

BOOK REVIEW

The Crescent in the West: Image of the Orient in English Literature up to 1832 By Abdur Raheem Kidwai, Bean Bassin, Mauritius, Al-Ilm Publishing, 2019

Abdur Raheem Kidwai is a Professor of English at the Aligarh Muslim University, India, and Visiting Professor Fellow, School of English, University of Leicester, UK (2006-2016). He has specialized in the study of Orientalism in English Literature. Equipped with amazing literary and writing skills, he has devoted his time to penning several articles and books, especially on the depiction of Muslims and Islam in English Literature. This book contains material from his Ph.D. thesis originally titled as *Samples of the Finest Orientalism: A Study of the Orient in Lord Byron's 'Turkish Tales'* (Leicester, UK, 1993), for an extensive audience. The work consists of three chapters, along with a bibliography of Byron's Oriental reading

Kidwai starts by accentuating the factors which led Europe to learn about Islam and the Muslims in general. The West, with the passage of time, termed Islam to be a heresy and the Muslims' character to be wretched in nature. Kidwai has pointed out the biased statement of R.W Southern, who calls the period between 700-1100 to be the '*Age of Ignorance.*' Southern, however, seems to not have gone through the authentic historical records of Islam for him to have uttered and termed the '*Golden Era of Islam*' to be the period of darkness. Such a statement leads to the tendency of the emergence of the penning of polemical works. By highlighting this negative image at the very outset, Kidwai provides a foretaste to the readers about what lies ahead regarding the image of Islam projected by the Western writers.

In Chapter 1, Kidwai attempts to depict the causes of the initial interaction of Europe with the Muslim world. The genesis, according to Kidwai, being the Crusade Wars in the Middle Ages, followed by the Muslim conquests of Spain in 711, which lasted till 1492, and another

important point of interaction between the two, being the Ottoman Empire undoubtedly. He also mentions the reasons of the distaste of the Europeans for the Ottomans due to which they have been negatively portrayed in the Elizabethan English Literature. Moreover, Kidwai intelligently uses his ace of spade in the citation of travel literature. This, according to him, paved the way, to some extent, for the Europeans to change their negative attitude towards Islam and Muslims. Kidwai shows diligence and accuracy in picking up the relevant materials without any sort of bias for Muslims or the West. It is clearly visible that his toil and purpose is to provide the readers a non-discriminatory outlook of the projection of Islam and the Muslims in the works of these writers. What is more striking in the writing of Kidwai is that even the minute detail has been expressed with reference; a commendable literary skill and ability. It depicts the scope of reading as well as the research conducted by Kidwai. It will not be inappropriate to state that the first chapter persuades the readers to dwell into the other two remaining chapters. What is noteworthy is that they are very informative for those having a deep interest in studying and comprehending the history of the insights developed by the West regarding the Orient and Islam. The Western approach consists of amalgamated perspectives, both positive and negative. Though, most of the representations of Islam by the Western writers are negative, yet Kidwai stresses the writings of those authors as well such as Thomas Gower, Thomas Brown and William Jones, who speak of Muslims highly. By highlighting both sides of the same coin, Kidwai portrays an impartial picture in his writing. He is well aware of the fact that one cannot clap with one hand, which he does delineate in his analytical study. He offers a balanced interpretation of the sources as well.

Chapter 2 deals with the Orient's portrayal in Byron's *Turkish Tales*. Kidwai appreciates the efforts of Byron, who first went through a deep study of the Orient, enabling him to authenticate his writings. He further points out that Byron prepared his own notes with relevancy in order to bring the flavor of authenticity to his projection of the Orient. Byron shuns the methodologies of his contemporaries, who rely heavily on various citations to design their arguments regarding the life and manners of the Orient. Kidwai looks satisfied with Byron's presentation, as he avoids extravagance and elucidates his views and thought in connection with the text. According to him, Byron, by not falling into overindulgence, eschews the process of disputatious writings in comparison to other Western. This writers puts him in the list of those embarking on

a sedulous and literary voyage, passing through a positive avenue to reach an unbiased station. Byron also employs his qualitative analytical method by not relying only on secondary sources. According to Kidwai, Byron's Orientalism is markedly different from that of the other Western writers, marred by religious rancor and cultural astigmatism. Byron is much more advanced in his thought thus assuming relevance in the modern world, which is full of plural and multicultural life.

Chapter 3 deals with the projection of the Oriental female characters in the works of Byron. Kidwai cites the earlier works of the West in which Oriental characters have been mentioned or discussed. However, these works, according to him, depict a loathsome image of Islam. The Orientals are termed as unscrupulous, cannibal, polygamists and traders of women. Kidwai brings into light their low level of understanding of the Islamic religion. Moreover, Byron's female characters are of utmost importance. According to Kidwai, the female characters, Leila (*The Giaour*), Zuleikha (*The Bride of Abydos*) and Gulnare (*The Corsair*), differ from one another. Byron's portrayal of the different shades of femininity is notable; *Leila*, being submissive, *Zuleikha*, the sober and obedient one and *Gulnare*, depicts masculine features by rescuing Conrad from Pasha Syed's dungeon. Besides, Kidwai highlights some essential themes like patriarchy, tyranny, adultery and interfaith marriage. However, they have been simply generalized by him. The absence of concrete proof to support his statements tones down the weight of his remarks. Also, punctuation mistakes are seen in this work, which need to be avoided so that readers can benefit. A piece of suggestion to the author would be that in case a new edition of the book is on the way, the above-mentioned themes should be discussed in depth.

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