Clarion Review

General

Yoash

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Three Stars (out of Five)

The uncertain air that magnified some things and blotted out others hung over the whole Gulf so that sights were unreal and vision could not be trusted.

—John Steinbeck *The Pearl* (1945)

A Bombay pearl magnate Dilip Chandra undertakes the largest harvesting operation ever seen in Ottoman-controlled areas of the Persian Gulf—over three thousand skilled divers contribute. The Chandras are modernists by 1914 standards advocates of cross-cultural friendships and marriages (like their own) who refuse to recognize India's caste system. The chief of the local tribe Abdel'Aziz Yoash presides over an internally divided house. His two sons' philosophies and priorities continuously dictate opposite courses of action. He attempts to coax them toward unity: "'Your heritage is indivisible; you have to help each other and step on a common path…'"

Dilip's concern for his workers is uncommon for the era: "'The camp cannot benefit at the price of their peril. We cannot abuse the short lives of those divers and create more dangers for them just to amass more wealth.'" Revered for business smarts and a sense of equity Dilip fares poorly as a leader during serious conflict. Concern over the maintenance of a gentlemanly image allows etiquette to guide his fate. Both he and the amazingly indecisive Yoash fail to calm their most truculent lieutenants. Project foreman Vernon Turner formerly of the British Navy and Yoash's right-hand man Abu' Saiid act counter to orders not believing in compromise.

New national alignments are in formation as the specter of world war solidifies. The overextended Ottomans expect a cut of the profits while the British exert greater control over the seas. Despite prevailing politics the narrative in general and the humanitarian behavior of key characters indicate an outlook of guarded optimism. Details of the divers' hazardous work reflect thoughtful research but too significant a proportion of *Yoash* consists of permutations on a ceaseless argument aboard Chandra's ocean liner at anchor near pearl camp and while

steaming toward the Indian Ocean. The seeds of romance are planted between Vernon and Dilip's British-Indian daughter Krishna but the relationship remains embryonic.

The author is an Iranian-born person of Hebrew extraction who immigrated to the United States and wrote articles for Persian-language newspapers. He was an official with the government of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi in the 1950s later a translator for the American military before settling into a career of marketing. His familiarity with divergent cultures helps make the competing groups' customs and interests come across as roughly equal in validity. Antagonists are not necessarily villains. The setting period and subject cover new territory for many western readers. *Yoash* presents an old world at the very moment it is being superseded. The thematic exploration of cooperation versus authoritarianism shares time with events of pure adventure on the seas. This book is available in seven languages.