

anity, the attitude of the Sandinista government toward the Church, and the role of the contemporary Church in social change and social justice. All three men are convinced that Marxism and Christianity are compatible, that the Sandinista revolution is a Christian revolution, and that the gospel of the Church implores its priests to be activists for social change and social justice. The sentiments are summed up by d'Escoto, a Maryknoll priest born in the United States of Nicaraguan parents: "I'm a priest—a missionary priest, essentially. I travel for the cause of peace, justice, and the dignity of my people." The powerful, though simple, words of these priests bear moving witness against the U.S. administration's claims of the Sandinista grand design to extend atheistic communism up the coast of Central America. (WV)

HER INDIA: THE FRAGRANCE OF FORGOTTEN YEARS

by Blikees Latif

(Arnold-Heinemann; 264 pp.; \$7.50)

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Tastes in popular history and culture are as volatile as those of fashion. Currently, India is "in." To a segment of this market, M. M. Kaye, Richard Attenborough, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, and a host of less talented purveyors of nostalgia, project an India that never was quite the way they present it. Their subcontinent is peopled with essentially four species of humans. Two types of Britons, those with a stiff imperial upper lip and those who have gone native in romance or politics, cavort with two types of locals, Indians who serve their masters for cash or conviction and new nationalists ready to lead the masses to independence. Reality was much more complex. The Indo-British relationship was a multilayered embrace. Colonist and colonized were both affected in a variety of ways, many of which were unrecognized by the participants.

In the midst of this turbulent encounter there were occasional and very special individuals whose lives testified to the opportunities for personal growth and spiritual development that resided in the crucible of these tensions. Alys Iffrig was such a person. Born to a French-German family of comfortable circumstances, Alys fell in love with and married a young Indian Muslim who was studying in Paris. In 1927, at the age of nineteen, she returned with her husband to the southern Indian city of Hyder-

arrange for the Muslim burial in a Kazakh ancestral burial ground of his old friend and co-worker Kazangap. Yedigei is eventually frustrated in his desire to inter Kazangap's remains because access to the burial ground has been cut off by barbed wire surrounding a cosmonaut launching site. While Yedigei is made into an intruder on Kazakh native territory by an unfeeling military bureaucracy caught up in the space race, those very military bureaucrats, in tandem with their counterparts in the United States, have undertaken to exile from the earth a two-man Soviet-American space travel team that has discovered and entered into collusion with extraterrestrial beings anxious to have contact with the inhabitants of Earth. At the end of the novel, the Soviet and American space agencies surround the planet with the satellite equivalent of barbed wire to prevent intergalactic dialogue or the return of the space team.

During the day's journey to the ancient Kazakh cemetery, Yedigei reminisces about his early years at the railway junction. Those years were scarred by the tragedy of a fellow-worker, Abutalip, hunted down by the Stalinist machine because he had, after escaping a German POW camp, fought alongside the Yugoslav partisans in the last years of the war. Aitmatov's own father, according to the introduction, had been purged during the novelist's childhood—a fact that seems to have kept Aitmatov from joining the Party until 1959. Yedigei's feeling for Abutalip's surviving sons verges on the maudlin, but this detail from the author's life makes it more intelligible. The suggestion of a romantic attraction between Yedigei and Abutalip's widow—he has died under interrogation, heartbroken with longing for his sons—is the least interesting element in the novel. Yedigei is apparently not so Muslim as to consider taking the widow as a second wife, possible because Soviet law enforces Christian monogamy on all its citizens.

Turkic legends are interwoven with these narratives of a funeral journey, space travel, and Stalinist repression, especially in the tale of a Kazakh mother and son, the latter turned into a mindless *mankurt* (a zombie-like slave) by Mongol invaders of Kazakhstan in the Middle Ages. Unable to recognize his mother, the *mankurt* kills her at the bidding of his Mongol master. No more chilling image of the attempt to erase the ethnic past of the non-Russian Soviet peoples can be imagined.

Aitmatov's early experience as a veterinarian, combined with the nomadic totemism of Central Asia, may explain the prominence given throughout the novel to animals. Yedigei's oversexed camel Karanar is more vividly sketched than his colorless wife, Ukubala. Vixen, dog, and eagle emotions are frequently analyzed in the course of this complex novel; they seem to counterbalance the superhuman characteristics of the inhabitants of the planet Lesnaya Grud' contacted by the exiled space travel team. Dualistic imagery throughout the novel stresses, to the point of tedium, that all the characters are involved in a tug-of-war between East and West. The railway line has its two terminals. Soviet and American officials meet on board a jointly manned vessel stationed at a point equidistant between Vladivostok and San Francisco to determine the fate of their vagrant space team.

In burying Kazangap, Yedigei wonders whether younger Kazakhs will know enough for the Muslim funeral ritual to do the same for him; he even entertains some mild doubts as to whether there is a God to mandate such ritual:

"They don't believe in God and know no prayers at all. No one knows, and no one will ever know, if there is a God. Some say there is, others say there isn't. I want to believe that You exist, and You are in my thoughts, when I come to You with my prayers. In fact I speak through You to myself, and at such times I am given the gift of thinking. It is as if You, Creator, had Yourself thought these thoughts of mine. In this lies the heart of the matter. But these young men do not think about this, and they despise prayer. But what will they have to say for themselves and for others at the great hour of death? I am sorry for them. How can they appreciate their innermost, secret humanity, if they have no way in which to rise up in their thoughts as if each of them should seem to be a god?"

Of course these are the thoughts of an aging Kazakh railway worker, not necessarily to be identified with those of a Kirghiz veterinarian-turned-novelist. Nevertheless, this is a fascinating production to come from the pen of a Hero of Socialist Labor. (WV)

abad. Until she died, forty-seven years later, Alys lived and loved in India.

The facts of her life are quite remarkable. She learned Urdu, dressed in a sari, associated with a broad spectrum of Indian society, joined in Muslim ceremonies, pioneered in the revival of traditional crafts, and married twice into distinguished and conventional Muslim families from Hyderabad. With her first husband (Ali Yavar Jung, later India's ambassador to the United States) and his second wife she maintained a long friendship; to her second husband (Ali Hydari, son of the then chief minister of princely Hyderabad State) she was a strong staff on which he leaned.

These particulars are only an entrance into the universe of Alys. Hers was a world of enduring pursuits—questing, changing, learning—and her story is elegantly told here. Reconstructed from personal reminiscences related by Alys to her daughter Bilkees, this book is written as a kind of autobiography—impressions from early twentieth-century France to modern India. Alys speaks to us in the first person. That she sounds so authentic and vivid is a tribute

to both the impact of her personality and the skill of Bilkees Latif. It is not easy for a relatively inexperienced author to master a literary technique so full of danger.

Alys emerges as a woman whose surface grace concealed an inner strength. Three themes infused her life. In her quest for spiritual sustenance Alys seems to reach out for a confusing and excessive variety of experiences—Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and others. Yet there was a deeper consistency in this approach. She was always searching for the mystical essence, however it came. As she grew older, Alys did find her true faith: realization through a spiritual syncretism. This advance to universalism, set against the torrid sectarian and political antagonisms of India in those days, is beautifully portrayed toward the end of *Her India*.

A second theme is adjustment. Alys had to contend with several unusual transitions. As a young French woman she moved into a conservative segment of Muslim society in India. As a European she married into a native family—a practice not viewed kindly by the British Raj. As an older woman she

saw her India of tradition and privileged lifeways yield before modern India. These changes would and did disorient many others, but Alys survived with remarkable composure.

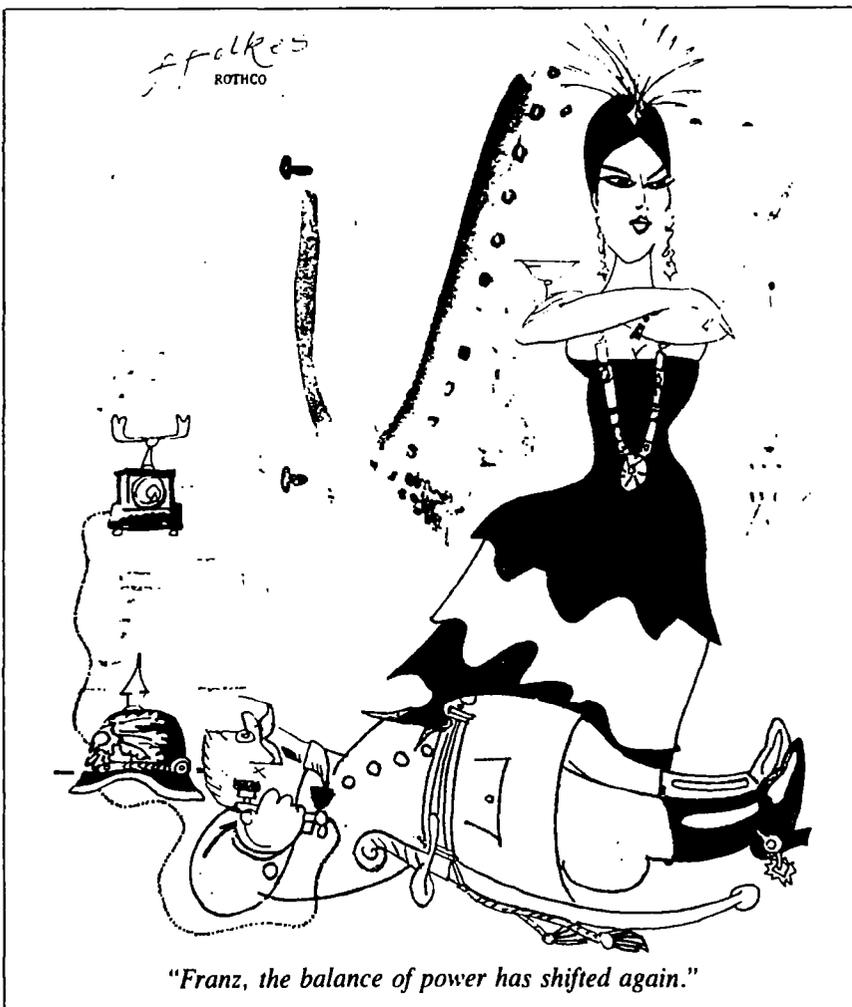
An openness to learning about life was a third continuity. Fragile and dependent at first, Alys grows in maturity and so outgrows her husband Ali Yavar Jung. In her second marriage it is Alys who is the stronger partner, supporting and trying to guide a weaker husband. As she learned about India and about life, she also learned to manage men and the affairs of men.

The Alys of *Her India* is a loving and gentle creature of mostly tranquil disposition. Yet this is only one part of the story. There are muted hints of frustration and disappointment. One suspects that Alys, like so many sensitive and creative personalities, was not always easy to live with or to understand. Ultimately, her real triumph may not have been a triumph over circumstances, as this book suggests, but over herself.

Her India is basically an interweaving of three separate works. As a conventional autobiography it is interesting, although somewhat onesided. As a social history of Hyderabad in the latter days of the Empire it conveys a wealth of information about peoples and customs. However, it is as a record of a spiritual journey that this book comes alive. Here it is an arresting document reflecting experiences and happenings that are both unique and yet very meaningful to others. This is its strength and its beauty.

If there is a flaw in this work, it comes from Bilkees Latif's inclination to restraint. She states that she has deliberately excluded unpleasant details; but these are part of the warp and woof of life. Why, precisely, did Alys and Ali Yavar Jung divorce? What were the weaknesses of the many personalities we encounter? How could sensitive and spiritual Alys so enjoy a *shikar*—hunting defenseless animals for fun? Why were her parents so reluctant to visit India? What about the nastiness of life and people? Unsanitary information sometimes provides perspective in evaluating the full panorama.

This is only a small problem with a significant and largely satisfying effort. Perhaps it can best be set right by a complete biography of Alys and her times. Given her success with this book, it is evident that such a task can be most competently undertaken by Bilkees Latif. Until then, we have this impressive recollection of spirituality and society in latter day imperial India. **WV**



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