



Book Review

PAKISTAN'S STABILITY PARADOX: DOMESTIC, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS

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Reviewer Profile

Ajit Kumar Jha has been the Editor of two Middle East based newspapers in the last eight years: *Qatar Tribune* in Doha and *Oman Tribune* in Muscat. He launched both the newspapers. In India, Mr. Jha was a senior editor with India Today magazine, *The Indian Express* and *The Times of India*. He began his journalistic career with *The Hindustan Times* as Assistant Editor. He also appears regularly on TV and radio. He was educated at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Oxford University and the University of California, Los Angeles. He writes on politics, economics, strategic affairs, environment, literature, cinema and on other current issues for newspapers, magazines and books. He specializes on South Asia, Middle East, Europe and the United States.

Pakistan, etymologically speaking, signifies a land of cleanliness and purity. Ironically today it is associated with political instability, virulent militancy and economic fragility. With a paltry 2.5 per cent economic growth rate, rampant sectarianism and political violence, the country stands on the brink of a disaster. Given possession of nuclear weapons, such a state of crisis makes Pakistan a serious threat to international security. Such pessimism and doomsday scenario building characterizes most of the essays in the book *Pakistan's Stability Paradox: Domestic, regional and international dimensions*. In the end, the book becomes yet another addition to the already voluminous literature on clichéd treatments to Pakistani problems of terrorism and instability.

A more balanced perspective would have asked the meaningful question, how has Pakistan, which averaged annual GDP growth as high as 7 to 9 percent between 2004 to 2006, and 6.8 percent in the 1960s and 1980s, has slipped down to as low as 2.5 percent today? Why has a country envisioned by someone as dedicated to democracy as Quaid-i-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah, has today been wracked by militancy and periodic bouts of military rule? How has the political sociology of the ruling elite—the dominance in politics by the narrow landed feudal potentates largely from Punjab—caused the instability? Why have the few democratic experiments in the past—for instance, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his daughter Benazir Bhutto—been defeated by hanging and political murder. But none of the 12 essays in the book address Pakistan's economy or, say the historic role of a political party, like Pakistan Peoples' Party.

Half the essays are on militancy and others on the impact of such extremism on the regional and global world. The main concerns are then jihadi terror, sectarian *madrasahs*, military rule and what causes political instability in Pakistan? How does it affect the South Asian neighbourhood? What is the fate of the India-Pakistan peace process given the threat of cross-border terrorism? Which way is Pakistan's rollercoaster relationship with the US headed? What is the trajectory of Pakistan's links with its neighbours: India, China and Afghanistan?

Since the volume is a product of a seminar held at Australia's Griffith University, each of the authors raises a specific set of problems. Lacking a general introduction there is no attempt at an overarching thesis, which could have linked some of these unrelated essays and helped come to a firm conclusion. On their own merit, however, some of the essays raise interesting issues, most of which are deeply disturbing. Yet, a why and how of Pakistan's problems and what, if any, are the solutions that could have added an original perspective to the book, is totally missing.

The first chapter *Pakistan's triadic politics and chronic political instability: Is democracy the panacea?* reveals how Pakistan's politics alternates among three forms of government: dictatorship, Islamism and democracy. The essayist argues that in the process of competing with one another each of these three forms of government are compelled to poach each other leading to constant instability.

To ensure political longevity, Misra claims, each regime must possess power, authority and legitimacy. Since none of the forms of government possess all three preconditions, each of the three forms an alliance with another form of government. Therefore the military, for example, which lacks popular legitimacy, ends up co-opting the Islamists

who have ideological legitimacy, thus acquiring a military fist in an Islamic glove. The best examples are the overdependence of Zia-ul-Haq's military regime on Islamism, and General Pervez Musharraf's alliance with the Islamist Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA).

The 2008 elections, which brought the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to power, provided Pakistan with a historic opportunity to consolidate democracy. However, under President Asif Ali Zardari the country has lurched from one constitutional crisis to another, leading to the recent ouster of Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani and the conflict with the Supreme Court. Misra accepts that with a "supportive Washington, an apolitical army chief and demoralized Islamists, democracy now possesses its best chance." However, as the main editor of the book, Misra fails to provide a novel approach to the study of Pakistan that attempts to break out of the stereotypical approaches employed in the past.

Tasneem Kausar's *Judicialization of politics and governance in Pakistan: Constitutional and political challenges and the role of the Chaudhry Court*, is a welcome respite from the clichés. It deals with the Constitutional conflict between the judiciary and the executive under the last two regimes, both military and democratic. Kausar claims that the Supreme Court in Pakistan has always played a political role. Prior to 2005, the Supreme Court invariably favored the ruling regime. Ever since Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry took over, the Supreme Court has strongly challenged the executive: first, the authoritarian regime of General Pervez Musharraf; and later, the democratic regime of Zardari. Musharraf suspended Chief Justice Chaudhry, which led to his own downfall. The Zardari regime, although reluctant, was forced to reinstate the Chief Justice.

Agreed that the executive's conflict with the judiciary resulted in a constitutional crisis, yet such a discord has had a positive consequence for democracy in Pakistan: first, it has ended up empowering the judiciary; second, it activated public interest litigations; and third, it inspired the lawyers' movement which continued for two years from 2007 to 2009. It was the lawyers' movement that succeeded in forcing the Zardari government to reinstate Chief Justice Chaudhry. This positive side of the constitutional crisis could have been further explored to build a totally new perspective on Pakistan's democracy, something that would challenge the typical doomsday approach. But unfortunately, the editors of the book have overlooked this.

Tasneem Ahmar's *Women, media, equity and equality: The Pakistan context* reveals the suffocating levels of patriarchy in the Pakistani media organizations. Ahmar argues that although women students often outnumber male students in mass communication departments, yet women's representation in the mainstream media is paltry. Some amount of comparative data would have strengthened the argument. Ahmar relies more on individual cases. With the exception of Dr Maleeha Lodi and Dr Shirin Mazari, who are editors of the *The Muslim* and *The Nation*, there are no other women who have been editors of news dailies in Pakistan, observes Ahmar. The Associated Press of Pakistan has never had a woman director. To conclude, there is tight glass ceiling that prevents women from reaching the top in media organizations. It would have been useful had Ahmar related the study of patriarchy in the media to the prevailing political culture in Pakistan.

Two of the chapters in the first section deal with two different aspects of the phenomena of militancy, the most vital problem affecting Pakistan since 2001. While Aneela Babar's *What are they teaching them at school nowadays? Understanding hybrid seminaries and Pakistan's social revolution*, reveals the dangerous training curricula and culture at different *madrassas* (seminaries), Muhammad Amir Rana's *The militant's landscape: Pakistan's Islamist organizations and their impact on the body politic* narrates the consequences of such training: 246 religious based political parties and militant groups operate in Pakistan, the number of terrorist attacks in the country since 2005 has increased by an alarming 746 per cent. Rana identifies 13 banned organizations such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Muhammad and 11 others as major terrorist outfits. Such fierce jihadi politics has resulted in 2,148 terrorist attacks reported from all across the country in 2008, killing 2,267 people and injuring and maiming 4,558. By 2009 the casualties doubled and it has gotten worse in recent years.

Ashok K Behuria's *The state of Jihadi organizations in Pakistan and their regional and international links* traces the origins of Pakistani militancy two decades prior to 9/11 to the Afghan jihad against Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and official Pakistani attempts to foment trouble in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in India. Such extremism mushroomed with official connivance especially during Zia-ul-Haq regime. Further, Behuria analyses the twists and turns of Pakistan militancy, how it got progressively Arabized by linking itself to a fundamentalist Salafist and Wahabi ideology, championed by the Al Qaeda after 9/11 and later built international links leading to the murder of Daniel Pearl, the attacks against General Musharraf and the deadly Mumbai attack of 2008.

How has such militancy in Pakistan affected its neighbours? What are its regional dimensions? Part II of the book is largely concerned with Pakistan's links with India and Afghanistan. Happymon Jacob's article *The India-Pakistan peace process* examines the attempted détente between the two neighbours that began in 2004 and ended by 2008. Prior to the peace process, the two neighbours were on a confrontationist path with nuclear competition during 1998 and the Kargil conflict in 1999. The December 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian parliament led to a 10-month long military mobilization on the borders when it appeared to most observers that the two countries were on the brink of a war. This coincided with the low intensity war and cross-border terrorism unleashed by Pakistan in J&K.

The Islamabad Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in January 2004 and later the declaration of a composite dialogue between the two belligerent neighbours began the peace process. India's Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and President Musharraf of Pakistan met first in New York by September 2004 and later in New Delhi in April 2005 during an India-Pakistan cricket match. This helped to thaw the frozen relationship and built up hopes on both sides. However, increasing militancy and Talibanization dashed all hopes of a lasting solution.

What led to the derailment of the peace process in 2008? According to Jacob, the waning of Musharraf's popularity within Pakistan given the constitutional crisis with the judiciary and the sacking of Chief Justice Chaudhry led ironically to the failure of the peace process. Musharraf's exit might have ended the peace process in the short run but

in the long run, the last nail in the coffin was hammered by the Mumbai attack, according to Jacob. With the return of the second peace process since 2011 and Pakistan's attempts at dealing with some of the alleged perpetrators of the Mumbai attack, there seems to be a ray of hope in the future of Pakistan-India friendship.

The last section traces the international dimensions of the Pakistani crisis: the country's links with US, China and the predicament of a nuclear state wracked by terrorism. Moeed Yusuf in *Pakistan-US relations: An inconvenient partnership of convenience*, describes the rollercoaster nature of the relationship since 9/11. While the US coerces Pakistan to target Al Qaeda and Taliban, a reluctant Pakistan drags its foot given its support to Jihadi elements that fought Soviet intervention in Afghanistan prior to 9/11. Ironically, Yusuf points out that Pakistan's support to the Jihadi Taliban was also dictated by US strategic interests during the Cold war era. Former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage's infamous threat of "bombing Pakistan back to the stone age," best describes this coercion that Pakistan faces from the US. Yusuf further reveals the infirmities of the buy-out options, including aid that the US resorted to both under George Bush Jr and Obama administrations.

The asymmetrical nature of its relationship with the US has pushed Pakistan into the arms of an assertive China. Srikanth Kondapalli examines China-Pakistan relations in *Testing China's rise*. Michael E. Clarke's *Pakistan and the four faces of nuclear terrorism* raises the uncomfortable question of how Pakistan is a threat to international security given that its entire nuclear complex is susceptible to acts of nuclear terrorism.

Can Pakistan Survive? Tariq Ali wrote this work in 1983, which argued that Pakistan's genesis lacks reason in history. Yet almost three decades since the book was published Pakistan has managed to survive and grow. At the time when India was growing at the sluggish rate of 3.5 percent (1947-77), Pakistan with a more liberalized economy was surging at almost double that rate, except in 1951 when the country faced a recession. In the early part of this century (2003 to 2007), Pakistan again surged at almost 7 to 8 percent. It is only since 2008-9 that the economic growth rate has nosedived. A chapter on Pakistan's trajectory of economic development and decline would have enriched the volume greatly.

Moreover, democratic forces in Pakistan's recent history, especially the judges, the lawyers and the media have struggled together to fight army style authoritarianism. Tasneem Kausar's article, which deals with such a movement, is the most insightful piece in the book. The editors should have let Kausar's piece become the lead introduction to the book. It moves away from the stereotypical doomsday scenario building and sets a totally fresh tone of looking at Pakistan's myriad problems. The story of how during the recent years democratic forces have attempted to bring about a revolution from below, arrayed against an alliance of the army and the growing tribe of Islamists, would surely have added the much needed new perspective to the book.

Since February-March 2011 a second peace process has begun between Pakistan and India. Former Pakistan Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani's trip to India in March 2011 to watch a Pakistan India cricket match in Mohali, along with his counterpart Dr. Manmohan Singh, was the major event that kick-started the peace process. The

successful visit to India by Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar in July 2011 did much to thaw the frozen relations at the symbolic level. The pilgrimage by Pakistani president Asif Ali Zardari in April 2012 to the Sufi shrine of Khwaza Moinuddin Chisti in Ajmer in Rajasthan took the peace process forward. The liberalisation of visas and the recent attempts to bolster bilateral trade by inking three major agreements between both the countries are encouraging signs underscoring this new phase of détente.

In August 2012, New Delhi unilaterally decided to allow direct foreign investment from Pakistan to India. This has been hailed on both sides as a massive psychological blow to extreme elements hostile to improved ties between Islamabad and New Delhi. There is more than a glimmer of hope on both sides with more travel restrictions being removed. The red carpet rolled out for Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar by the Pakistani authorities during his week long November trip to Pakistan is bound to encourage more back channel routes to diplomacy. Ajmal Kasab's recent hanging for the crimes of Mumbai terror bombings of 2008 may prove to be a mere blip if the two sides decide to rebuild a bridge of friendship. To top it all, the plan to renew cricket diplomacy by staging a new cricket series from December 25 to January 7, 2013 in India, after nearly five years of no India-Pakistan cricket ties, will go a long way in reuniting what terrorism broke apart — a subcontinent of peace and prosperity.