

**Book Review: Minhaz Merchant, *The New Clash of Civilizations*, Rupa Publications, India, 2013. ISBN: 978-81-291-2990-1, Price: 500 INR.**

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### INTRODUCTION

The debate of 'Clash of Civilizations' was instigated by the Samuel. P Huntington in the New York based *Foreign Affairs* magazine. The article 'Clash of civilizations?' was highly debated which latter on stimulated Huntington to write the book *The Clash of Civilizations' and Remaking of the World Order*. The book was hotly debated in the post-cold war studies and numerous academic and non-academic responses were observed. The book *The New Clash of Civilizations* by Minhaz Merchant advocates the Huntington's clash school and like Huntington, who sees the future clash among eight civilizations of the world, Minhaz prophesizes the future clash between America, China, India and Islam. This book is the selected writings of Minhaz Merchant which is devoted to the fellow Indians as a go-ahead guide to see how India as a nation should mushroom politically, economically, scientifically and historically in the next few decades but with a perilous underpinning of witnessing the contest between India, China, Islam and America. The constant worry in this book is the premise around which author weaves the book-which is civilizations have clashed over territory and faith and it is in the nature of man to compete for power. The shifting economic and military balance (hard power and soft power) towards the east from west, which eventually will lead to the decline of west, is deliberated in the book.

The book is divided into six sections- History, Nation, World, Leaders, Science and Society and Vintage -each section is sub divided into a number of units. Each unit is an indicator and an advice to fellow Indians that how India as a nation will flourish and develop the next decades with certain some powerful challenges' both within and outside. The book contains 311 pages excluding introduction and including bibliography. The major challenges to India discussed in the book are:

**The New Clash of Civilizations:** The author takes off from the journey of journalism into the history of International Relations while discussing the clash of civilizations with a prefix "new" added to it- *The New Clash of Civilizations*. What does he mean by adding 'new' to the already existing premise or corollary on International relations? The framing of future policies since the *policy of containment* and *theory of clash of civilizations* has helped American interest very well. Is author advocating the Indian interest in international relations? According to the author it is very important for India to see herself growing in confrontation with these civilizations. The four competing civilizations- India, China, Islam and America will shape the future of the world, worries us while comparing it with this statement that *it is the nature of man to compete for power* (p.6) while closing the doors of dialogue through which 21<sup>st</sup> century academicians, scholars and politicians were laboring to shape the international relations. The author has no value for the responses of academicians who disagree with this corollary that civilizations are the global actors rather who stress the state theory like Fauad Ajami, Stephen Walt, Jonathan Fox etc. Civilizational theory has its foundations rooted in religion and when author prophesizes a competition among the civilizations he must be aware that he is like Huntington trying to divide the world into rigid boxes (Amartya Sen. on his response to Clash theory). The author never tries even to define what does he mean by civilization! And he never tries to define it. He separates the Islam as a civilization without defining its boundaries. Someone would argue how Indian Muslims are related to India as a civilization because in larger context civilization has a strong footing in religion. By dividing the world into civilizations author is advocating a twenty year before theory clash of civilizations that too with no philosophical and religious underpinning.

**Economy and Politics:** The author is very much concerned about Indian economy and its global impressions and how it has to compete in future to maintain the global relevance. It is believed in the academia that west is becoming economically and militarily weak as Professor John Nye says aptly that it is losing both hard power and soft power. In this backdrop India must carefully maintain its global relations. The good relation of India with America is very important says Minhaz. One must appreciate the analysis of author while predicting the GDP's of India and other countries. According to Minhaz- Wealth Report 2012 study and Purchasing Power Parity study - Indian economy will rise to 85 \$ trillion in 2050 AD with conditions like rise of human development Index end of dynasty politics, corruption, good relation with US and a better policy with China. The author has apprehensions for the Indian economy. In 2050 one of the reports according to the author sees 330 million Indians living in poverty (p.38) due to bad governance (p.37). India needs to focus on hybrid agricultural technology to double total crop yields within a decade, modernize infrastructure, make land acquisition fairer to farmers, improve health care, pass enabling legislation to unleash the entrepreneurial energy of small and modern enterprise-the backbone of Indian economy-and implement tough, effective regulation to clean up business practice (p.40). India has a good chance of excelling the pyramid of economic growth if all these indicators are set all right.

But for India to flourish political discourse like *secularism* should be interpreted in a healthy way. India's greatest strength has been Secularism but according to the author Congress exploited this term. In this context one may understand the statistics of Rae Bareilly where over 70 percent of children are moderately stunted due to malnutrition, which is ruled by Congress since Feroze Gandhi in 1952 (p.48). The Muslims in India are quite confused with the interpretation of *secularism* by congress. Before Muslims the word secularism gets exposed as something that safeguards them physically but not economically (p.48). Communalism is a greatest challenge which author has not treated well and even skipped the Gujarat riots etc but he has focused on how religion can distort the political institutions. According to the author India's disaster lies in mishandling its minorities and this is where things may go array and hence cease India to reach 85 \$ Trillion economy. India, according to the author, should follow meritocracy rather than dynasty politics to establish a powerful electorate.

**Leadership:** For India to face the challenge of new clash of civilizations, she must craft her leadership intelligently. India can't afford dynasty politics and the smart India means end of dynasty rule. For example, the author says that India is an evolving democracy and if Rahul Gandhi has his father's sense of honor, he must let democracy to evolve by declining the prime ministership (p.137). According to the author, Congress has been a champion of creating dwarf leaders by following the blood lineage and this is something where India should excel as a nation. Sonia Gandhi played a role in Indian politics that is unprecedented in Indian independent history. She was neither Prime minister nor president but still the final arbiter of national policy. This sort of power without accountability flies in the face of democracy (p.144). These flaws in leadership will be noticed when India will reach to the threshold of 85 percent literacy. However, the author has a soft corner for Narendra Modi, who according to him has been successful to catch the nerve of younger generation through social networking. On Dr Manmohan Singh, the author knew that new economic reform agenda encounters problems with bad governance and strong well governed institutes are the back bone of what Manmohan Singh dreamed of. He is the man who influenced Indian economy more than any contemporary national leader, says author but economy stumbled when he shared the last moments of prime ministerial chair. One more leader the author has introduced in this book is Dhirubhai Ambani, whom author considers to be a *Business Leader* of the century. According to the author the Ambani did impossible and created in the people the spirit of believing impossible (p.160). In this channel of leadership who inspired people is one more- Om Prakash Jindal. He, according to the author was an extraordinary business man and an elegant leader who left behind India's largest business empire with a combined group market value of \$15 billion (Rs. 95,000 crores). Leaders like L K Advani, Chidambaram and Tendulkar are also introduced as the people who influenced the history of India.

## CONCLUSION

The book is a prodigious attempt to collect all the celebrated past writings of the author. The book is a guide for the IR students and also a plot for the Indian policy makers. But the title of the book is not apt and suggestive because the title 'Clash of civilizations' is deeply rooted in the subject of philosophy, religion and Politics. The author is grounded in Journalism and not as much of academic.