CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

‘Derivative’, ‘imitative’ and ‘unoriginal’ are some of the terms used to describe the recent genre of Arab historiography and social science. Such terms conceal the principles of selection which guide the work of these scholars. As a beginning the subject is almost exclusively the rise and consolidation of modern nation-state and the period of research is 19th, 20th centuries. These two focusing points coincide with the same areas and chronological periods of Middle Eastern history which are best researched in the west and which form as a model for primary research in social sciences. In the western model, the dynastic history of the Safavi Qajars and the Ottomans represent the centre of attention of this type of research. In fact, the western model of research is carried out to the virtual exclusion of the earlier history which was characterized by the complex socio-economic systems and pluralistic societal arrangements, in full contrast with the modern nation state. It was only in the 19th century that these social arrangements began to break down.

Concentrating on the period of the failure of these pluralistic societies implies the inevitable rise of the modern nation state. As a consequence, most of the studies start with the successor nation-states like Kemal Ataturk’s Turkey and Reza Shah’s Iran as their main point of departure. As a methodology, two books are important works to be mentioned here. They are, (a) Bernard Lewis, The Emergence of Modern Turkey (Oxford, 1961) and (b) Niyazi Berkes, The Development of Secularism in Turkey (Montreal, 1964).
With the focus primarily on the political dimension in the western and the Arab models, the history of society, economic conditions, culture and science remained either under developed or un-integrated in both Western and Arab scholarship for a long period. However from the 1970’s, a new interest in the dynamics of political economy began to take place. The rising popularity of political economy, especially among the historians owes much to the internal crisis of history in some of the countries including USA. However, during the past several decades, historians have been borrowing new ideas and concepts from other fields. As far as the other disciplines are concerned, history provides the background that precedes the point where more scientific work commences. According to Anthropologist Le’vi-Strauss, history performs a useful function in organizing knowledge chronologically.

In the present thesis, the continuity and change in the relationship between the three religious communities has been taken up. Judaism and Christianity form the minority groups of West Asia and the Muslim community constitute the powerful majority community of West Asia.

The triangular relationship between god, people and territory has been crucial to the Jewish faith. The land was considered to be the divine gift to the nation and the nation was considered to be the custodian of the divine habitation. As far as the Jews were concerned, the exile in to Egypt and other nations in captivity was a shattering of this divine destiny. The Jews considered the exile as punishment for their sins. It is believed that the Jews carried into exile a spiritual fatherland, wherever they went. It became a fundamental part of their
religious belief that they would return to their fatherland. Although the Jews were the main element in the population of Judea/Palestine region during the Roman and the pre-Roman period, after the wars of A.D. 70 and A.D. 135, much of the Jewish population got scattered all over the world. The Jewish population was only 56,000 in Palestine at the time of Balfour Declaration. It was in the 20th century that the Jewish population began to increase through migration from the various European countries and USA.

The Jews were not strictly a homogenous group. Historically they were divided into Sadducees, Pharisees, Scribes and Essences. Several centuries before the rise of Christianity and Islam, there existed Jewish settlements in Asia and North Africa. The Jewish settlement existed in Cochin in Kerala for almost 2000 years.

We have inscriptive evidence of the Kings of Himyar in Southern Arabia, who were of Jewish origin. Similarly, at Haifa, archaeologists have unearthed several remnants of the Jewish period.

The present study comes out with the conclusion that apart from the divisions within the mainstream Jews, there were also several minor Jewish groups who were not treated on par with the mainstream Jews. These included the Karaites, Samaritans and other sects. They were in fact, the marginalized communities. The Karaites have doctrinal and practical differences with the mainstream Jews. But at the same time, they uphold the essentials of the Jewish creed. The belief in one god, the moral code of human behaviour the
expectations of the messiah and the emotional attachment to the land of Israel are common to rabbinate Jews and the Karaites.

The religious practices of the Samaritans, another sect, differ in many details from those of the mainstream Jews. Their calendar is different and therefore the holidays do not coincide that of the Jews. Their prayer book is different. One can certainly conclude that in religious doctrine and practice the Samaritans are essentially similar to that of the Jews, despite some different beliefs and rituals. Their monotheism and strict adherence to the Jewish Law mean that they share their foundations with Judaism.

The relationship between Islam and Judaism in the early days of Islamization was cordial. The Jews performed certain professions, which the Muslims were forbidden from taking up. The Jews were considered to be the protected groups and they were taxed for protection. But, as decades and centuries passed, the ruling classes became rigid and the Jews suffered heavily. A large sections of the Jews converted into Islam in order to overcome difficulties of survival.

Christianity in West Asia arose out of the Jewish apocalyptic revelations of the coming Kingdom. It derived its impetus from the personality and vision of Christ. Christianity gained its strength from the belief in his resurrection and the promise of eternal life. It received its doctrinal form in the theology of St. Paul and grew by the absorption of Pagan faith and ritual. It became a triumphant Church by inheriting the organizing pattern and genius of the Roman empire.
Christ’s achievements lay not in the ushering of a new state, but in outlining an ideal morality, different from that of the Pagans (Romans), and the conservative Judaism. Christ advocated a life of simplicity, piety, moral integrity, gentleness, justice and peace. In a world of revenge, killing and retaliation, Christ advised his followers to turn the other cheek to the enemy, which was the furthermost degree of non-violence. He wanted his followers to be pure in heart and advocated strict celibacy in a world of immoral practices.

Right from the early years, divisions emerged within Christianity on the basis of different dogmas and beliefs. Early Christianity had spread to Judea, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, North Africa, Ethiopia, Arabia, Greece, Rome and other areas of Europe. During the period of Chalcedon, real division had taken place among the Christians of Syria, Coptic Christians of Egypt and the Greeks. The Asian and the North African Christians considered the Greeks as their enemies and the Arabs as their friends. During the last years of the Byzantine rule, the Arabs brought total turmoil, politically and socially. In fact native Christians did not regard Islam as other than a powerful and noxious Christian heresy. Thus, the Arab conquest was followed by a long period in which the relations between the native Christians and the Muslim rulers in the Middle East remained cordial. In the early years, Christians with their higher social and cultural level, were indispensable, in the administration. But this honeymoon did not last long. Rigorous Islamization started in the following centuries. The Christians were taxed for ‘protection’. They were forbidden from civil, revenue and judicial administration. They were kept out of the army. They
were also prohibited from taking up certain profession. Special dress and head
dress used to be insisted to identify them publicly. There were incidents of
organized assaults and persecutions for centuries which forced many of them to
get converted to Islam.

The idea of creating a Jewish state in the midst of a disintegrating
Ottoman empire created fresh problems for the inter-community relations. By
1880’s the growth of anti-semitic feeling in Germany and Austria as well as
persecutions of the Jews in Russia convinced a large section of the Jewish
intelligentsia that assimilation was no longer possible. They came to realize that
the Jews were not only a religious group, but also a separate nation bound by
common faith and sentiment rather than by land. Thus, Dr. Theodor Herzl, the
founder of political Zionism, insisted that the Jews should be granted sovereignty
over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a
nation. The problem of the Ottoman policy towards the immigration and the
purchase of lands by the Jews in Palestine with the support of the European
powers opened up a Pandora’s box. With the actual creation of Israel, these
problems multiplied.