BOOK REVIEWS

KITĀBU’R RASŪL, THE CONSTITUTIONAL DICTATION OF MUHAMMAD.
By Yusuf Abbas Hashmi. Karachi : Karachi University, 1984. 170 Pages. Rs. 70 (Soft), Rs. 80 (Hard).

To honour the memory of Dr. I.H. Qureshi, the eminent historian of Pakistan, the President of Pakistan has established a Foundation. In response to a directive of the President the Federal Cabinet has sponsored “Dr. I.H. Qureshi Chair for Research in Islamic history”. The University of Karachi has been chosen to be the venue of this chair, which is held by Dr. Yusuf Abbas Hashmi, the former Dean of Islamic Learning and Professor of Islamic History.

This book which is a research thesis on the Constitution of Medina is the first research work published by the Karachi University on behalf of the Dr. I.H. Qureshi Chair for Research in Islamic History. Dr. Yusuf Abbas Hashmi is its author.

In chapter iv of the book Dr. Hashmi lists eighteen points with which he has dealt in this book. Some of the more important points are the following:

1. Whether the Constitution of Medina was an ‘āhd or Mithāq.
2. Whether Muhammad was its sole author and whether it was his dictation.
3. Whether the Šahīfah (Constitution of Medina) is a unity or a collection of different agreements and whether it was dictated on a single date.
4. With whom all the conceived powers rested in the Šahīfah?
5. Whose authority emerged as supreme and binding and why?
6. Did the Šahīfah give an insignificant place to Muḥammad?
7. Does the Šahīfah come within the purview of the Qur’anic verse: wa mā Yantīqu ‘an al-hawā?

After discussing these points, Dr. Hashmi draws the following conclusions:

1. Šahīfah was neither a covenant nor an agreement, Muḥammad was its sole author and it was his dictation. It was dictated at a stretch, guaranteeing thereby its unity and single date of issue.
2. Theoretically all powers rested with Allah, but in practice it imposed the
authority of Muḥammad.

3. Muḥammad himself being the architect and designer of the Ṣahīfah, only his authority was to emerge supreme.

4. Muḥammad and only Muḥammad enjoyed a significant place in the Ṣahīfah.

5. To substantiate the argument that the Ṣahīfah was the dictation of Muḥammad it should be the duty of the researcher to point out the relevant Quranic verses.

6. If the relevant Quranic verses are traceable would it not be possible to conclude, “Nor does he speak of his own desire”. (53 : 3)

It is difficult to agree with the conclusion of Dr. Hashmi that the Ṣahīfah was not an agreement. His argument is that by the time Ṣahīfah was written, the Jews had been reduced to a nonentity. So there was no need to obtain their consent. This is not true. The power of the Jews had declined no doubt, by this time and the Aws and Khazraj had become dominant but still the Jews were not so weak that they could be ignored. We must remember that after the battle of Badr the Banū Qaynuqa remarked and uttered the threat that Muḥammad had to deal with the Quraysh, or he had to deal with us, we would have given him a good lesson”. Such a threat could not come from a group which was utterly powerless and insignificant. Similarly, the Banū Nadir conspired to kill the holy Prophet even though he was the head of the state. This shows that they felt confident of their strength. The fact was that the Muslims (Muhajirs and Anṣār) had recognised the prophethood of Muḥammad. Therefore, there was no question of their entering into an agreement with their prophet. The prophet was just to be obeyed but this was not the case with the Jews who did not recognise the prophethood of Muḥammad. They could not submit to his commands without an agreement. Therefore, in writing the Ṣahīfah the Prophet had to obtain their consent. Thus the Ṣahīfah, was not an agreement between the Prophet and any section of Muslims, but it was an agreement between the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the Jews. On p. 8 of his book Dr. Hashmi gives the following quotation from Ibn Isḥaq. “And the Rasul of Allah wrote a writing between the Muhajirin and the Ansar and summoned the Jews to it”. This also shows that the Jews were summoned in order to obtain their consent to the Ṣahīfah which was not a unilateral imposition on the Jews.

Regarding the connection between the Ṣahīfah and the Qur’anic verse “Wa Mā Yantiqu ‘an al-Hawā, it is quite clear that Dr. Hashmi believes that the Ṣahīfah was a revelation from God. On p. 35 of his book he says, “As we have discussed elsewhere many of the clauses of the Ṣahīfah can be compared with the relevant Quranic verses. Revelational trend can well be discerned”. This amounts to stretching the meaning of the Quranic verse wa mā yantiqu ‘an al-hawā, too far. The Quranic assertion that the Prophet (peace be on him) does not speak from desire but says what is revealed to him refers only to the Qur’ān. Anything that is extra-Quranic cannot come under the definition of wahi (Revelation). If the meaning of Nutq (talk) is stretched too far it would lead to the conclusion that when the Prophet talked to his wives on domestic affairs, his conversation constituted a revelation, a thesis which no Muslim would accept.
In discussing his theses Dr. Hashmi sometimes refers to details which are not relevant to his subject. For instance on page 11, he says that Sargeant contradicts himself while accusing Muḥammad (S.A.W.S.) of his moral lapses in marrying Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. One fails to understand what the episode of Zaynab bint Jaḥsh has to do with a research thesis on Sahifah. Another such instance is the question of Jewish population in Medina after the expulsion of Banū Qurayṣah. Dr. Hashmi says that if the Jewish population is to be taken at 42,000 and keeping in view Sprenger’s ratio of seven to nine, the Arab population comes to 54,000. This is also a matter which is only distantly relevant to the thesis of Dr. Hashmi.

In any case, the book is a useful addition to the Sirah literature and Dr. Hashmi has taken great pains to discuss and analyse his thesis. He has consulted original Arabic sources and also studied the books of the orientalists whom he calls Islamists; why, we do not understand. The term Islamists is used to distinguish people who believe in Islam as a socio-political and economic order from secularists who treat Islam merely as a religion.

There are many linguistic errors in the book which should be eliminated in the next edition. Below we give a few examples:

Second line on p. 17 is still in complete definition of din (is still an incomplete definition of din).
Last but one para p. 17 only his authority was to emerge supreme, and beyond him of his Allah (And beyond him that of his Allah).
5th para on p. 27. They will protect him with which they protect themselves (They will protect him with that with which they protect themselves).

Such instances can be multiplied. There are also printing mistakes due to defective proof-reading.

MAZHERUDDIN SIDDQUI.