Aziz Ahmed

This elegant volume has been published under the auspices of the Near Eastern Center, University of California, Los Angeles. The learned editors are too well-known to be introduced. As the note of the editors indicates, this anthology illustrates much of the detailed theoretical argument found in 'Aziz Aḥmad's "Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan."


The learned editors have tried to place in the hands of the western students of international affairs the views of religious and political thinkers in their own words, as faithfully as possible rendered into English, without offering any judgment of their own. Their aim and object has precisely been to enable the readers to draw their own conclusions.

Translations of Urdu passages have been prepared by well-known specialists with great care and accuracy.

The work has undoubtedly great academic value and the editors deserve appreciation and encouragement for publishing a pioneer work of this kind.

It is, however, surprising that Mr. 'Azīz Aḥmad has, with due respect to his ability and scholarship, included in the present anthology, to quote his own words, "the selections from significant literature and documents that hold a mirror to modern Islamic self-consciousness, self-statement, and self-definition in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent," ignoring the most significant theological and political thoughts of some of the leading savants of Muslim India and Pakistan. Whatever the reasons, Mr. 'Azīz Aḥmad has, perhaps after his Western teachers, completely disregarded the importance of the unique contributions made by prominent thinkers like Maulānā Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan, Maulānā Aḥṣāf 'Alī Ṭāhānawī, Maulānā Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madānī, Maulānā Ahmad Riḍā Khān of Bareilly, Maulānā Ṭāhā ullamah of Amritsar, Maulānā Abd' al-Ḥayy of Lucknow and a host of others who made by common consent a deep religious impact on the majority of...
the Muslims of India and Pakistan. For example, to estimate correctly the views and creeds of Mirzâ Gholâm Aḥmad, the works and contributions of Maulānâ Thānā'ullâh of Amritsar are indispensable. Likewise, one can better understand the contributions of Nawab Šiddîq Ḥasan Khan if one is fully acquainted with the academic activities and rare scholarship of Maulānâ ‘Abd al-Ḥayy of Lucknow. Another omission which should be noted here is the influence exercised by Maulānâ Karâmah ‘Ali of Jawnpûr and his descendants on the Muslim mass of East Bentgal, North Bengal and Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Nor can we totally ignore the indefatigable services rendered by Mufti Kifâyatullâh, Maulānâ Aḥmad Sajjâd and their organizations, Jam‘iyyat ul-‘Ulamâ’ of Delhi, and Imārat Shar‘iyyah, Patna, Bihar, respectively. Again, the valuable contributions of some members of the Khairabâdî school of thought, of a number of commentators of Ḥadîth and exegetes of Bihar, Bengal, U.P., Punjab and Sind cannot be obliterated from the pages of history.

On the contrary, the editors have included selections from the writings of some scholars who never influenced their own community viz., Dr. Khalîfah ‘Abd al-Ḥakîm and A.A.A. Fyzee. The latter would rather be condemned on religious grounds by all sections of Muslims if they happen to read his following beliefs regarding the Qur’ān and the Prophet (p. 204): “Muhammad gave it (the Qur’ān) to us in the words of Muhammad, in the speech of Muhammad, the Arabic language”; or “... that he was neither greater nor lesser than the great teachers of the world”.

It is a fact that Sayyid Aḥmad Khan exercised great influence upon those who were associated with his college and the University of Aligarh and most of the products of British-organized-universities. Amir ‘Ali and Fyzee and the like had no religious impact on any group of Muslims. The English educated people of the sub-Continent, no doubt, admitted their academic achievements and what is called modern scientific scholarship. On the other hand, the Ulema exercised enormous influence on the masses. In the struggle for achieving independence for the sub-continent the self-less sacrifice of the ‘theologians’, to use the expression of Mr. ‘Azîz, also made great impact.

But due to the hold of English in government offices and universities, Muslims of the sub-Continent in general, and of Pakistan in particular, suffered a great religious setback and became almost bankrupt in the values that are inevitably required in all spheres of human life.

The general title of the book and the period indicated therein would justify some of the remarks advanced above. Notwithstanding some short-comings in the treatment of the subject itself, the present work makes a very useful and authentic reading for all those for whom it has been published.

M. S. H. Ma’sumi.
It is only in the fitness of things that the three great streams of civilisation, the Judaic, the Christian, and the Muslim, having sprung from the same holy land, should endeavour to converge towards a confluence. Inter—civilisational amity, however, is possible only if the members of one civilization understand and appreciate the weltanschauung of the other in all its multifarious ramifications, which implies an objective study and sympathetic approach to each other's history and traditions, philosophy and mores, laws and institutions, legends and aspirations. The Near Eastern Center of the University of California, therefore, and its late director, Prof. Gustave E. von Grunebaum—who himself made no mean contribution towards such an understanding—deserve special thanks for giving a fillip to studies in Muslim civilization in depth by instituting the first ever award in Islamics and providing a regular forum for the dissemination of the products of such studies in the Biennial Conferences and their Proceedings. Named after a great orientalist, the GIORGIO LEVI DELLA VIDA MEDAL is to be awarded biennially to give recognition to an outstanding scholar whose work has significantly advanced the study of Islamic civilisation. The recipient of the award, it is stipulated, shall deliver a formal lecture in person at the University of California as part of the GIORGIO LEVI DELLA VIDA CONFERENCE. The proceedings of the conference are to be published as a separate volume in a special series, of which the volume under review is the first.

The Proceedings of the First Giorgio Levi Della Vida Conference, in addition to Prof. Von Grunebaum's Address on the occasion of the presentation of the Award (in his capacity as the Director of the Near Eastern Center) and an Introduction by him (as the General Editor) consists of five lectures: (i) "Logic and Law in Classical Islam", by the first recipient of the Medal, Professor Robert Brunschvig, (ii) "The logical Structure of Islamic Theology" by Prof. Josef van Ess, (iii) "Language and Logic in Classical Islam" by Prof. Muḥsin Mahdi, (iv) "Poets and Critics in the Third Century A.H." by Prof. Seeger A. Bonebakker, and, (v) "The 'Law Merchant' of the Medieval Islamic World" by Prof. Abraham L. Udovitch. There is also a 12-page Index to the volume.

The first of the lectures is by Prof. Brunschvig who, in a matter of 12 pages, sweeps across the whole field of jurisprudential questions. There is hardly anything in this lecture that belies Prof. von Grunebaum's encomium: 'His [i.e., Levi Della Vida’s] close kin in intellectual elegance and stylistic finesse, in that pervasive sensititvity which in scholarship corresponds to the artist's intuition, and again in that all-embracing and seemingly effortless control of history, law, and philosophy, both Islamic and Western, Robert Brunschvig has as though by the magician's wand in one touch identified and brought near their solution problems from all provinces of Islamic Studies which before him had hardly been noticed.'
"The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology" by Prof. Joseph van Ess is in the nature of a general introduction to the science of kalām. The lecture is divided into three sections: Prof. van Ess endeavours to bring out the apologetic and controversialistic character of 'ilm al-kalām in the first section, then he discusses the main terms employed in the Ādāb al-kalām and their Greek, especially Stoic, ancestry, and, in the last section, he traces the historical development of the interplay between the traditionalist notion of qiyās and the Aristotelian syllogism.

The relation between logic and grammar is the theme of the next lecture, "Language and Logic in Classical Islam", by Prof. Muḥṣin Mahdi. The translation into Arabic of the Aristotelian Organon led to a controversy between the Grammarians (nahwīyīn) and the Logicians (mantiqīyīn): while the Logicians maintained that the grammatical treatment of the particles etc. was superficial and inadequate, and that only logic could teach one how to speak sensibly and correctly, the Grammarians on their part held that the study of logic was an exercise in futility. A celebrated debate on the respective merits of language and logic took place in Baghdad in 320 A.H./932 A.D. between Abū Bīṣhr Matta and Abū Sa‘īd al-Sīrāfī. Prof. Muḥṣin Mahdi's lecture begins with an analysis of al-Tāwhīdī's introduction to the debate, then offers an interpretation of the main issues raised in the debate, within the context of the encounter between Kalām and the new philosophic tradition. The rest of the paper analyses and comments on the debate itself with emphasis on its inner articulation and on the views of the two protagonists as they emerge in the course of the debate.

"Poets and Critics in the Third Century A.H.", neither deals exhaustively with the poets and critics of the 3rd-century, nor does it restrict itself to a consideration of only those who wrote in that century. In fact, it is chiefly concerned with a consideration of the views of two famous critics, Ibn Qutaybah and Ibn al-Mu'tazz, with regard to the question of the acceptance of (the then) contemporary poetry as against that of the poetry of the pre-Islamic period.

Most people would naturally think that the Islamic Shari'ah must have been developed by jurists as a theoretical set of doctrines without taking into account any matters of custom or actual practice. Orientalists of an earlier age, therefore, assumed that the Islamic law was "the erudite construction of men of religion who were generally unmindful and unaware of the exigencies of practical life" and that, as a consequence, in Snouck Hurgronje's words, "all classes of Muslim community have exhibited in practice an indifference to the sacred law in all its fulness quite equal to the reverence with which they regard it in theory." It was perhaps G. Bergsträsser who first pointed out that their knowledge of Islamic law and its history was not yet sufficiently advanced to pronounce a definitive judgement on the problem of law and practice, and, that the observance of various sections of the Law by Muslim peoples had in fact varied greatly according to time and place.

Prof. Robert Brunschvig's pioneering work of some years ago, "Considération sociologiques sur le droit musulman ancien" (Studia Islamica, 1955), in which he showed that the divergent views of the early schools of Muslim jurisprudence did not arise from "the labyrinth of exuberant casuistry" unrelated to the social milieu in which they emerged, appears to have changed the perspective. Prof. A.L. Udovitch, in the last of the lectures
in this volume, "The "Law Merchant" of the Medieval Islamic World", continues to tread the path charted by Prof. Brunschvig, and, by a careful scrutiny of the early Hanafite treatment of the Partnership (Sharikah) and Commenda (muḍārabah, qirād, muqṣradah) laws vis-a-vis the actual commercial practice as revealed in the documents of the Cairo Geniza, Prof. Udovitch arrives at the conclusion that commenda and partnership contracts were "commercial instruments of remarkable flexibility and efficiency" and that "in their elaboration, the jurists [of the Hanafite School] were guided by a sympathetic and informed responsiveness to the needs of trade and [paid] conscious attention to prevalent mercantile custom".

Each lecture in this volume is a monument of erudition, and is characterised not only by immense scholarship, felicity of expression, masterly presentation and appropriate yet simple vocabulary, but also by an endeavour to break through the crust of centuries-old prejudices wilfully created and nurtured by interested quarters in the name of religion. The volume, however, is not meant for the specialists in Isamics only; the scope and treatment of each lecture is such that students of human civilisation in general as well as the specialists in the particular fields dealt with will learn, I dare say, a great deal not only of much that has already become available in books dealing with special topics and learned journals devoted to Islamic studies but also much that is not elsewhere readily available. The lectures in this volume are from the pens of leading Islamicists who by their researches and re-discoveries have blazed trails through realms hitherto uncharted by the orientalist, or, if at all, charted in such a manner as more to correspond with his own preconceived notions than with the shape of things obtaining in reality.

In a volume of this nature every reader whose special interest coincides with the field covered in any of the papers will discover small points and obiter dicta to quibble with and it would be simply pedantic to produce a list of them. It may, however, be pointed out that Prof. van Ess, in his otherwise excellent lecture, sometimes stretches his zeal for finding Stoic equivalents and prototypes for the technical terms employed in Kalām, which he claims to have been derived from the former, to the breaking point: the word "Kalām", for example, is said to have been indubitably derived from the Greek "theolekτις", which, it is submitted, can by no stretch of any rule of comparative philology be held to be valid, or, again it is simply preposterous to derive 'wa-in qaļa qa'il n... quhā' and 'wa-lā yuqdu līnā...naq lu' from 'eithe fate...famen oti, or 'ean eritai apokrinoi μεθα' even though the expressions may be semantically equivalent, for otherwise, any expression in one language could be held to be derived from a suitable expression in another.

The present volume is a welcome addition to the growing literature on Isamics, and if the standard of the first conference is maintained by the later conferences, and there is no reason why it should not be possible to maintain it, then, it may be safely prophesied, the publication of their proceedings shall become in a short while an important and anxiously awaited event.

F. A. Shamsi.