military occupation of another people can be described as a functioning liberal democracy is one that scholars of comparative politics have increasingly raised, and its relative absence from the analysis represents a gap in an otherwise ambitious work. Similarly, a deeper treatment of Pakistan's civil society, judicial independence, and media freedom would have enriched the democratic comparison beyond the structural level.

God's Republics is a substantial volume of 420 pages, supported by an extensive reference section of 24 pages that reflects the breadth of Nagi's reading across political theory, history, and sociology. The book's scope is impressive, and its central comparative framework is original and timely, particularly given the ongoing debates in both countries about the relationship between religious identity, national belonging, and democratic governance. It is a valuable and thought-provoking contribution to the comparative politics of South Asia and the Middle East, and it will be of considerable interest to scholars, students, and informed readers seeking to understand how two ideologically similar states arrived at such different political destinations. It is recommended as both an academic resource and a serious work of political analysis for future research.

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