BOOK REVIEW


Kalim Siddiqi, who is on the editorial staff of the Guardian, has recently taken a Ph. D. with a thesis on Pakistan. It is his firm conviction that the bureaucrats who became the rulers of Pakistan have betrayed the people in a way no ruling class among the Muslims has done before. For him the year 1947 was a turning point where Muslim history failed to turn—"the sâhib class saw to it that it did not." The promised land, he holds, had been reached more by default than by design.

Kalim Siddiqi propounds the often heard thesis that the Muslim League leaders began to think in terms of a separate state, not because the Muslims of India would not survive without it, but because in a separate state they would be the ruling class. The League, he says, had taken no notice of the "Pakistan" concept during the thirties because its leadership still hoped to secure guaranteed patronage from the Congress. "In 1940, when that hope had finally disappeared, Jinnah discovered what the Muslim thinkers and masses had known all along—that there were two nations in India."

In analysing the various segments of Muslim leadership, Kalim Siddiqi starts with the divines. Whereas some of his observations are brilliant, his projection of the mullah is somewhat out of focus. At times one gets the impression that the author is too Western in his education and has, perhaps, lived too long in England (since 1954) to be fully conversant with the intricacies of Muslim religious leadership and its divergent trends of thought. His historical sketch starts with the generalization that under the British Empire the mullah's chief concern was the purification of souls as a prerequisite for reestablishing the dominion of God on earth. Even if we take for granted that this attitude was the predominant one in those days, the author fails to explain the transition from this apolitical spiritualistic stand to the fascism prevailing in organized religion ever since the establishment of Pakistan. Today the mullah believes in the opposite; his motto is "political power first, without it there can be no purification of souls" while in his mind the concept of purity and soul has been reduced ad absurdum.

Surely, the author is on surer grounds when he concludes that the image of (ritualized) Islam projected by such 'good Muslims' as Maudūdī has contributed almost as much to the tragedy of Pakistan as the incompetence and irrelevance of the "heathen" élite. Kalim Siddiqi's judgement is certainly worth recording: "The mullah indeed bears a greater responsibility in so far as he was more directly in touch with the masses than the pukka sâhib who was in any case the creation of an alien culture."

But this final verdict does not explain the phenomenon. Much more incisive and consistent is the analysis of the bureaucratic élite, the emergence and performance of which form the central theme of the book. As is to be expected, he starts with Sayyid Ahmad...
Khân, who failed in his “Reformation” of Islam but succeeded in creating a class of people who can only be described as Protestant Muslim without a “Protestant Islam”. These sweeping statements of the author, journalistic no doubt, have the advantage of lending clarity to many an issue that has so far only been tackled in the cumbersome manner of historians without perspective (excepting Khâlid Bin Sayeed who preceded Kalim Siddiqi with a similar analysis but with academic methods).

The root cause of the dilemma of Pakistan’s first 25 years of existence is seen in the sort of unholy alliance of aristocracies - the British with the Moghul - which was re-habilitated by the genius of Sayyid Ahmad Khân. It all began with the deputation of Muslim gentry who met the Viceroy, Lord Minto, in 1906. These Muslim nobles, who represented no one but themselves, were no democrats. They had an advantage over the Hindus in so far as they were, like the British rulers of India, true blue aristocrats. Like all aristocracies the world over, they were opposed to the whole concept of democratic participation in autocratic government. Their emphasis on aristocratic Muslim “character” was sweet music to the ears of their British counterparts such as Lord Minto, with whom they shared, besides sport and beef, love of poetry and the cultivation of an aristocratic culture. Lord Minto’s “generous” concessions to the Muslim nobles, especially the offer of reserved seats on a restricted franchise, allowed them to indulge in the preservation of aristocratic values and modes of thought in preference to meritocracy. (Here probably lies the real difference with the Hindus, for otherwise whatever Kalim Siddiqi says about the Muslim nobles has been said about the Hindu nobles as well. Incidentally, Nehru portrays his father, who used to hunt and eat beef, as the prototype of the English gentleman). By acting like British lords, loyal to the Crown, the Muslim gentry secured the desired membership in the district boards, the municipal councils and the provincial assemblies. There was no need to cultivate contacts with the general mass of the Muslim population. From this point onward to the present day there has been no meaningful communication between these “indigenous” servants of the government who are by education, training and temperament arrogant, and the rest of the Muslims. “The people of Pakistan are still paying for it with their sweat and blood.”

These “educated” Muslims did not pray for Pakistan, for “if they prayed at all, they prayed for the British raj to go on for ever.” As for the provenance of the Pakistan concept, Kalim Siddiqi makes much of its origin among the masses. But then he divests it of the revolutionary tinge by averring that “the Pakistan concept appealed to the Muslim masses who hankered after a past glory”, and that “the Rahmat ‘Ali plan drew its inspiration largely from the memory of the Moghul Empire.” Next comes the negative raison d’etre. Gândhi’s râmraj was galling not only to the oppressed Muslim masses but also to Jinnah’s liberalism. A strong positive content, says the author, was contributed by Iqbâl whose “assessment of the political, social and economic ills of India, and in particular of the Muslims, had a depth and dimension which the ‘educated’ Muslims of the Aligarb Movement were ill-equipped to comprehend.”

The second half of the book is an account of the Ayûb era and its aftermath. Though much of Kalim Siddiqi’s narration is outstanding for its perspicacity yet, as a whole ‘he does not come to grips with the sore tragedy. He is obviously under the illusion of having drawn a clear picture of what and how it all happened, but even a sympathetic reader cannot but feel that the author has not fully digested his raw materials.
Thus he espouses the cause of dogged Bhāshānī as the most potent force capable of wrestling the true Pakistan, the Pakista of the masses and their philosophers, out of the hands of the villainous bureaucracy. East Pakistan's bid for self-construction is smothered by Mujib and his upstarts, who do not want change but merely a take-over a junior bourgeoisie from the East wants to install itself in the office of the Western senior. The author is quite poignant in depicting the antipeople stance of Mujib as following in the true tradition of the ruling class. He deplores that this new elite succeeded in balk- ing Bhāshānī and the East Pakistani masses and thereby effectively stifled socialist aspirations for a long time to come. At the same time, Kalim Siddiqi admits that Bhutto led the very same popular forces to victory in the West. But then the author succumbs to the effete hypothesis that Bhutto had a hand in bringing about separation. This would be less disconcerting if not for his stark failure to substantiate his strident assertion that Bhutto aligned himself with Yahyā in a sinister act of revenge, leaving the East alone after disabling it.

It could be plausible that at a certain moment destiny made both, Bhutto and Yahyā, pursues similar course. But the author ought not to have overlooked that he himself provides ample evidence that there was no similarity of motive, and that the possibility of both joining hands in a common struggle for two different causes must be ruled out.

The writer records how Yahyā and the whole Western establishment tried hard to appease their younger cousin from the East by offering him a disproportionately high share. But the newcomer, who had just jumped across the barrier separating the lower class of his origin from the middle-class, was so intoxicated with the prospect of his next leap that he wanted to rule supreme without having to share even with lesser partners. Seeing all their concessions spurned the old coterie at last ran amuck. It is difficult to see, what truck the intractable Bhutto could have with them, especially since the writer, on another page, equates Bhutto's role with that of Bhāshānī, at least in rough outlines. Since Bhutto had not been booted out the way Bhāshānī was, was it not his stringent obligation to consolidate people's power, at least in the West? Ostensibly, the author has no objection to Bhāshānī's sacrificing unity of the two wings and opting for Bang- ladesh if this helps in bringing about an ultimate fulfilment of the Pakistan dream. But then he should concede the same rationale to Bhutto - sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

Kalim Siddiqi has skilfully described how the pre-1972 Pakistan was not really Pakistan but rather a controversy of the ideal, a Pakistan distorted beyond recognition. He differentiates between the "deep seated rational belief in one's cause" as held by the multitudes of hungry, ill-clad, illiterate, dispossessed Muslims, the "ideology of Pakistan" which is "an abstraction understood only by the masses", as against the expediency of the "faceless" bureaucrats of the Muslim League (and its successor, the 'Awāmi League), corrupt, morally degenerate and intellectually pervert, "a mercenary class originally hired by a foreign power". Now, in 1971, there was a genuine chance to make a fresh start for the realization of the original Pakistan of the masses and the thinkers. How- ever, at this juncture such a transformation was possible only in the Western part, provided that it was rescued from the new anti-people coterie which had taken over in the East. If one were to follow the author's argumentation with more consistency than he himself, one would have to infer that for Bhutto the option was either to have a true Pakistan by
confining himself to the West, or perpetuate misery under the old constellation and allow are juvenated bureaucracy to establish firmer than any ruling clique before. The entire canto fermo of this book, which is essentially a vituperation against the traditional ruling class allows only a painful decision in favour of a people's Pakistan in the West, bisected at least for the time being.

It is, therefore, difficult to follow the author in his wistful longing for a united Pakistan under Mujib. It is amazing to find him sticking to the fanciful theory of reconciliation at five past twelve. According to Kalim Siddiqi such a reconciliation was possible not only after the army action in March but even during the war - when Mujib should have been released to save East Pakistan from India! Here he puts the alienation of Pakistan which, according to him was not the promised land, as a sacrosanct ideal over and above the ideal of the authentic, the real Pakistan. The author's concern for Pakistan is ardent to an extent as is mostly found in expatriates only. This might have prevented him from a more thorough recognition of the only realistic option.

Besides, his clinging to Mujib, whom he has characterised as the personification of anti-Pakistanism, bespeaks the bizarre sort of love-hate for the Bengali as is frequently found with jilted "Bihārī" intellectuals.

Otherwise, if at all the bogey of Bhutto's responsibility for the separation is to be accepted, Kalim Siddiqi, nolens volens, proved that this was actually a Kemalist operation, the fulfilment of a duty whereby Bhutto salvaged the badly mauled ship of the nation, abandoning a large Turan for a small but consolidated Turkish republic. (Opponents might even call this an alibi for Bhutto). Something of that seems to have become visible to the author through the mist of his contradiction, for the book ends with a friendly advice to Bhutto: the people whom the Prime Minister has to watch just closely as he has to watch Mrs. Gandhi are the men who surrounded Ayūb and Yahya. "These professional sycophants, courtiers, and hangers-on are still in business and flourishing. They are probably already trying to identify themselves with the President and his party".

The Mujibist impasse in the final chapter is but natural in view of the fact that the events analysed are too recent. One could hardly expect the author to pass as detached a judgment on the leaders of today as he passes on Jinnah. Kalim Siddiqi's treatment of the Qā'id-i-A'ẓam is carried by a spirit of carping historical criticism that may be regarded, to say the least, as vanguardist. In Pakistan it is likely to be considered sacrilegious. However stinging his assessment may be, the price of the book is prohibitive enough to prevent many potential readers from coming to grips with it.

Berlin.

—Detlev Khalid