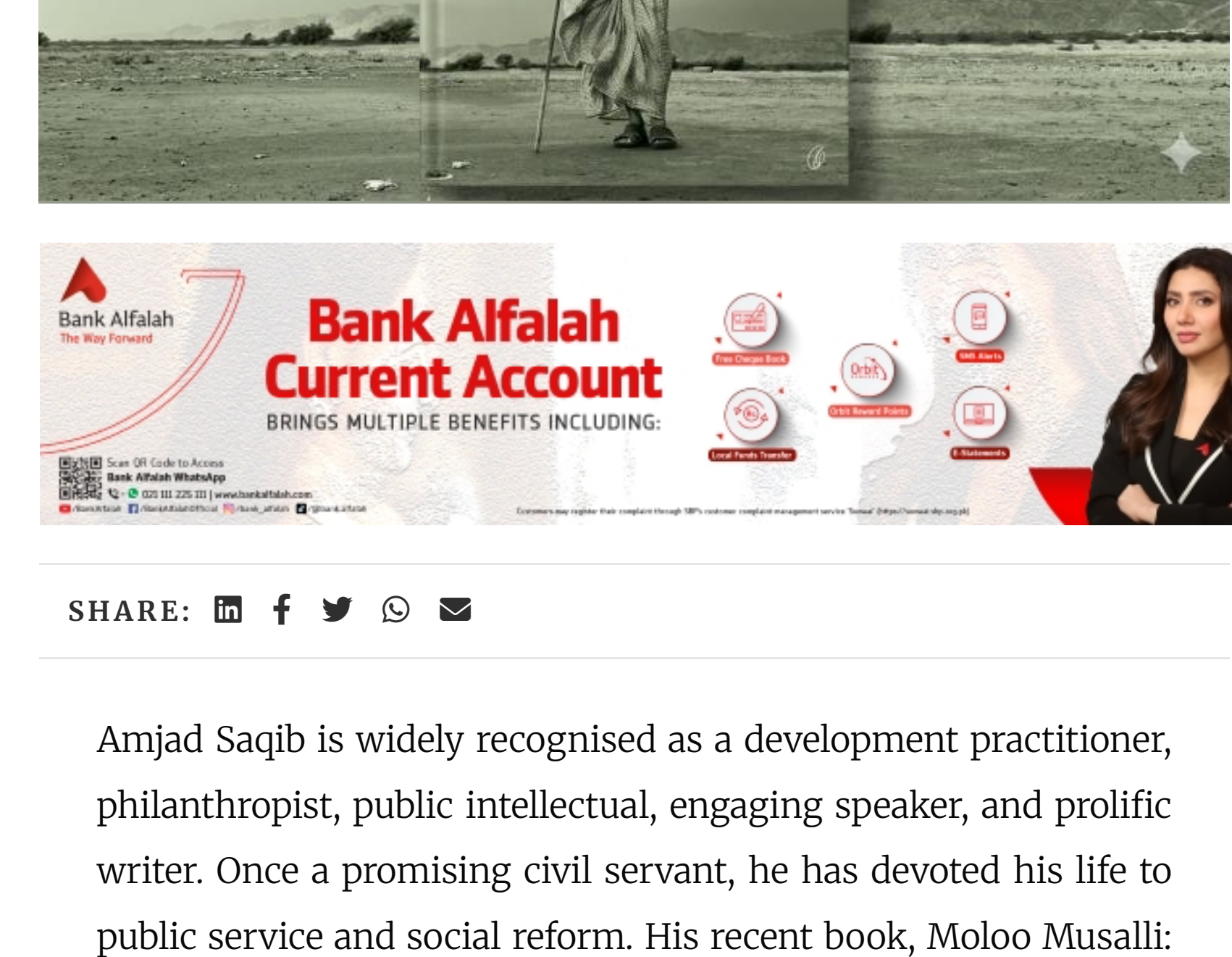




Moloo Musalli: A Mirror Held To A Wounded Society

It is more than a lament, protest, and rebellion; it is a searing indictment of Pakistani society, institutions, and the wider world, and a moral appeal to restore lost humanity amid pervasive suffering, powerlessness, and injustice

Saeed Shafiqat Features, Main Slider May 23, 2026



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Amjad Saqib is widely recognised as a development practitioner, philanthropist, public intellectual, engaging speaker, and prolific writer. Once a promising civil servant, he has devoted his life to public service and social reform.

In his view, it moves simultaneously through fiction, lived experience, reflection, observation, and spiritual-philosophical inquiry. Whether it belongs wholly to one genre or draws from all of them, I leave it to the reader's imagination.

Spread over nearly 175 pages, Saqib combines experiential observations with deeply reflective insights, driven by an enduring passion to revive humanness in society and, if possible, across the wider world through the metaphor of Moloo Musalli.

The book is divided into six sections: Misery, Resilience, Legacy, Questions, Hope, and Dawn is Not Near. Each section contains stories capable of unsettling the reader, quickening the heartbeat, or provoking deep introspection.

Similarly, Saqib's Moloo Musalli oscillates between anguish and hope. Depending on one's mood, age, and social location, the book can be both a pleasurable and agonising read.

Vibrant Cities, Wounded Souls: Ernest Hemingway's Masterpiece of Post-War Disillusionment

The section Misery, the longest in the book, contains sixteen concise yet powerful essays. It is heart-wrenching and explains with striking clarity why societies descend into misery.

Among the most moving pieces is the two-and-a-half-page story, The Prostitute, which should ideally be read alongside Sexual Violence and A Transgender's Tale (chapters 10 and 17).

Saqib raises uncomfortable but necessary questions about attitudes, beliefs, institutional practices, and the functioning of governance in Pakistan

Yet Saqib's portrayal of a young girl whose dream of becoming a 'bride' is transformed into the tragedy of 'prostitution' evokes both moral reflection and a desire for corrective action.

In the section Legacy, the discussion of Abdul Sattar Edhi (pp. 106–108) deserved greater elaboration than a brief rendering of his imagined dialogue with the Creator.

The reader would have benefited from more sustained reflections by the author on Edhi's enduring legacy. Equally heartening is the short but meaningful note on Bhagat Singh (pp. 97–99), the rebel and revolutionary whose recognition and legitimacy have grown considerably in contemporary Punjab.

Saqib is correct in observing that Bhagat Singh's "story of sacrifice is little known." More importantly, he demonstrates courage and conviction when he writes: "We refuse to recognise people of other beliefs as equals.

The Tweet That Held Back A War

In this sense, Moloo Musalli becomes more than a literary work; it is a humble invitation to Pakistani historians, social scientists, civil society activists, and power elites to reinterpret and reimagine Pakistan's history by recognising the contributions of vulnerable and minority communities in shaping the country's past, present, and future.

Incidentally, the fifteen-plus endorsements appended to the book (pp. 174–195) themselves make compelling reading.

In my assessment, the most provocative and insightful section is Questions. Here, Saqib raises uncomfortable but necessary questions about attitudes, beliefs, institutional practices, and the functioning of governance in Pakistan.

As a former bureaucrat and the driving force behind Akhuwat, he possesses intimate knowledge of bureaucratic culture and institutional behaviour. The chapter A Bureaucratic Odyssey: The Tale of a Different Kind of "Moloo", read together with A Tribal Chieftain of Orakzai, is both tantalising and hilarious.

The narrative reveals how an honest and competent officer, lacking powerful connections, loses an opportunity for overseas training as his file drifts endlessly through bureaucratic channels, while personal connections elsewhere effortlessly secure influence and access.

In only five pages, Saqib captures the lived reality of bureaucracy with greater immediacy than Matthew Hull's theoretically rigorous Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan (2013).

Saqib's summation is devastatingly precise: "The delay isn't about bureaucracy; it is because Mohsin is 'Moloo'. He has no powerful connections and hasn't engaged in the back-scratching culture that explains one's network."

He then broadens the critique with a piercing observation: "Every stratum of society has its own version of the Moloo Musalli—the powerless, the unconnected, those condemned to struggle endlessly within an indifferent system" (p.126).

Illusion Of The Hero: Why Society Makes the Man, Not the Reverse

One expected that such a penetrating critique might culminate in a clearer roadmap for dismantling these corrupt cultural practices. Instead, Saqib ultimately pleads for compassion, morality, ethics, justice, and equity, giving voice to the cries of the Molooos.

Whether the powerful and wealthy are prepared to listen remains an open question.

According to the author, the book is a "lament", "protest", and "rebellion". In the reality, it is more than all three. It is a searing indictment of the Pakistani state, society, institutions, and even the establishment itself.

The larger question, however, is whether the book can ignite a transformative spark for a better, brighter, and more humane Pakistan. Saqib extends this moral appeal beyond Pakistan, seeking to prick the conscience of global society and revive the spirit of humanness in an age where humanity, civic virtue, and moral responsibility appear to be eroding daily—as witnessed most tragically in Gaza.

The concluding sections, Hope and Dawn are Not Near, once again reinforce resilience amidst suffering. Yet the tone remains deeply melancholic as Global Molooi gets the haunting couplet:

"Life has been spent like a continuous compulsion; I don't even remember what crime I was punished for" (p.173).

It is a poignant ending, one that captures the despair of the marginalised with painful honesty, but leaves the reader uncertain whether a brighter and more humane future is truly within reach.

TAGS: Amjad Saqib book review, Moloo Musalli In Search of Lost Humanity, Pakistani social critique literature, poverty and human dignity Pakistan, contemporary Urdu English

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