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Choice of subjects and the art of interpretation

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Chimera, in Greek methodology, is an imaginary monster with a lion's head, a goat's body and a serpent's tail. The real hybrid that is orientalism has its own head; body or tall, each coming from aroma different source. The face glows with imperial grandeur and, academic majesty, the body consists of arduous and pains- taking research into the minutia, and the tail, which incidentally is the most active organ of the animal. If is the tail that wags the monster.

The essence of orientalism lies in its choice of subjects and in the art of presentation and interpretation. The 29th Congress was a microcosm of orientalism: as shaped during the last three centuries. Some notable changes are taking place, but these are mostly,, peripheral, the mainstream continues to flow in the old style.

The section on Arabic and Islamic Studies was of prime interest to me. Of the 108 papers presented in this section, 35 dealt with language and Literature. İn papers dealing with the different aspects, of the Arabic language, the "problem" to figure prominently was that of the local dialects. A number of papers were given to show that local dialects represented somewhat self-contained language sub- systems. Since the last century this "dialectical" theme has time and again been emphasized in the orientalist literature. In the light of this thesis the unity of the Arabic language turns out to be merely superficial. The diversity of local dialects has the potential of producing a number of languages, Arabic and otherwise. The researcher's eye is sharp enough not to miss the unique peculiarities of a "Shi'ite dialect" in Southern Lebanon, as distinct from the. Beirut: colloquial. (J. Aro, "A Dialect"). Southern Lebanon (Shi'ite)

Another theme was regionalism in politics and religion. Over half a dozen papers in this section and an equal number in the section on India were devoted to tribalism, regionalism, local nationalism and centrifugal trends. It was suggested that these "realities" made necessary the adoption of a principle for state organization other than Islam, The concept of Ummah is primarily religious and not political or sociological.

The Qur'an an and Hadith could attract only three papers. Only one dealt with Islamic law and four with tasawwuf. Twenty papers delineated aspects of history, 15 were devoted to politics and regional nationalisms and I to socio economic studies) Science and technology could bag only two-papers. The subject wise break up is interesting

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| Language and literature | 35 |
| History | 20 |
| Politics and regional nationalism | 15 |
| Socio economic studies | 11 |
| Religion and theology | 8 |
| Art and architecture | 6 |
| Tasawwuf | 4 |
| Quran and hadith | 3 |
| Comparative religion | 3 |
| Science and technology | 2 |
| Islamic law | 1 |
| Total | 108 |

Out of the 110, papers presented to the. section on Islam and Arabic Studies 81. were. by non-Muslim scholars, and only 29 were from Muslims. As against this in the sections on the Christian Orient and the Hebraic Studies there was no paper from any Muslim Scholar. In the section, on India, out of 180 contributors 114. Were Indian, five Pakistanis, two non-Indian Asians, and 59 Europeans and Americans. Islamic Studies is still dominated by the.

Westerners and Israelites..

The Congress was attended by over five. thousand delegates. Besides France, the - biggest delegation came from India, over 200 delegates Israel fielded a delegation of 60 and they concentrated mainly on Arabic and Islamic Studies. The number of Muslim delegates was neither in propor- tion to their world population nor to the Muslim-oriented themes in the congress. Some Arab scholars presented good papers, but their number was very small Only five came from Pakistan, but there were a dozen or so Pakistani scholars who had come from Europe or or America The Iranian participation was relatively, balanced.

Pakistan's dismemberment came up in a number of papers but none from any Pakistani scholar. Neither did the very few presenting discussions try to set the record straight from the floor. The nearest ne thing by a Pakistani scholar was about the fall of Ayyub. regime, and that took in a descriptive Way D. D Anderson dis- cussed the challenge of linguist to the national identity of Pakistan and said the prospects of Pakistan and South Asia appear in grim? He, however, made some original contribution by suggesting that there is not only a "Baluchi and Pathan unrest", but also the "dislike of a Sindhi President". An Indian scholar (Daljit Singh) tried to discuss the diametrically different roles of the military elite in India and Pakistan. He placed the -blame for national disintegration of Pakistan on the shoulders of the army There were four papers on Bangladesh,. two by Indian scholars, one, by a Hindu scholar of Bangladesh and one by a European. Out of the 167 papers presented in the section on India, only seven dealt with themes related to the Muslims, six with Pakistan and four with Bangladesh.. Significantly this: section" was named "India and not, South Asia, or Indo- Pakistan subcontinent as the realities of the situation suggest.

A striking feature of the Congress was an increased participation by scholars from the orient. India, China and Japan had taken keen interest in the Congress and their scholars, tried to present their respective viewpoints with purpose and competent scholarship. In another respect a number of studies on China represented. a break-through. These were problem- oriented and not just confined to antique- worshipping: The Arab/Muslim scholars did not try to study any aspect historical, political, cultural, economic etc. of the Palestine problem or for that matter of any Arab/Muslim problem. The Israeli scholars presented a number of studies about Arab society; but there was not a single one by any Arab scholar about. Israeli society Generally speaking the Muslim scholarship has yet to make its mark in intellectual forums The overall climate of the congress remained that of a pantheon-maximum concern with the illustrious dead and little interest in the challenging present. The next Congress will be held after 5 years in Mexico. In the meanwhile possibilities will be explored to organize periodically regional conferences or sectional congresses, primarily to cater for the sheer increase in number of orientalists. Underlying the various Congress, discussions and the lobby talks was an emerging feeling that a new life needs to bo breathed into orientalism. Perceptive minds do realize that old, orientalism will have to give way. But how different from the old one the new orientalism would bé, will depend upon the extent to which the new oriental scholars are prepared to examine the very basis of orientalism, The problem is not merely that of finding correct answers to the questions that confront us-but more fundamentally of asking the correct, questions and then setting out to seek answers to them. To be able to move out of the Pantheon orientalists scholars need some degree of institutional iconoclasm. Otherwise they may continue to shuttle from no-where to no-where and yet entertain the complacent feeling that things are moving Stagnation is not the only misfortune. Movement in the wrong direction could be worse. The first part of this report appeared -in-the previous issue