

Diana Miserez,

*Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan – Humanitarian and Visionary*, published by The Book Guild Ltd, Great Britain 2017, with a foreword by Professor Guy S. Goodwin-Gill, All Souls College, Oxford. A Swiss publisher, Editions Cabédita, has brought out this book in French (March 2017).

This is a biography of the personality and achievements of a great humanitarian who served the UN for well over 30 years, from 1958 to the mid-1990s. He was appointed UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees in 1962, and from 1966 to 1977 he was the High Commissioner for Refugees. In 1981 as a special rapporteur to the UN Commission on Human Rights he rendered a study on the relationship between massive exoduses and the violation of human rights. Over the following 15 years he undertook crucial UN missions, initially in relation to the humanitarian assistance needed in the aftermath of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

Sadruddin Aga Khan (1933 – 2003) was extremely well equipped to become one of the leading figures in the United Nations, as it evolved after the Second World War. His father, Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan had been President of its forerunner, the League of Nations, created after the First World War. Sadruddin, rooted in one of the richest families in the world, decided to offer his services to the UN and to other causes, declining any remuneration. His father had been the Imam of the Nizari Ismaili Muslims, an estimated 15- 25 million people residing in a large number of countries in Asia and Africa and had appointed his grandson, Sadruddin's nephew, Imam in 1957. Sadruddin, whose mother was French, held an Iranian passport, while living most of his life in Europe. He could truly say, as he often did, that he was a man of both East and West. He was also a prince, because Queen Victoria had bestowed a hereditary royal title on his father, a fact that in many circles added to his prestige. Mentally he carried a strong baggage, having studied for seven years at Harvard, one of the best universities in the USA, and being conscious of the rich philosophical heritage of the Ismaili Muslim tradition of adherence to rationality and social justice. All this contributed to the unique and remarkable personality, a combination of charisma and an eminent ability to bring people together to shoulder the most difficult challenges, as emerges from the book by Diana Miserez.

The author, in the absence of a biography of Sadruddin Aga Khan that she had expected would be published after his death, finally took the pioneering task

upon herself. Having in her background a deep commitment to the plight of the world's refugees, and the experience of having worked in the "field" herself, she was equipped to appreciate, admire and relate the ways in which Sadruddin performed as the United Nation's High Commissioner for Refugees. The fact that influential media around the world on several occasions recommended him for the office of the Secretary General of the UN, and that in 1981 a majority of the Security Council members voted for him, demonstrate the wide acceptance of his unique abilities as a mediator.

The book has as its sources of information published material: documents, reports, books and newspaper articles related to the activities of Sadruddin Aga Khan as well as official records of some of his speeches. Interviews conducted by various media also give glimpses of Sadruddin's thinking. The author always places him in the wider context of the work in which he was engaged. The reader meets the complex world of what has given rise to displacement and thousands desperately fleeing their countries as well as the practical challenges of assisting them. She also goes beyond Sadruddin in describing what happened for instance in Afghanistan and Rwanda after he left office, and she throws light on the need for Sadruddin's humanitarian engagement and visions by recording the events connected to the refugee crisis erupting from the war in Syria during just one week in August 2015.

The objective of the UN is to promote peace, security and human rights to all human beings in the world, and the mandate of the High Commission for Refugees, underscored by the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees, is to protect and assist refugees and to facilitate their repatriation. The UN General Assembly envisaged that the task would be completed once the refugee problem in Europe had been solved in the aftermath of the Second World War. (The Palestinian refugees had their own UN organization). However, the immensity of the problems connected to the flow of refugees only increased over the years by catastrophes in Eastern Europe, in Indo-China, in Chile, on the Indian subcontinent, and elsewhere related to decolonization and new weak states in Africa. Under the leadership of Sadruddin Aga Khan UN HCR vastly expanded in its ability to understand the causes underlying the crises and in assisting the needy. International law prohibits intervention from outside in sovereign states. He developed thinking about how this constrained the international community from protecting people driven from their homes due to internal conflicts. All through his life Sadruddin was deeply concerned with the poverty of the Third World and predicted that if the gap was not

narrowed between the rich and the poor, the rich countries would in the end suffer.

The title of the book describes Sadruddin as a visionary and much of the book is about his being ahead of his time when it came to the preservation of the environment. He created his own foundation, The Bellerive Foundation, that addressed a large number of issues, "Alp action" being one of them, dealing with the problems of deforestation, pollution, community decline and agricultural depression due to the expanding tourist industry. He called for a code of ethics relating to the mountains as well as a commitment for the preservation of animal and plant diversity. His Bellerive Foundation convened a large number of conferences, many of them on the nuclear arms race and on finding effective measures towards nuclear disarmament. A chapter of the biography further reveals Sadruddin's rich personality by writing about his large collection of Islamic art and Quranic manuscripts from all over the Muslim world.

Diana Miserez knew virtually at first hand some of the work of Sadruddin Aga Khan. An example of her admiration, confidence and trust in him is revealed in the way she deals with the genocide in Rwanda, in which 800 000 people were slaughtered in 1994 ("to the eternal shame of the UN" p.260). He was familiar with the history of the long-term ethnic conflict, and the author regrets that he was not in charge of the UN before the conflict escalated, as "he and his brilliant associates would have devised measures to temper the escalating Hutu extremism".

The author makes extensive use of long quotations from her research material. In order to ease the reader's access to Sadruddin's own voice, his statements and writings are rendered in italics all through the text.

This is an accomplished, well documented and highly readable biography of a good person in high office, truly dedicated to make the world a better place. The themes of uprooting, displacement and flight as well as the environmental issues makes the book speak directly to our time.

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