BOOK REVIEWS


The Cambridge University Press, Bentley House, London, has recently published the Cambridge History of Islam in two volumes.

The volume I discusses the Central Islamic Lands and consists of the following four parts:—

Part—I : The Rise and Domination of the Arabs.
Part—II : The coming of the Steppe Peoples.
Part—III : The Central Islamic Lands in the Ottoman Period.
Part—IV : The Central Islamic Lands in Recent Times.

In 1970 the editors brought out the second volume which discusses the further Islamic Lands, Islamic Society and civilization. These Volumes have been written by a team of scholars who have earned some name and fame for their special studies in various branches of the history of Muslim lands. An effort has been made to provide a comprehensive survey of the History of Muslim lands over more than thirteen centuries to the years following the second World War.

The learned professors have made an endeavour to view Islam as a cultural whole and to enable the reader to follow all the threads-historical, theological, philosophical, political, economic, scientific, military, artistic—related to the rise and advancement of Islamic Civilization.

The volume under review deals with Islam in the sub-continent of India, South-East Asia, Spain, Sicily and Africa, and elucidates the story of political developments down to the years following the Second World War.

Numerous maps and photographs have been profusely used to illustrate Islamic Art and Architecture.

English readers will no doubt find the work comprehensive and authoritative in the subjects it deals with. Nor will it fail in winning the appreciation and admiration of students, particularly the university students of oriental subjects, and those who read history for intellectual pursuit and mental pleasure and pastime.

Like all the works of the learned orientalists which deal with the rise, development and expansion of Islam, the work under review also displays an approach quite alien to the norms of belief and practice which enabled the advocates of Islam to thrive and prosper in its halcyon days.

It is a fact of history and no figment that with the expansion of Islam, the Millat which was established by the holy Prophet grew only in weakness by absorbing many
foreign customs and alien institutions which had nothing to do with Islam and its teachings.

The Christian writers on Islam have undoubtedly been almost unable to make an objective study of the tenets of Islam, and hence, they possibly never segregate themselves from their inherent Christian doctrines when they try to examine and analyse the creeds of Islam. However liberal and unbiased they may pose to appear, they are never free from their own prejudices. To illustrate the point a bit more elaborately the following lines are quoted from the Introduction written by Professor P.M. Holt (p. xx):

"Two of the principal institutions of Islam, Shari'ah and Jihad, the Holy Law and the Holy War, are expressions of the concern in its conservative and militant aspects respectively — aspects moreover which are not wholly distinct, since the Holy War is fought in defence of the Holy Law against its external and internal enemies".

Now, the above lines would have us understand that the writer distinctly tries to keep aside the political, social and economic matters from the 'conservative and militant aspects' of the Umma. In other words, Shari'ah which is in fact identical with Islam, and Din, has been used in the meaning of Fiqh, Islamic Law, and has been declared as an ingredient of Islam like Jihad which has, again, been wrongly understood in the sense of the Holy War — a term so dear and sacred to the Christians, as against the Jews in the long past, and against the Muslim Turks so well-known in history. The Muslim readers would only wish the Professor could illustrate and describe precisely 'the legacy of Byzantine administration' the Muslim Community inherited, and 'the customs of Arab tribal leadership, as well as the usages of the Meccan trading oligarchy' the successors of the Prophet as heads of his community drew on.

Another point of significance is the attitude of the Orientalists towards Hadith or as the editor has it, 'the memorials of the alleged acts and sayings of the Prophet, as transmitted by a chain of informants'. Following the pattern of the new gospels which were prepared by saints after the alleged crucification of Jesus Christ, the advocates of Christianity naturally understand that the same thing befell to the Muslims in the case of their recording Hadith. They are either quite unaware or they deliberately pose to be unconscious of the fact that the Apostolic behaviours and actions were copied by the Companions carefully and his Sunan were practically transmitted from generation to generation; and the followers of the companions and their followers with all care and caution recorded the descriptions of the acts as well as the sayings and approvals of the Prophet, and thus, the collections of Hadith saw the light of the day. It was the belief in the Qur'an and the Sunnah which led its advocates to invent all the Islamic Sciences including historiography, biography, Arabic Lexicon, Grammar and Rhetoric, Hadith Tafsir, Fiqh and Usul etc. There appears no significant point, therefore, in saying, (xxii): "Thus the motive which led to the development of Islamic historiography was primarily religious'. Moreover, one cannot connive at such a glaring contradiction as is manifested in the following two expressions:

(a) "Hence Islamic historiography assumes as axiomatic the pattern already evolved in Judaeo — Christian thought: a succession of events in time, opening with creation, culminating in a point of supreme divine revelation (when, in effect, there is a new creation of a holy community') and looking prospectively to a Last Day and the end of history." And
(b) "In this connection, it is significant that, in spite of the contacts between Islamic and late Hellenistic civilization, and of the Muslim reception of much of the Graeco-Roman cultural heritage, the Islamic historians were almost totally uninterested in their Classical predecessors, whether as sources of information, or as models of historiography" (Introduction, xxii).

One can evidently realize the original type of historical writing that developed in Islam in the biographical dictionary in the words of Sir Hamilton Gibb:

"It is clear that the conception that underlies the oldest biographical dictionaries is that the history of the Islamic Community is essentially the contribution of individual men and women to the building up and transmission of its specific culture; that it is these persons (rather than the political governors) who represent or reflect the active forces in Muslim Society in their respective Spheres; and that their individual contributions are worthy of being recorded for future generations".

The volume under reference contains the following four parts:

Part V. The Indian sub-continent.

1. Muslim India Before the Mughals
   by I.H. Qureshi, University of Karachi.

2. India under the Mughals by I.H. Qureshi
   Appendix:
   The Sultanates of the Deccan, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries.
   by Burton-Page, University of London.

3. The Breakdown of Traditional Society
   by S.A.A. Rizvi, the Australian National University, Canberra

4. India and Pakistan
   by Aziz Ahmad, University of Toronto.

Part VI. South-East Asia.

1. South East Asian Islam to the Eighteenth century
   by H.J. Degraaf, de Stegg.

2. South-East Asian Islam in the Nineteenth Century

3. South-East Asian Islam in the Twentieth Century
   by Harry J. Benda, Yale University.

Part VII. Africa and the Muslim West.

1. North Africa to the Sixteenth Century
   by Roger Le Tourneau, University of Aix-en-Provence

2. North Africa in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries
   by R. Mantran, University of Aix-en-Provence.

3. North Africa in the Pre-Colonial Period
   by Andre Raymond, Institute Francais d'Etudes Arabes de Damas.
4. North Africa in the period of Colonization  
   by Andre Nouschi, University of Nice.

5. The Nilotic Sudan.  
   by P.M. Holt.

6. The Western and Central Sudan  
   by Humphrey Fisher, School of Oriental and African Studies,  
   University of London.

7. The Iberian Peninsula and Sicily  
   by Ambroxio Huici Miranda, Valencia.

Part. VIII:  
Islamic Society and Civilization.

1. The Geographical Setting  
   by X. De Planhol, University of Nancy.

2. The Sources of Islamic Civilization  
   by G.E. Von Grunebaum, Near Eastern Center, University  
   of California.

3. Economy, Society, Institutions  
   by Claude Cahen, University of Paris.

4. Law and Justice  
   by the Late J. Schacht, Columbia University, New-York.

5. Religion and Culture  
   by Louis Gardet, College Philosophique et Theologique,  
   Toulouse.

6. Mysticism  
   by the late A.J. Arberry, University of Cambridge

7. Revival and Reform in Islam  
   by Fazlur Rahman, Central  
   Institute of Islamic Research, Karachi.

8. Literature:  
   (a) Arabic Literature  
       by Irfan Shahid

   (b) Persian Literature  
       by E. Yar-Shater, Columbia University of New York.

   (c) Turkish Literature  
       by Fahir iz, University of Istanbul.

   (d) Urdu Literature  
       by Aziz Ahmad

9. Art and Architecture  
   by G. Fehervari, School of Oriental and African Studies,  
   University of London.

10. Science  
    by G. Anawati, Institut Dominicain d'Etude, Orientales, Cairo.

11. Philosophy  
    by Pines, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
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12. Warfare
by V. J. Parry, University of London.

13. The Transmission of Learning and Literary influences to Western Europe
by F.G. Gabrieli, University of Rome.

Besides the above Parts the volume contains a) Dynastic List of the Umayyads of Spain, b) Bibliography, c) Glossary, and d) Index.

Now, it is not possible to review all the chapters as mentioned above. But it would not be unwarranted if a few general points as discussed by the veteran contributors may be recalled here just to rouse the curiosity of our readers and to demonstrate how intellectually and artfully our contemporary orientalists present the result of their own researches on Islam and the followers of Islam based mostly or sometimes not on the historical facts and figures but on their own preconceived notions which they have already formed in total conformity with the social environment they have grown in. Referring, for example, to chapter 3. p. 67 entitled 'The Breakdown of Traditional Society', a Muslim would hardly understand what does the title mean. One can understand the changes that occur in a society. But a Muslim Society of any part of the world and of any century does surely possess Islamic rituals which are performed within the society. It is, therefore, very difficult to dispose the contradiction apparently contained in the following extract of the first paragraph (p. 67):

“In the course of time, the interaction of their (Muslim immigrants) various ideas and values contributed to the rise of cultural traditions which were radically different from those of their birthplaces; Muslims, while retaining the broad basic framework of their religion, evolved healthy traditions of toleration, and of peaceful co-existence with the indigenous populations.”

Similarly, it is amazing that after the discovery of rich endowments made by Aurangzib for various temples of Rajputana, Ajmer and other places, the writer of the chapter declares (see the 2nd paragraph): “The obscurantism and bigotry of Aurangzeb disturbed the Hindu and Muslim nobility alike”.

It is true that Aurangzeb carried his campaigns against the petty Muslim and Hindu rulers including Sivaji and the Sikhs who frequently disturbed the peaceful commonalty and caused them irreparable loss. But it is far from truth to charge him with obscurantism and bigotry, specially when we recall that some of his campaigns were led by Hindu Rajput Rajas.

While it is quite correct to say about Shah Waliyullah’s Hujjat Allah al-Balighah that “it reflects a deep understanding of the importance of the process of historical change and socio-economic challenges”, it is surely sweeping a remark to say (p. 72 1st line): “His magnum opus, Hujjat Allah al-Baligha draws extensively upon the works of Ibn Miskawayh, al-Farabi and al-Ghazali.” Likewise, there is hardly any evidence to support his statement that Sayyid Murtada of Bilgram was a disciple of Shah Waliyullah (see the end of p. 72).

The writer seems, however, quite correct when he declares after discussing the academic achievements of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan: “His far-fetched interpretations of
Qur'anic verses to prove his thesis that wahy (revelation) and ‘natural law’ or ‘reason’ were not conflicting and irreconcilable, failed to convince many of his closest associates. But his plea for a close examination of the Traditions ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad, even if they were embodied in the classical collections of Hadith, stimulated great interest amongst members of his own generation and among his successors too”. One may add here that the taṣfīr of Sir Sayyid and some of his religious views with his background of being disloyal to the Muslims and fully devoted to the British and his admiration of English sciences led a number of his contemporary as well as succeeding Muslim thinkers to propagate their own whims and wishful thoughts as equivalent to wahy and truth disregarding the accepted meanings of lexicons and ignoring the fact that their individual reasons were equally prone to mistakes and errors.

Passing on to the eighth part, the Chapter 4 on ‘Law and justice’ deserves special attention. The entire chapter appears to be a jumble of contradictions as it begins with “The sacred law of Islam, the Shari’a, occupies a central place in Muslim Society and its history runs parallel with the history of Islamic civilization, and then the writer (the author of the chapter) says, “Islamic law itself is one of our most important sources for the investigation of Islamic society, and explaining Islamic law in terms of Islamic society risks using a circular argument (p. 539)”. On the one hand he writes: “Islamic law had its roots in pre-Islamic Arabic Society. This society and its law showed both profane and magical features”; On the other he also declares: “There are no indications that a sacred law existed among the pagan Arabs; this as an innovation of Islam” (p. 539).

Now, accepting the writer’s statements that “The sacred law of Islam is, the shari’a and that “the sacred law was an innovation of Islam”, as are evidently understood from the above quotations there remains no doubt about the absurdity of his statement:

“Islamic law had its roots in pre-Islamic Arab Society”.

The fact is that the Islamic law or the Shari’ah is no other than the Qur’anic injunctions, prohibitions and the Sunnat and approvals of the Messenger of Allah. The learned writer of the article has confused the Shari’ah (Islamic Law) and the codified laws of the Fuqaha’ who have derived their decisions from the Qur’an, the Prophetic Sunnah, sayings and approvals, and the Sunnah, sayings and approvals of the Şahâbah and the Tabi’în’. The orientalists have, however, almost forged a unity among themselves with the object of altering the history of Islam as they insist that the concept of Prophetic Sunna is based on the Ḥadîth which was collected in the second and third centuries, and cleanly forget that the Prophetic Sunna was strictly followed by the Şahâbah both in the life of the Prophet and afterwards and that the sunna of the Messenger of Allah remained in practice from the very beginning of Islam to this day and that a number of aḥâdîth were recorded in accordance with the practices of the Şahâbah which they were accustomed to perform from the time of the Messenger of Allah. This is quite obvious from the fact that the works of Imám Awzâ’î, Abû Yusuf, Malik and Muḥammad among a host of others which have now seen the light of the day and which preceded the six canonical collections of Ḥadîth contain and refer to a number of aḥâdîth and customs of the people of Medina (which must have been inherited from the Prophet himself, and which have been referred to by Imám Malik in his Muwaṭṭa’, and preferred to his narrated Ḥadîth) which are not available in any of the six collections.
In brief, the articles contained in the volume are not free from biassed views and opinions and cannot be recommended to those young Muslim students who have not studied the Islamic Sciences in their original language. The volume has obviously been published for English readers who will easily realize that each and every chapter displays, outwardly in a very scholarly manner, the individualistic angles of view the author possesses. The readers may also bear in mind that the Ummah never attaches any significance to the individual rational views which find no support from the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

For those who like to make a critical and comparative study of the Islamic Society and Civilization in the twentieth century the volume will be found immensely valuable.

M.S.H. M'ażümî