

## Book Reviews

### **Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin**

Akbar S. Ahmed

London: Routledge, 1997

ISBN 0-415-14966-5

### **The Indus Saga and the Making of Pakistan**

Aitzaz Ahsan

Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996

ISBN 0-19-577693-3

The partition of India in mid-August 1947 resulted in the Muslim-majority northwestern and northeastern zones of the sub-continent being separated and awarded to Pakistan. It necessitated movement of people on a gigantic scale. Beginning with March 1947 and until the end of that year communal massacres perpetrated by extremists resulted in the deaths of some two million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Between 14 and 17 million were forced to migrate. Punjab, which was divided into two separate halves, was the arena of the first major ethnic cleansing after the Second World War. The two books under review suggest that Pakistan was necessary and, by implication, inevitable.

Akbar S. Ahmed's point of departure is the quest of Indian Muslims for distinct identity which seemed threatened in a united India under Congress rule (from the point of view of the Muslim League it would result in permanent Hindu-majority rule). He asserts that at all critical junctures, Muslims have looked up to a hero, a saviour: the example *par excellence* being Saladin, an ethnic Kurd who won back Jerusalem from the Crusaders and thus re-established Muslim power in the Middle East. Mohamed Ali Jinnah, who also belonged to a minority Muslim group, was the Saladin of Indian Muslims because he won Pakistan against all odds.

The book is a hagiography. In the first four chapters Ahmed marshals substantial evidence and well-reasoned arguments to counter the charge that Jinnah was the arch villain in the partition drama. Rather his conversion from an Indian nationalist to a Muslim nationalist was a reaction to anti-Muslim Hindu revivalism, Gandhian religious populism, Congress's inability to accommodate Muslim interests and a host of other economic, cultural and political factors.

Reviewing other facets of Jinnah's life, the author strays away from an even-handed analysis to establish an image of Jinnah as a caring and feeling husband, father, leader and statesman. He converted to Sunni Islam, became pious and devout in everyday life and when he died, the Kalima, affirming his Islamic faith, was on his lips. The evidence is mostly anecdotal. An interview with Jinnah's recluse daughter, Dina Wadia, is a major source for dispelling the unkind aspersions cast by his detractors.

From chapter five onwards the book examines the responsibility for the partition riots. The author deplors several times in the book that some two million people lost their lives. The villains in the piece turn out to be Nehru and Mountbatten. Both are alleged to have had homosexual inclinations and perhaps an affair together. More importantly Edwina Mountbat-

data and interviews, and appropriate theoretical insights from her survey of a number of approaches, she has studied the origins and growth of the student movements in Assam in colonial and post-colonial Assam, and highlighted the roles played by the students in achieving India's independence and subsequently (and more importantly) in fighting for the state's identity and development. In the development of the student movements in Assam, two factors have proved to be very challenging: the continuously shifting demography of Assam due to migration to Assam, and the expansion and contraction due to territorial reorganisation of the state since colonial days. Historically, the student movements in Assam were influenced by the nationalist movement in Bengal and passed through similar phases of evolution to the latter. They were very distinctive in being powerfully founded on regional issues but they were fighting for national liberation as well as regional development. In the post-colonial days, the movements became linked with socio-economic problems of the state and regional identity.

Deka's book shows that Assam is unusual in that it was the students rather than peasants or workers or their representatives who were the prime movers of change. The study also shows how in Assam, as perhaps elsewhere in India, student activism was the mainstay of subnationalism. She also shows that the movements in Assam always maintained a strong rural base both in terms of leadership and membership, although there were instances when the industrial workers, and even farmers, joined the movements. The most distinctive finding of her study is that the students in Assam have fought for the region's interests without going against the nation (Indian), and thus they proved to be an integrative force. Her conclusion is that the student movements in Assam have contributed much to the socio-economic changes in the state, and become the watchdog of the state's interests *vis-à-vis* the Indian state.

However, the study seems to suffer from a couple of limitations. First, the author has not located her materials in an appropriate analytical framework grounded in political scientific issues. Second, she has not discussed the pitfalls of the students-turned politicians in Assam. Had she done that, she would have been able to locate the roots of many subnationalist movements such as the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), in the relative failure of the state's student movements in articulation.

On balance, the book is a welcome addition to the growing literature on India's northeast, and should be of use to students of modern Indian history, political science and ethnic movements.

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### **In the Land of Poverty: Memoirs of an Indian Family 1947–1997**

Siddharth Dube

London: Zed, 1998

ISBN 1-85649-597-3 (hb); 1-85649-598-1 (pb)

Siddharth Dube provides an informative and highly readable study of poverty and caste discrimination in north India. Set in Baba ka Gaon, a village close to Amethi in Pratapgarh district of Uttar Pradesh (UP), the volume charts the experiences and recollections of three generations of a local *harijan* family. It reports that at the time of India's Independence in August 1947, Ram Dass and Prayaga Devi were Untouchables, at the base of India's caste system and bonded as landless labourers to the 'feudal village lord'. Fifty years later their plight is similar in many ways. The couple remain surrounded by poverty and prejudice, as



do their children and grandchildren, despite legal reforms, anti-poverty programmes and reservation policies designed to eliminate deprivation and injustice of this form. Dube looks to explain why this is so.

The book was written whilst the author was visiting fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi. Prior to this he had worked as a health policy analyst with UNICEF and the World Bank and as a writer on health issues in India and the US. He puts his investigative skills to good use during his time in Baba ka Gaon. His study draws heavily on oral history and transcriptions of interviews conducted with Ram Dass, Prayaga Devi and family whilst in the field. It is not overly theoretical, but provides excellent thick description; a feature that makes the study accessible to social science specialists and to a more general readership.

The volume is well grounded in history and records changing public responses to untouchability in India. Dube explores how Dr Ambedkar led the emancipation of Untouchables from the 1920s until his death in 1956, fighting for civil rights and legal protections for lower castes, and committing the state to programmes for education and employment generation. Slowly, Dube notes, public perception of untouchability started to change: harijans began to be served at roadside stalls; and their legal right to frequent these stalls was protected by government. Significantly, Ambedkar's input engendered a rising sense of self-respect among lower castes and heightened their awareness of what could be achieved through electoral politics. The value of Ambedkar's work in this area was not lost on Ram Dass:

Baba Ambedkar made us aware of the Dalit's power in elections .... Us Scheduled Caste people were all very unhappy when he died. The local Scheduled Caste people took out a procession on his death. We just went and watched. Because we were outsiders, we were more vulnerable to getting harassed by police, which is why we rarely joined processions (pp 78–79).

Progress in education and social reform did induce some worthy improvements in *harijan* welfare within the village. Srinath, Ram Dass and Prayaga Devi's eldest son, completed his school examinations and became a primary school teacher. Dube's interviews illustrate the rising value attached to education by lower castes, and the considerable sacrifices that families were prepared to make to ensure that their children were educated. Ram Dass explains that:

(i)f I hadn't worked hard as a labourer and educated Srinath, it would have been impossible for him to become a teacher ... . I had this conviction that I should make them study however poor I was. I worked harder so they could study ... (p 115).

In some cases the rewards of education were considerable in terms of the respect and trust accorded by fellow villagers. Srinath was affectionately known within the village as 'Masterji'; a title, Dube indicates, that was more an honorific than a nickname, a mark of his achieving what many assumed to be impossible for somebody from his caste: passing through secondary school and becoming a teacher.

Sadly education has not provided security of need for all Baba ka Gaon's *harijan* population. This is reflected in the experience of Hansiraj, Srinath's eldest son. Despite becoming the first Scheduled Caste person in the village to complete a bachelor's degree (his sister was also the first girl to complete eighth grade at the local school), Hansiraj now resides with three other young men in a box-like room in an Allahabad slum. Unemployed for many years after graduation, he is now resigned to manual low-paid work that falls well below his aspirations. This reality, Dube argues, is one shared by many millions of educated-unem-

ployed Indians. The degree that is meant to provide surety of better things—perhaps a clerical or white collar job—often provides nothing of the sort. Instead many graduates remain as impoverished as their peers who never completed secondary school, let alone college (pp 141–142).

Future prospects seem equally dismal for Ram Dass and Prayagi Devi's family. Dube concludes that for these people the 'past has been brutally harsh, the present precarious, and the future shows no hope of being better' (p 215). His explanation highlights a catalogue of unfulfilled promises on the part of politicians in State and Centre government. The land hunger and unemployment experienced by many rural poor in India have seen little redress since 1947, despite the Congress Party's pledge at Independence to abolish revenue intermediaries and to provide 'land to the tiller' (p 57). The Congress leadership's commitment to social justice, exemplified by Indira Gandhi's promises of *Garibi Hatao* ('Stop Poverty'), was always significantly weaker than suggested by its fiery rhetoric. For all her promises, Ram Dass indicates, 'Indira Gandhi was always so busy visiting hundreds of countries that she never had time to see whether her laws were working' (p 105). This lack of commitment, in combination with harsh curbs on civil liberties during the Emergency (1975–1977), prompted lower castes to abandon Congress (I) in large numbers when elections were restored in 1977:

... poor people voted against Mrs Gandhi. We all voted for the Janata Party because we were all so fed up with what happened under her rule. We were all very happy when she lost the elections (p 110).

In sum, this is a fascinating collection of anecdotes and insights from rural India. One or two issues perhaps warrant further attention. I was keen to hear more about the implications of the Bharatiya Janata Party's emergence as largest single party in UP, and the perceived failure of the Bahujan Samaj and Samajwadi parties to represent the interests of the poor—issues raised briefly in Chapter 14. I felt that a book that addresses so many important issues probably deserves more than a two page conclusion. Overall, however, I hope that this volume is widely read. If, as often said, village India is the 'real India', this study provides a fine introduction to the mechanics of village life operating therein.

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### **Indian Music and the West**

Gerry Farrell

Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997

ISBN 0-19-816391-6

While historical studies of Orientalism in South Asia have gradually spread from literary concerns to other genres and media such as painting and architecture, the field of music has remained largely restricted to the domain of ethnomusicology. Gerry Farrell has assumed the admirable task of taking music out of the ethnomusicological archive and spreading its significant wealth among other disciplines. The result is a book which is interesting, provocative, and even fun to read at times, but also a book which is premised on a number of assumptions about Indian music and western listeners which are often untenable—sometimes disturbingly so.

The theoretical apparatus with which Farrell approaches his subject, roughly defined as the interaction between Indian music and western culture during the last two hundred years or so,