BOOK REVIEW

HUMAN SECURITY AND PHILANTHROPY: ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES AND MUSLIM MAJORITY COUNTRY PRACTICES


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Philanthropy and the obligation to help those less fortunate are central tenets in Islam. It is one of the Five Pillars and as such is an integral part of a Muslim’s ethical outlook. Human Security and Philanthropy: Islamic Perspectives and Muslim Majority Country Practices by Samiul Hasan is a helpful addition to addressing the philanthropic structure and practices in different Muslim countries. It is among the very few scholarly works that highlights the little-known concept of third sector organizations (TSOs) in relation to human security in Muslim majority countries (MMCs). In this case, public goods, service delivery groups, and organizations not a part of the market (the first sector) or the government (the second sector) are identified as the third sector.

The book is divided into 5 main sections and 12 chapters. Each section consists of one to four chapters focusing on a particular topic or concept. The first part provides some statistics about the 47 MMCs, followed by an explanation of the concepts and practices of Islamic philanthropy. The second part discusses the rise of TSOs. The third part discusses obligatory and non-obligatory charitable giving, while the fourth part discusses the nature of civil society in Islam. The final section discusses the role of TSOs in Islamic society and their potential.

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The first part (chapters 1-3) provides an overview of philanthropy and a discussion of third-sector organizations in 47 MMCs in Africa and Asia. Backed by several references, Hasan exhaustively addresses major issues and aspects of human security in Islam. The author also offers a holistic paradigm of human security, hinging on “freedom from want” and highlights major aspects of human security related to food security, shelter, health, education and work. He then elaborates on the key components, historical evolution, and conceptual formation of all these needs and analyzes the dimensions from an Islamic perspective in order to discuss relevant issues. He concludes the chapter arguing that there is no conflict between Islam and the concept of human security.

The second part (chapter 4) discusses the history and development of TSOs, philanthropy, and the structure of nonprofit organizations in MMCs. Hasan analyzes the legal environment, characteristics, extent, and functioning of all varieties of the third sector found in MMCs and their impact and effectiveness in addressing human security. He also discusses the varied policy frameworks in those counties. He touches on how governance and the political climate affects individual TSOs.

The third part (chapter 5) goes into further detail, transitioning from the previous section. Here the author explains the concept and process of the different type of obligatory (zakat) and non-obligatory (e.g., Sadaqa and Khairaat) charitable giving performed by Muslims. He compares different countries in his sample for a better grasp of the concepts and processes of zakat. He also discusses individual preferences and concerns in paying for zakat, especially in MMCs where payment is obligated by law (e.g., Libya).

The fourth part (chapters 6-8) presents an overview of the concept of civil society in Islam and relevant literature. Hasan delves deeply into the extent, scope, and structure of TSOs in the 47 MMCs. Again, he makes clear and illuminating comparisons between the countries and compares formal and informal TSOs. He discusses and contrasts their performance in the context of the different structures found in the 47 MMCs. This part helps the reader understand how these organizational structures can differ based on the culture and mode of governance, even in the context of the same religion. He devotes chapter 7 to the concept of waqf (plural awqāf), which in simple terms is a charitable endowment typically involving the donation of a building, piece of land or other in-kind asset for the Muslim good without the intention of the donor to reclaim the asset. He discusses the legal
mechanism of awqāf and how its evolution is helping Muslims in different parts of the world.

In the fifth and final part (chapters 9-12), Hasan discusses the role of TSOs in the Muslim world and their potential. He pinpoints some key practices and innovations that these organizations can adopt to expand their scope and streamline their operation. He also discusses how they can learn from one another and assist each other throughout the world.

Each section is well crafted and keeps the reader engaged with a combination of narrative, references, statistical information, and concluding arguments. Each section and concept flows smoothly and naturally into the next. His inclusion of a summary at the end of each section provides a useful and valuable summary of the ground it covers. This study is comprehensive in treating the subject matter from the analysis of the legal environment to characteristics of individual TSOs, the scope and functioning of different TSO forms found in different societies, and their individual effectiveness in addressing human security issues. On top of that, it offers a comprehensive geographic coverage of all 47 MMCs in Asia and Africa.

At times, the narrative may be too technical for a reader unfamiliar with the field. Overall, Hasan’s work is a good study and worth the extra effort, even for the novice. I highly recommend this book to scholars and students (primarily graduate students), researchers, security experts, and anyone with an interest in philanthropy in an Islamic context. This book is equally beneficial for the practitioner involved in nonprofits, particularly those involved in nonprofit finances.

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Zeeshan Noor is a Ph.D. student in the Public Affairs program at the University of Texas at Dallas. Mr. Noor’s research interest lies in the use of digital and social media in the nonprofit sector. His other topics of interest include fundraising, human resource and diversity management. Mr. Noor is also a Research Assistant in his Ph.D. program and serves as an Editorial Assistant for Public Administration Review (PAR). In addition, he is an Editor for the ASPA Section for Women in Public Administration (SWPA) newsletter. Zeeshan Noor has an MPA degree from UTRGV and an MA degree in Mass Communication form his home country, Pakistan.