

Book Review

Masuma Hasan, Pakistan in an Age of Turbulence, South Yorkshire, Pen & Sword History, 2022, ISBN: 978-1-52678-860-3 Price Lb. 25.

Contemporary history is verifiable history, and when it is being written by someone with a rare access to the records, value is added. Dr Masuma Hasan is presently, Chairperson of the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs (P.I.I.A) Her stint as our Ambassador to Austria, and election as Chair of the Group of 77 in 1996 (p.376) served her in good stead in her present position. For her doctorate from Cambridge, Masuma Hasan was under the supervision of Nicholas Mansergh, author of *Independence Years*, Oxford, 1999 and editor (with E.W.R. Lumby) of the 12 volume *Transfer of Power Papers*, HMSO, 1970-1982.

The reader could have reasonably expected an “official” history, the type that our intellectuals habitually decry, but it is as unofficial as it can be without stretching the facts. As Masuma Hasan states:

This memoir traces the upbringing, education and career of a woman, from a privileged and liberal background, who despite all odds, rose to become the Cabinet Secretary and head of the Civil Service in Pakistan (p. IX)

She does not come across as condescending, and on a number of issues her views are quite independent, even combative. This may be explained partly by the fact that she hails from Panipat, the most recurring battlefield, known to us, and partly by her being married to Fatehyab Ali Khan a leader of National Students Federation (NSF), the most radical leftist organization in the country. This perhaps gave her a stereoscopic vision one view from the Secretariat window and another from the walls of the prison, which she frequented to visit her husband.

But we get ahead of ourselves, her ancestry, her lineage and her immediate family are the stuff of history, and she writes about them as a trained historian. She is descended from the tenth Imam ‘Ali al-Naqi (827-868 A.D.) and collaterally from the revered Companion and host of the Holy Prophet, Abu Ayub Ansari (d.674) Ninth in descent from the Companion was Abdullah Ansari (1006-1088) who was honored by the

Abbasid caliphs but beleaguered by fellow clerics, for being a Hanbalite, yet returned time and again to preach at the Grand Mosque of Herat,

The move from Herat to Panipat was made by an ancestor named Malak Ali in 1286 at the behest of the Delhi Sultan Ghiyath-ud-Din Balban (1200-1287) Her grandfather was Anwar Hasan (1877-1928) whom Masuma Hasan describes as a public servant and civil engineer who specialized in the construction of bridges. His appointment to the domain of the Nizam, exposed the family to Hyderabad culture. All this she has drawn from her grandfather's papers she inherited and preserved.

Her father Sarwar Hasan (1902---1973) had a Law Tripos from Cambridge (1923-1925) but he did not find law practice congenial. It was he, who as its Secretary, brought the Indian Institute of International Affairs to Pakistan. This was no mean achievement. The Pakistan Institute of International Affairs was perhaps the sole exception to the deprivation Pakistan suffered at Partition.

The Indian Institute of International Affairs was transferred to Pakistan by the simple step of relocating it to Karachi, just on the eve of Independence. Under the rules the IIA could be shifted to any location in India, which till 15 August 1947, Karachi was. Membership had surreptitiously, been extended to Muslims; so that when the general body met, it was decided by a majority to shift its office to Karachi. Khwaja Sarwar Hasan had met Mohammad Ali Jinnah before making this move. They were helped by the Chairman of the IIA, Sir Sultan Ahmed (1880-1963) whom Masuma Hasan describes as "an Indian Nationalist but who seemed to have harbored a soft corner for Pakistan" (p.45) In Pakistan the Chairman was Professor Abu Bakr Ahmed Haleem, who like Sir Sultan Ahmed belonged to the Jehanabad district in Bihar. Thus though the Institute migrated to another country, the district remained the same.

In the beginning, the Foreign Ministry was dependent on the PIIA, but ultimately, it was the PIIA which became dependent on the Foreign Ministry. The imposing pink color building, was partly let out which provided needed funding to the Institute. By the time Masuma Hasan became Chairperson, the property had become very lucrative the consequence of which she faced. It is here, that the raconteur gives place to the historian.

Aftab Alam Kazilbash (my teacher also in S.M. Law College) persuaded Masuma Hasan to become Chairperson of the PIIA. A property developer who was a tenant as well as a Member of the Board, had his eyes on the building and tried to get it vacated. He tried to intimidate the Chairperson: "Do you think you are Indira Gandhi?"(p.211) Since she

had resisted, she had to face one case after another. Then, they were civil cases, today, they would have been criminal cases!

All the above proceeds from her parentage. Masuma Hasan's marriage to Fatehyab Ali Khan in 1969 gave her a window on the National Students Federation. Despite the strain it put on her career, the marriage was a happy one and miraculously she was able to reconcile her marriage and her career. Masuma Hasan clears up a mystery surrounding the NSF's protest at the killing of Muslims in Jabalpur, India:

This was a very controversial move and it was the first time that the Left had involved itself in a non-secular pro-Pakistan Movement against the Indian State' [Kamran Asdar Ali, Surkh Salam, Oxford, 2015,p.385]

As Masuma Hasan recalls when the NSF protested against the murder of Patrick Lumumba, the *Dawn* editorialized that the NSF was overlooking crises near home, as a result of which the NSF protested against communal riots in Jabalpur on 27 February 1961. As a consequence, Fatehyab Ali Khan with the entire NSF leadership suffered banishment from Karachi and also became household figures in Pakistan. It is through her indirect association that she gained an insight into the politics and personality of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

It is Masuma Hasan who reveals that the first interaction between the N.S.F and Z.A. Bhutto had been adversarial. The NSF had entered the ground where Ayub Khan's Pakistan Muslim League was holding its Convention. The NSF barged its way in while chanting pro-Ayub slogans, which however, did not take any one in:

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was also present on the stage; he was the Secretary of the Convention Muslim League, came to blows with Saeed Hasan (p.100)

In the 1970 elections, Saeed Hasan would be elected MPA, Sindh, on a PPP ticket, but was soon unseated on the grounds that he had invoked religious prejudice against his Ismaili opponent, Pyar Ali Allana. Allana replaced Saeed Hasan and promptly joined the PPP. Here we need to cite Masuma Hasan's assessment of the historical role of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto:

Bhutto was an unfortunate leader whose close associates abandoned him in his hour of need. All his political colleagues owed their importance to him and the wave of populism which he rode. Many of them have written their own accounts after Bhutto's death, and have squarely laid the blame for his downfall on his suspicious nature, impulsive behavior and failure to heed sincere advice. All these

accounts are attempts by these writers to absolve themselves from the charge of contributing to Bhutto's downfall. Rafi Raza's version is the most informed and coherent.(p.129)

I have never come across such an insightful and impartial estimate of the literature relating to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Rafi Raza was courteous, even hospitable to me personally, but it was he to whom Bhutto was referring, when he said that the enemy had penetrated the cabinet of Pakistan. Masuma Hasan never met Z.A. Bhutto, but I did, and I found his charm winning. What happened thereafter, I have written in my obituary of Rasheed Hasan Khan.

It is not within my personal experience, but Z. A. Bhutto, on the personal level could be infuriating, but by the masses he was adored. General Ziaul Haq, on the other hand, at the personal level is reputed to be humble, even obsequious, but his gentle disposition did prevent him from ordering people to be whipped, imprisoned and executed. I was deprived of this feast of reason but Masuma Hasan had the privilege:

I do not remember how long my meeting with Ziaul Haq lasted, but I do remember how aggressive and abrasive he was. Popping nuts into his mouth he inquired why I had turned up to see him. (p.212)

The reason we have mentioned above, to save the PIIA building from a property shark. She speaks now of her most important post which secured for her an appointment with General Pervez Musharraf:

The brief period, I spent as Cabinet Secretary was the most rewarding part of my career. As the highest position in the public service; it brought its own importance, but I was fortunate that my colleagues cooperated with me throughout. Because the Cabinet Division is an empire, with a myriad of responsibilities apart from cabinet affairs, it was possible to make a contribution in many ways. (p189)

As Cabinet Secretary, Masuma Hasan was assigned to read the Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report with regard to its publication. Excerpts had been published in *India Today*, 13 August 2000. Why then? Nobody recalls, but it was because Bangladesh had offered to mediate the Kashmir dispute. Then, some findings need to be re-visited in the light of Sarmila Bose, *Dead Reckoning*, Oxford, 2011 and Yasmin Saikia, *Women, War and the Making of Bangladesh*, Oxford, 2011.

The Hamoodur Rahman Commission downplays the preceding massacres of Non-Bengalis on the plea that the violence perpetrated by civilian mobs was not equal to the action carried out by the trained and regular Pakistan Army action against Bengalis. This is a position difficult to maintain, in view of the fact that a civilian Bengali mob at

Mymensingh wiped out an Air Force battalion under Safi Mustafa. Morarji Desai later revealed that regular, trained Indian soldiers had fought alongside the Mukti Bahini, 5000 of whom lost their lives for a third nation.

To make fun of General A. A. K. Niazi is good sport, except for the fact that no one was awarded the Military Cross, like he was, for cowardice. The fact was as Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw has said in a video recorded interview that that the Pakistan Army fought gallantly, but had no chance because of the lake dotted plain surrounded on all four sides by enemy territory. It is also not true that forces pushed Hindus out of the East Wing. When Pakistan proposed that the UN monitor the border, Indira Gandhi turned the proposal down, seeing that she saw no purpose in it (*The Times*, London, 3 December 1971)

The most troubling period of her life, what caused her the greatest stress is the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (M.R.D.) with her being a very prominent civil servant and her husband Fatehyab Ali Khan in prison because of his courageous participation. What she underwent can be seen from the passage below:

On 3 March 1985, Fatehyab was suddenly transferred again from Karachi to Sukkur. When I protested to Ahmed Sadiq, the home secretary, he told me that Fatehyab had to be shifted because Nasir Baloch was to be hanged. "But what" I blurted out, "has Nasir Baloch's hanging to do with Fatehyab?" He answered: "You don't understand, these are not rational decisions. Fatehyab is a very influential prisoner so we can't take the risk of having him here at that time... (p.158)

Pakistan in Age of Turbulence, is unusual history, insightful history, and challenging history. Nowhere else can we find Abul Fazl and Abdul Qadir Badayuni co-authoring a book. The discipline of history would have remained poor had Masuma Hasan not come forward with this book.

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