

The Fall of a Sparrow, Salim Ali. Oxford University Press, 1985 (Oxford OX2 6DP, England) 110 Rupiahs.

I have been asked to prepare a review of this autobiography and do so with pleasure, but my comments will be completely biased. I have known Salim for many years and have a very warm place in my heart for him. He is all of the things that this book reveals him as being. His dedication and sense of humour have always been qualities that appealed to me. Anyone who has read from his many works would expect this autobiography to be as well written and enlightening as it is.

Salim Ali spans three-quarters of the 20th century during which ornithology went from looking at birds down the barrel of a gun to watching them with binoculars; from the period of collecting and utilization to that of enjoying and conserving. He was the winner of the second J. Paul Getty Wildlife Conservation Prize in 1976 and is the dean of ornithology and conservation in India.

He has presented his story under 23 chapter headings which are events in his life, not necessarily chronological. He sprang from a rather multitudinous family and constantly refers to them; so much so that I would have appreciated a geneological chart to have kept them all in order. The book deals almost more with people whom he has known than with his personal experiences. Although a consummate naturalist he is interested in people as well, but knowing him as an amusing raconteur I was a little disappointed in the lack of anecdotes and yarns. True, in the last half of the book he does

tell a few that greatly given it.

All through the volume you find Indian words which are italicized and most of these are explained in a glossary at the end. However, a map of his travels and surveys in India would have been very helpful. To a reader without British or Indian background some of the narrative could be a bit mystifying, so a few maps would have helped. It is in the epilogues that he shows the true Salim Ali sense of humour and joy of living.

This is a book that any ornithologist worth his salt should have before him.

H. Elliott McClure

Recd 11/1/87

The Fall of a Sparrow. Salim Ali, 1985. Oxford University Press, New York. \$15 (110 Rupiahs)

This is the autobiography of an ornithologist and conservationist who spans most of the 20th century. It is a history not only of his life but of the many other biologists with whom he was and has been in contact. It is a personal history of ornithology and conservation in India and the sub-continent. Salim Ali received the second J. Paul Getty Wildlife Conservation Prize, given in 1976 and has been the advocate of wildlife conservation in the sub-continent for half a century.

The book covers 24 chapters which are periods or episodes in his life. It is beautifully written and its incidents and anecdotes reveal the thinking and mores of India from British occupation to the present. It is a book that is a must for any ornithologist and good reading for the amateur bird watcher as well.

H. Elliott McClure

The fall of a sparrow. - Salim Ali. 1985. Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press. 265 pp.
+ 71 black and white photographs. Rs.110 (ca \$10.00). --

In writing this review, I am at once hesitant because I know how little Salim Ali enjoys public attention. In his own words " it took considerable persuasion from friends and 'fans' to evoke in me the courage to write an autobiography...." which would let " curious (my italics) people know how and whence I contracted the germs of ornithology...". So, at the risk of incurring his displeasure, I am going to recommend this autobiography to anyone with a love of nature, a sense of humor and a curiosity about the progress of ornithology in India. This book has humor in good measure while it tells the extraordinary story of a man who followed his ornithological dream with scant regard for material gain at a time when ornithology was little known and scarcely regarded as a "respectable" profession among his peers. Consequently, Salim Ali is one of those rare individuals who has lived life to the fullest and still continues to do so.

Scientific ornithology in India was initiated and pursued by the British, mostly by officers in Her Majesty's service. Originating as a "hobby" for many officers stationed in remote areas, it developed into a serious occupation in such pioneers as E.C. Stuart Baker who authored the second edition of the volumes on birds in the Fauna of British India (FBI) series, and Hugh Whistler. Then, into this British dominated sphere came Salim Ali. He had his appetite for ornithology whetted by a compulsory and nearly continuous stay in the Tavoy district of Burma from 1914-1923 where he was attending to a family business. He went to Berlin to train under Erwin Stresemann whom he regards as his "guru" and came back equipped to make his own important scientific contributions to Indian ornithology.

Salim Ali tells the story of his association with the Bombay Natural History

Society (BNHS) - the foremost organisation of its kind in India today. He traces this relationship from the time he was directed to its collections in the offices of Phipson and Co., Wine Merchants (!) after the "fall of the sparrow" to the present when he is President of the BNHS. He was twelve years old when the sparrow fell. He tells of his breaking into a virtually all-British stronghold, rarely resisting a chuckle at the sahibs.

He has interesting accounts of the ornithological surveys he conducted in association with the BNHS, in various Princely States of India, under the patronage of the Maharajahs. His sense of fun, adventure, capacity for hard work and striving for perfection come through at all times. Those surveys were the basis for several books on regional ornithology published by Oxford University Press, like the Birds of Kerala and the Birds of the Eastern Himalayas. These culminated in his magnum opus - The Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan (in ten volumes) written in collaboration with S. Dillon Ripley. The Handbook was written to fully update Stuart Baker's work in the Fauna of British India series and to include original information on the ecology of the species. He also wrote a popular field guide - The Book of Indian Birds - which is widely used today. He writes only briefly about his fascinating seminal study on the breeding biology of baya weaver birds. It is obvious, however, that Salim Ali enjoys behavior and ecology much more than systematics.

He writes of his friendship (to cite only a few) with Hugh Whistler who gave him much useful practical advice in his salad ornithological days; with Richard Meinertzhagen, D.S.O. - the intrepid Colonel of A Kenya Diary fame with whom he expeditioned to Afghanistan and shared other good times; with Loke Wan Tho - the "quiet and scholastic" businessman with an "eye for beauty"

who became a world renowned bird photographer during his exile in India from Singapore; with J.B.S. Haldane and with Dillon Ripley with whom he still shares an uncommon rapport.

He writes with deep affection about his interesting and large family, some of whom were deeply committed to social or political causes. Though Salim Ali is himself not political, he obviously has strong feelings about the role of the British in India and the role of Indians themselves. These feelings flash through occasionally.

Salim Ali, unlike virtually all of us, was present at a time when Indian wildlife was "plentiful" and Indian forests were relatively well preserved. From his book one gets the flavor of what it must have been like then - when the last tiger was shot outside the outskirts of Bombay in 1929 ! Days and times - a whole period gone by. One detects regret and nostalgia in the book but only fleetingly for the "young" man of ninety years is optimistically passionate about conserving what is left. As a nominated member of the Indian Rajya Sabha (the country's highest governing council), Salim Ali is actively fighting today for his own special part of the planet.

The book has many events and personalities condensed into it's pages, snatches from a much larger wealth of experiences. However, it captures the essence of a great man whose example is worth savoring. The seventy-one excellent photographs are of memorable times and places.

-- Renee M. Borges, Department of Biology, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida 33124 and 104/C Aradhana, G.D. Ambekar Road, Naigaum, Bombay 400 014, India.