

## RECENZJE

Zohurul Bari, *Re-Emergence of The Muslim Brothers in Egypt*, New Delhi, 1995, 165 pp.

Zulu chiefs are preceded at festive occasions by praise singers who warm the audience up with tales of their ancestry and achievements.

Zohurul Bari casts himself as an objective narrator for Muslim Brothers or *Iḥwān al-Muslimūn* in modern Egypt. Muslim Brothers portray themselves as a shining religious example of “Islamic correctness” and by implication a model for governing the state. Refreshingly, however, most of the Egyptians are a good deal starry-eyed about them. They are also much more open than their apologists in acknowledging the misgivings which other still harbour about them and more honest in addressing them unflinchingly. And there is no harm in saying, “whoever closes his eyes to the past becomes blind to the present”.

Zohurul Bari is well versed with Egypt's past and his panegyric has many virtues. It is full of first-hand accounts of his own conversions with Egyptian scholars and religious figures who matter on this subject. It encompasses the length and breadth of the subject since the dawn of the twentieth century to October 1981 when President Anwar as-Sādāt was assassinated by a Muslim Brother army officer. The book is clearly written and concise. The merit of the book becomes double because he has used basic sources in Arabic and his grasp, to a large extent, is superb. It is a model for students on the Middle East to emulate; how one should collect material and how one should neatly chapterise it.

Zohurul Bari rolls the ball in when he quotes, for Muslims the state is a divinely ordained necessity. Unlike Christians or the other people of the book *ahl al-kitāb* where the matter has been resolved amicably by dividing the role of the state and religion, i.e. “give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's”. The Muslims still continue to debate how far they should go to accommodate the role of Islam in running the state. Part of the confusion and on-going tussle are the result of a paradox in Islamic history that while the social pervasiveness of Islam was an accepted concept its extension to the arena of politics and to the affairs of state remained to the conceptual domain. The other part

could be attributed to the fact that “the initial success of Islam was so rapid that it had no need to give anything to Caesar”. The idea in Islam that the divine message is complete and final, and is as well addressed to the “state”, which was established in the lifetime of prophet Mohammad. Result is obvious, after fourteen centuries, the ‘ulamā’ and the rulers are at loggerheads to interpret their version of the šarī‘a.

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which, to a large degree, symbolised the Islamic Caliphate, the Arab World was formally distributed among the European Powers and Palestine was marked for a Zionist state under the British Mandate. Never before had the Islamic world come under the domination of non-Muslim powers at such a big scale, as it happened in 1919. Not only the Muslims lost their political independence; they started suffering the economic exploitation of the colonial powers. The time was ripe for an ideology of the political revival of Islam and in 1928 Ḥasan al-Bannā founded his organisation—the Muslim Brotherhood to challenge the existing system of King Fārūq under the British patronage. In those years, the idea of nationalism was so closely connected with pan-Islamism that it was difficult to make out “where the one began and the other ended” (p. 19). Initially the Muslim Brotherhood did not have a political programme on its agenda; it entered the political arena with a call for the protection of the economic rights of the Egyptians. Its main attack was the presence of foreigners and Al-Bannā castigated the foreign companies for the economic plight of Egypt. At the same time he dismissed all the western economic ideologies, viz. capitalism, socialism and communism as they were unsuited to Egypt. From 1934 to 1948 (when the Muslim Brotherhood was banned by King Fārūq) it carried out many its socio-economic programmes to win the hearts of thousands of Egyptians. Heyworth-Dunne commented, “... it is the first time in the history of modern Egypt that a private person with sufficient public spirit had built-up a programme of active participation in the improvement of social standards”. Second, the Muslim Brotherhood emerged as a political force only after the ruling Wafd Party started losing its grip over its social and popular bases in the late 1940s. The Wafd was so thoroughly overtaken by the wealthy classes and vested interests that if anyone called for social justice, he was immediately denounced as communist and was expelled from the party.

The political bankruptcy and economic disparity created a vacuum which somehow could not be filled by the Brotherhood after World War II. The only institution which could provide the main spark for a revolutionary change was the army. The Free Officers under the leadership of Ḥamāl ‘Abd an-Nāṣir and Muḥammad Naḡīb threw out the monarchy and took the power in July 1952. Most of the members of the Free Officers group were partly influ-

enced by Brotherhood's social concern but they were unwilling to share power with Islamic fundamentalists. The Revolutionary Government had dissolved all the political parties but it did not touch the Brotherhood. Nevertheless the differences were visible soon. The personality of the General Guide of the Brotherhood, Al-Huḍaybi clashed with 'Abd an-Nāṣir and this played an important role in widening the gulf between the two ideologues. Al-Huḍaybi who had been more cordial to the king, somehow cold-shouldered overtures and thus exposed the Brotherhood to have a head-on clash with 'Abd an-Nāṣir's government. Zuhurul Bari is absolutely right when he says, "Its [the Brotherhood's] failure was essentially the failure of its leader, who definitely lacked the political skill". (p. 48). The final straw in the war between the Free Officers and the Brotherhood was the shooting at 'Abd an-Nāṣir by a Brother during a public meeting in Alexandria in October 1954 (which introspect claimed by the Brotherhood, had been stage-managed by 'Abd an-Nāṣir himself to discredit the Brotherhood.) It prompted 'Abd an-Nāṣir to ban the Brotherhood and so successful he was that no demonstration of public support of the Brotherhood took place anywhere in Egypt.

The elimination of the Brotherhood through arrests, tortures and execution of six of its leaders helped 'Abd an-Nāṣir to consolidate his base. Further he took most of the religious slogans and charter of demands of the Brotherhood that he made the organisation almost bankrupt in the eyes of most of the Egyptians. The number of mosques was increased considerably in the ten year period, 1954-63, and the number of personnel in these mosques almost doubled and most of the time the priests were reading the texts, prepared by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. 'Abd an-Nāṣir never stopped himself as a practising religious man, even though he opposed to politicisation of Islam in the style of the Brotherhood. He always remained sensitive and he always identified himself as a defender of the nation and the faith. Such was his charisma and so great was his appeal, that he became the uncrowned king and the caliph for Egyptian masses. It was no surprise that in 1965 'Abd an-Nāṣir again clamped down the activities of Muslim Brothers without much problem and their so-called leaders such as Sayyid Quṭb, 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā'īl and others were executed and many died in the course of interrogations.

It was only after the defeat of Egypt during the June War of 1967 and death of 'Abd an-Nāṣir in 1970 that opened few windows for Muslim Brothers to breathe again. At the same time Anwar as-Sādāt, the new President, was fighting a survival battle against his leftist opponents. Sadat needed the support of the clergy and he set free hundreds of Muslim Brother prisoners. Many small Islamic groups, such as Ġamā'at al-Muslimīn, Munazzamat at-Taḥrīr al-Islāmī and others started their activities. As-Sādāt considered it

preferable “to allow the Muslim Brotherhood, with its relatively mild theories, restricted freedom to operate openly while still, maintaining the legal ban on the organisation”.(p. 77) A magazine “Ad-Da‘wa” was allowed to publish politico-religious issues. But once As-Sādāt made the U turn and visited Jerusalem to make peace at Israeli terms, the Brotherhood quickly reformulated its policy and started attacking As-Sādāt vehemently. Zohurur Bari terms As-Sādāt’s Jerusalem visit in November 1977 a “watershed” in the history of the Muslim Brothers. Now onwards there was an all out open war between As-Sādāt’s regime and the Muslim Brothers. Everything was under attack, whether it was Sadat’s appeasement of the United States and Israel or his economic policy of *infitāḥ* (economic openness). Finally, on 6 October 1981 As-Sādāt was assassinated by an army officer owing allegiance to an extremist Jihad group. Such was As-Sādāt’s unpopularity that most of the Egyptians did not feel any remorse or grief. Zohurul Bari is correct when he write. “If Nasser’s regime was repressive of the Islamists, As-Sādāt’s rule also lacked political participation... Hardly anyone in Egypt talked about the lack of political freedom and absence of democratic participation as a major cause of violent tendency among a certain group of youth”. (p. 132). One feels like asking, are Islam and democracy not compatible in the Arab World even in the 20th century? Egypt which could have been a leading example of a democratic set-up in the Arab World remains a perpetual breeding ground for Islamic extremism even today. This itself is a monumental tragedy for an ancient civilisation which as a nation-state limps for a rational governmental set-up. Perhaps a lack of scientific temper and pluralistic humanism make this tragedy manifold. As-Sādāt once in his exuberance mentioned that “there is no religion in politics and no politics in religion.” But this is not the end of story, what was true in the 1980s, is true in the 1990s. The external patron-the United States, which helped Islamic fundamentalism to grow in the 1950s and 60s, to challenge nationalism, is now itself facing the brunt in the 1990s as it has been branded as the sole “Satan” in the world. Perhaps, a clear example of a Frankenstein – where a man is being threatened by his own invention. Thus Zohurul Bari has presented us a valuable history of Muslim Brothers whose relevance is very important to understand the true dimensions of fundamentalism. At the same time he has highlighted Egypt’s complex cultural and socio-economic problems related to its polity. Each chapter can be expanded to a separate book if any serious scholar wants to pursue his study on the related subject. Zohurul Bari’s book has also a very fascinating bibliography along with a useful glossary of Arabic terminology.

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