

BOOK REVIEWS

Islam in Modern History

Professor Wilfred C. Smith's book *Islam in Modern History*²² is a study of the new trends in the world of Islam and, as the author states, seeks to present "a view beneath the surface of events, providing insight into the tension between faith and history in the Islamic world."

It begins with the succinct observation that "The Muslim Community in our day, like the rest of mankind, is in a serious transition. What distinguishes it is that its members face the perplexities and opportunities of modernity as heirs of a unique tradition. Their society is characterized by a faith, Islam, and a great past." The book is an endeavour to study "what is happening to the community and to the faith" (The sequence "Community and the faith" is important, for throughout the discussion problems of community receive precedence over those of the faith).

The book is divided into eight chapters. In the first chapter the author presents his own understanding of the Islamic faith, as the Muslims profess it, and its relation to history. The second chapter gives a bird's eye view of the present day cultural movements in the world of Islam and a survey of the modern intellectual trends which, from beneath the surface, are moulding the destiny of the Muslims at present. In the next five chapters an attempt is made to study the problems and prospects of Islam in certain specific regions *viz.* Arabs, Turkey, Pakistan, India and other countries. In the last chapter the author gives his concluding observations about the present and the future of Islam.

Professor Smith realizes that "Islam for Muslims is not an abstract idea but an idea in operative practice". He sums up his estimation of Islam as "a faith expressed not primarily in a system of ideas, but in a system of life, a community and its ways". And it is, according to him, this characteristic of Islam which makes history decisive for Muslims.

"The fundamental *malaise* of modern Islam is a sense that something has gone wrong with Islamic history. The fundamental problem of modern

²² Wilfred Centwell Smith, ISLAM IN MODERN HISTORY, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey (1957), pp. 317, \$ 6.00

Muslims is how to rehabilitate that history: to set it going again in full vigour, so that Islamic society may once again flourish as a divinely guided society should and must. The fundamental spiritual crises of Islam in the twentieth century stems from an awareness that something is awry between the religion which God has appointed and the historical development of the world which He controls".

The response to this challenge has come forth in different forms, in different Muslim regions. Muhammed bin Abdul Wahab of Arabia, Shah Waliullah of Delhi and Jamalluddin Afghani are the three great leaders of the Muslim world who came to grips with the new challenge of our times and became the mainspring of the movement for internal reform, external defence, political revival and pan-Islamism.

The later developments followed the lines envisaged by these three basic movements. There has been a more or less continuous upsurge in the world of Islam and the new movements derived their inspiration from these mainsprings.

After a survey of this background Professor Smith discusses in detail the four contemporary trends *viz*:

- (a) *Liberalism*, the hall-mark of which is rationalistic approach towards religion, West-orientation and a liberal interpretation of Islam;
- (b) *Nationalism*, which, in the Muslim world, is being used to revitalize Islam and "has become more and more religious the more the movement has penetrated the masses";
- (c) *Apologetics*, which consists in the endeavour to prove, to oneself and to others, "that Islam is sound"; and
- (d) *Dynamism*, which he regards as "the appreciation of activity for its own sake and at the level of feeling a stirring of intense, even violent emotionalism".

After a survey of the general trends of the contemporary situation the author has presented detailed studies of the Arab World, Turkey, Pakistan and India and has substantiated his views on the above subjects by facts revealed by the case-study of these countries. Briefly stated the author holds that liberals and secularists are on the decline throughout the Muslim world

except Turkey. Although there are still many liberals, he asserts, liberalism is disappearing. Apologetics are most active in the Arab World and are achieving popularity among the Arabs because they are "a proud and sensitive people". In his opinion, two basic responses to the challenge of modernity are those of 'reviving of an ancient reality that has lapsed', and "reformation" or the "modifying of an existing one that has gone wrong". Professor Smith holds that the "former idea applies more aptly to the modern mood of other Muslims, particularly the Arabs and Indo-Pakistanis, the latter to the Turks, because "the Arab dream is that of restoration, the modern Turks consciously talk of novelty".

The author's analysis of these trends can be summed up as follows:

- (i) The modernists and secularists are losing their strength day-by-day and liberalism is no longer a vital movement. This is so because the modernists have failed to realise the difficulties which beset them in the Muslim lands. Moreover modernists have failed to present any winsome ideology and have also failed to win the support and co-operation of the people.
- (ii) The old theologians too have not fully realised the nature of the problems of the modern world and as such they too have failed to come to grips with them.
- (iii) Two new movements in the Muslim world: the Ikhwanul Muslemoon in the Arab world and Jamat-e-Islami in Pakistan emerged to offer "magnificent leadership" into "the breach left by the evermore conspicuous failure of both the modernizers and classicists".
- (iv) There has been a lot of "dynamism" in the contemporary Islamic world, but the revival has been "more ebullent than thoughtful".
- (v) Turkey has tried to adopt another line: "it has abandoned the whole concept of a specific Islamic prescription of social pattern, and have accepted a separation of religious and politico-economic institutions". Now there are again some moves to revive the traditional Islam but the author is not hopeful about their success.
- (vi) As to Pakistan, the author holds, that its establishment signified

"the emergence of Islam from the period of oppression and eclipse and the embarking on a great and glorious enterprise, the society's reimplementation of Islam in our day". He holds that Islam is a matter of life and death for Pakistan and the implementation of the idea of Islamic state is of crucial importance.

In conclusion Professor Smith observes, that Islam as a religion is alive and dynamic. "Mundane problems cannot be solved by man where ideological and moral outlook is seriously inappropriate to their solution... the direction in which Islam moves is highly relevant to all other developments". On the whole Professor Smith seems to hold that modernists and classical theologians both have failed. But the future still lies in the hands of the *'Ulama*. In his own Words:

"Our study here would suggest that Gibb is right at least for the Arab world in stating that 'the future of Islam rests where it has rested in the past'—on the orthodox *'Ulama!* But as he goes on to say, they have yet to come to grips with the modern world."

Professor Smith's book is no doubt one of the most important and most interesting books written on Islam in the west in the recent past. However, some of his opinions are formed rather hastily and without proper reference to facts. Some others, we regret to observe, suffer from bias and lack of objectivity.

The author is not correct, for example, when he says that Islam is "a faith expressed not primarily in a system of ideas but in a system of life, a Community and its ways". Islam, undoubtedly attaches great importance to action, but it is fundamentally a system of ideas or an ideology which embodies an outlook on life and creates a set of norms and values. The first essential for an individual, who enters the fold of Islam, is to believe in this system of ideas. Action comes only next to belief. Islam, therefore, cannot be identified with what those who call themselves Muslims think or do. According to the Holy Qur'an if the existing community of Muslims were to give up their devotion to Islam, God will raise another community of Muslims who will be devoted to the *deep* and willing to serve it whole heartedly.

Again, the author has not understood the significance and the ultimate direction of changes actually going on in the Muslim world of today. It is true

that there is still a good deal of tension among the Muslims between what the writer denotes as "Modernism" and "traditionalism", but thanks to the creative vision of Iqbal and some other thinkers of Islam, this tension is already in the process of being completely resolved. The view is beginning to prevail that true Islam, as passed on to the Community by the prophet and his immediate followers, is perfectly in accord with all that is best and noblest—whether it is much or little—in the modern civilization. The Muslim Community, as a whole, is more definite in its attitude towards the west, more confident of its ideological stand point and more certain of its future today than it was in 1946 when professor Gibb wrote his *Modern Trends in Islam*.

Professor Smith dislikes Islam's insistence on a "system" and dubs it as "formalism". It is unfortunate that he does not realize that every ideology has its own form consisting of its institutions and an ideological Community lives up to the spirit of its ideology as long as it sticks to its form. The abandonment of the form of an ideology and the abandonment of its spirit and moral essence come so closely together that no one can say which of them came first. In fact the moment the form of an ideology is abandoned its spirit also disappears. It is not a mere chance that the weakening of the habit of Church-going in the West has synchronized with a proportionate weakening of morals.

The author's understanding of Iqbal seems to be very superficial. It is difficult for a western scholar accustomed to read systematized philosophies of western thinkers to grasp fully the philosophical hints of a poet-seer like Iqbal. The author asserts at one place that "Iqbal is so contradictory and unsystematic that it is difficult to assess him." And as an example of the "contradictory and unsystematic" views of Iqbal he refers to his being "a soofi who attacked soofism and perhaps the liberal who attacked liberalism." It is not clear why he thinks that a sufi has no right to attack what he thinks is not true sufism and why a liberal should not tell the world what are the real demands of true liberalism. If Iqbal is not a sufi or a liberal of a particular type—the one which the author has in mind—it can hardly be an indication that he is self-contradictory or unsystematic. The author no doubt requires a deeper and a more thorough-going study of Iqbal. Unfortunately the book is not, on the whole, a fully objective analysis of the Islamic panorama. Instead,

the missionary thinking of Dr. Smith seethes between the lines and tells adversely on the scientific value of the book.

K. A.

Literature on Iqbal

In the present age of specialization bibliographies serve a useful purpose in promoting research. Without bibliographies a research scholar is seriously handicapped for a good deal of his time is wasted in wandering about in search of relevant material.

We are at present far behind other nations of the world in the field of research. Lack of adequate library facilities, absence of good bibliographies, etc. are no doubt some of the factors responsible for our backwardness in this field. Even regarding Islamic and Pakistani subjects, we hardly possess any good bibliographies. The work under review compiled under the auspices of the Iqbal Academy is a remarkable exception.²³

This two-hundred page annotated bibliographical essay attempts to introduce all available works, articles, etc. of Iqbal and on Iqbal, in different eastern as well as western languages. The book opens with a chapter which throws light on Iqbal's prose writings and poetic compositions, as well as on his unfulfilled literary plans. The subsequent chapters throw light on Iqbal in his various capacities-as a poet, as a thinker and as an active participant in the politics of the sub-continent. The book concludes with a chapter which introduces works on Iqbal, written particularly in foreign languages, either by way of translation of Iqbal or by way of Iqbal's introduction, exposition and criticism. This chapter also mentions in brief the new bibliographical works so far published on the subject.

This bibliography is the work of learned assiduous scholar, the late Qazi Ahmad Mian Akhtar Junagarhi, who has left behind a number of books which testify to his sincere devotion to learning and his capacity for serious research. Through this annotated bibliography, which appears to be fairly comprehensive on the subject, Akhtar Junagarhi has rendered a valuable service to the cause of learning in this country. His labour is all the more praiseworthy because in our country this is almost a pioneering work in the

²³ Qazi Ahmad Mian Akhtar, Junagarhi, IQBALIYAT KA TANQIDI JA'ZAH Iqbal Academy, Karachi: 1955, pages 102-price Rs. 3/-.

field of bibliography—compilation. The formal and printing of the work, however, leaves room for improvement.

Z. I. A.

Letters of Iqbal

It is well said that letters are the true mirror of the personality of their writer. It is in letters that the real *man*, shorn of all artificial masks, speaks and unveils his personality. That is why letters of great men have always been read with profound interest. They provide a window on the life and character of the writer.

Several volumes of Iqbal's letters have been published during the last so many years. Most important of them is the compilation, *Iqbal Nama*, edited by Shaikh Ataullah. Now a valuable contribution to this literature has been made by Syed Nazir Niyazi²⁴ who has compiled *one hundred eightytwo* letters of Iqbal, all of which, except two, were written to him by the great sage of the East. Mr. Niyazi has also added profuse notes to throw light upon the background of the points discussed in the letters.

Many of the letters, in this compilation, relate to matters connected with Iqbal's illness and his treatment. Although such letters have little literary value, but they show the perseverance with which Iqbal lived and the way he braced the soul-rendering disease which afflicted him.

A unique characteristic of Iqbal's letters is that they always contain some very valuable comments on social, religious and philosophical topics. In his letters Iqbal used to discuss even very intricate problems in a very simple way. That is why his letters sparkle with gems of wisdom rolled over here, there and everywhere. The book under review also contains a large number of such random thought-pearls.

About *Tasammuf*, Iqbal makes the succinct observation that it is not meant for study or reportage: *it is something that should be lived.*

"By reading books and making historical researches nothing can be gained in this field. Neither the author of such books, nor the readers thereof can derive real benefit from such studies." (p. 10)

²⁴ "MAKTUBAT-I-IQBAL" edited by Syed Nazir A. Niyazi, Iqbal Academy, Karachi, 1957, pages 372, price Rs. 5/8-.

In a letter Iqbal discusses his approach to the study and interpretation of the Qur'an. He says that in his lectures he has confined himself to the explicit and the commonly understood meaning of the words of the Holy Book. He warns against the artificial interpretation of the Qur'an and asserts that the Holy Prophet himself used to take the Qur'anic words in their ordinary simple meaning and did not resort to far-fetched interpretations (*ta'weel*)". (p. 44)

Somewhere in 1934 an Anti-God society was formed in Aligarh. This event so perturbed Iqbal that he could not sleep throughout the night. (p. 202). This is an index of the philosopher's passionate desire to see a spiritual order prevail in the world.

Some important observations have been made by Iqbal in respect of the new liberal movement of Turkey. About Khalida Adeb Khanam's discourses on Modern Turkey and its approach to Islam he says that they betray a shallowness that is common among western writers on Islam. He has also complained of narrowness of her vision and her lack of understanding of the revolutionizing role of the Qur'an and of the Prophet of Islam in the cultural conflict of the East and the West. (p. 250)

These and other similar observations of Iqbal add to the value of his letters and help the reader in understanding the mind and thought of the great philosopher-poet of the east.

A.A..