

Book Review-I

India and Pakistan: The First Fifty Years

*Selig S. Harrison, Paul H. Kreisberg and Dennis Kux (eds.)
(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999)*

by

Dr. Rais A. Khan

The book is a collection of nine essays by eminent scholars on South Asia. These essays were presented at a conference organized by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington D.C. in 1997. The idea was to make a comparative study of the achievements and failures of India and Pakistan during the first fifty years of their existence as independent states. The essays cover politics, governance, economic growth, social development and foreign and security policies, particularly relations with the United States. The writers on all counts, gave more plus points to India than Pakistan. They do not regard India an unqualified success but their criticism is tempered by a tone of optimism and hope. Unlike a number of American analysts they do not regard Pakistan a “Failed State”. They admire Pakistan’s progress in many fields in the past but seem rather pessimistic about its future. Following is a brief analysis of each essay. The title of each essay is perhaps its best summary.

Paul R. Brass entitles his essay on Indian political development as “India: Democratic Progress and Problems”. He calls India a “developing democracy” and praises it for (i) entrenchment of parliamentary institutions and practice, (ii) the absence of military intervention in the political process, (iii) regular free elections both at national and states levels and peaceful transfer of power, (iv) high popular mobilization and participation in the political process, average voting ratio being 55% at the national level.

Brass notes that the domination of the Congress Party and of the Centre has come to an end during the last two decades. New equations of power between the centre and their state governments are emerging and this is causing a lot of tension. Alliance politics and coalition governments are becoming the norm. The monopoly of upper castes over the echelons of power and administration is increasingly challenged by the assertiveness of lower castes. How the growing ethnic and caste politics will affect India’s political stability, Brass does not speculate. He is more apprehensive of the increasing violence, corruption and criminalization of Indian society and observes that “pervasive, systematic, structured, and graded corruption is running from the bottom to the top of the political order” (p.34). He laments the scant concern for human rights in the Punjab in the past and in Kashmir at present. The Indians are obsessed with national unity and Hindu nationalism has become a powerful influence in modern Indian history and it will not go away. But Brass does not see *Hindutva* emerging as the dominant ideology replacing secularism, though he sees its lengthening shadow in the Hindi belt. Brass concludes that India has failed to provide its people the respect of the

possible for her to achieve. He predicts that “gradually and without much fanfare the states of India will become increasingly autonomous” (p.42).

Robert Laporte in his comparison piece on Pakistan has borrowed the title from Shahid Javed Burki’s book published in 1986 titled, “Pakistan: A Nation Still in the Making”. Laporte suggests that Pakistan’s politics has always been under siege. Divided by a thousand miles of hostile territory, Pakistan found it very difficult to evolve a united government. Theoretically it adopted a federal parliamentary form of government but on ground the system was “viceregal” inherited from the colonial masters. It has continued to this day with different constructs.

Laporte, like Shahid Javed Burki, thinks that even after fifty years of independent existence Pakistan is a state “still in the making”. Repeated military interventions in politics, lack of participatory democracy and imbalance of political and economic interests between East and West Pakistan led to political instability and division of the country. The ‘troika’ politics destroyed the emerging two party system between 1988-97. The hopeful signs that Laporte sees are the presence of a free and outspoken press and the shift in political control from the rural feudal elites to a more diverse form of urban political influence. Admitting the dominant role of Islam in the country, Laporte does not share the apprehension that it would turn into a sectarian state. He sees corruption, lack of popular interest in politics and decay of governing institutions at all levels clouding the future of democracy in the country.

Both Brass and Laporte are pessimistic about any qualitative improvement of politics and governance in India and Pakistan in the short run.

John Adams’ essay on India’s economic development is titled “Much Achieved, Much to Achieve” which pretty well sums up his assessment. Contrary to a number of western economists, Adams justifies the planned, centralized, socialist model economy of the Nehruvian era. He thinks it laid the foundations of industrialization and modernization which private sector could not provide but the policy was not properly implemented and the inefficiency and mismanagement of the bureaucratic control stifled growth. India lagged behind other Asian economies (including that of Pakistan). 1980s saw basic economic reforms and by the end of 1990s, Indian GDP growth was close to 7% per annum. Adams sees a bright future for Indian economy.

In the comparative essay on Pakistan: “Misplaced Priorities, Missed Opportunities”, Marvin G. Weinbaum compares Pakistan’s impressive early economic performance (average growth rate 6% per annum) with its present problems and despair. He attributes earlier economic success to the role of entrepreneurial, skilled educated refugees that came from across the border. He argues that huge national debt, both foreign and domestic – did not produce commensurate economic growth and is now a burden on the economy. So is the expenditure on armed forces. Attempts to reform have failed due to population explosion, low saving rates, lack of infrastructure, poor work ethics, corruption and absence of sustained economic vision and strategy. “Chronic political instability and an obscurantist bureaucratic culture mars prospects for good governance and sound economic growth” (p.89). However, he predicts that the international economic community would not let Pakistan to fall to its knees. Pakistan will muddle through but merely getting by will leave Pakistan non-competitive, relatively impoverished and prone to political instability.

Sonale Desai and Katherine Sreedhar writing on social development in India “Growth and Inequality”, focus on increasing disparities of wealth and living standards. True, a sizeable middle class has emerged and is enjoying the fruits of

economic growth but the majority of the population is mired in poverty. There are many positive social indications. Population growth has declined. Life expectancy has been doubled. Infant mortality rate has been reduced by two thirds. Both male and female literacy has increased significantly. But financial allocation in the social sectors are not only low but are diminishing. Malnutrition is very high. Health services are scarce and where available are of low quality. There are glaring regional inequalities and gender discrimination is rampant. Caste barriers, though constitutionally illegal, are widely enforced. National security is narrowly defined excluding social and economic security.

Anita M. Wesis, writing on social progress in Pakistan sees positive indicators but notices broad neglect in key areas. The social contract, she feels, must be reinterpreted and more resources allocated to the social sectors. She stresses population control and women empowerment as essential to Pakistan's social development. She sees a ray of hope in the growth of NGOs movement and the activation of the civil society.

Sunil Ganguly's essay on India's foreign policy ("India Policies: Past and Future") points out that in the early decades it was focused on global issues such as anti-colonialism, global distributive justice, cold war and non-alignment. The Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 and war with Pakistan in 1965 changed the focus and national defense became the centre piece of India's foreign policy. This led to warming up of relations with Russia and the quickening of India's quest for nuclear power. India's global agenda gave way to regional concerns. Ganguly advises India to follow a self centred policy of economic and political development and promote cooperation with South Asian neighbours.

Thomas P. Thornton in his comparison piece on Pakistan's foreign policy, titled "Fifty Years of Insecurity", has emphasized the insecurity syndrome of Pakistan. This resulted in Pakistan always seeking outside actors to redress the imbalance of power in South Asia. It successfully established close links with its Muslim neighbours and entered into alliances and understanding with leading global powers – first the U.S. and then China. Not sure of the reliability and continuity of external help it decided to acquire nuclear power. Thornton sees India as a status quo power and does not see any threat to Pakistan from that quarter. He is right in suggesting that lowering of regional tensions is in the interest of Pakistan. He asks Pakistan to give up the idea of gaining Kashmir because the cost involved in pursuing the idea is too high. He concludes, that given the insecure environment, Pakistan can not forgo defense including the nuclear element.

The world community would not help Pakistan over the Indian threat or Kashmir because the first has receded and the latter is a non-issue for most countries including China and the Muslim world. It should judge and help Pakistan on the basis of its ability to deal with domestic political and economic problems. Pakistan cannot afford to play for time. It may slip into the status of a failed state if urgent action is not taken.

The ninth and last essay in the book is by Stephen P. Cohen who analyses the relationships of India and Pakistan with the U.S. Cohen points out that U.S. has never had any strategic or economic stake in these countries. Its relations with them have always been governed by U.S global priority. Resultantly, these relations have seen ups and downs. Cohen advises the U.S. to pursue a "realistic, proportionate, low cost policy in South Asia aimed at encouraging economic liberalization, political democratization between India and Pakistan. He is against pressurizing these countries to abandon their nuclear capability. He lets the cat out of the bag

when he suggests a trilateral strategic dialogue between India, Pakistan and the U.S. vis-à-vis the rest of Asia including China.

Unlike reports of other American Think Tanks, the conclusions of this conference are objective and balanced.

The nine essayists have praised India and Pakistan where praise is due, but are critical where they find these countries lagging behind even other Asian countries. In that sense both India and Pakistan can be termed as 'failed states'. However the essayists are rather optimistic about India's future and pessimistic about Pakistan. ■

Book Review-II***Islamic Fundamentalism versus Modern Rationalism
'Enemy in the Mirror'***

*Roxanne L. Euben, Oxford University Press, 1999,
Pages 238, Price:Rs 595.00*

by

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Roxanne L. Euben's well-researched study: "Enemy in the Mirror", begins as an enquiry into the nature of fundamentalism and the way it has evolved in three great Faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Also, it reflects the nexus of the political and intellectual interests or preoccupations. In the process, the first interest is sparked by a paradox in contemporary politics. It is rightly questioned why secular, liberal democracies such as the United States have started witnessing sharply declining rates of voter turn-out and increasing alienation from politics, while at the same time, religio-political movements are galvanizing peoples into extraordinary attempts to make the political world.

With these introductory remarks, the author sets out to underscore parameters of fundamentalism. In the process, she determines criteria by which such interpretations are authorized. The term "fundamentalism" captures aspects of, for example, the way some American conservatives claim a monopoly of interpretation on such ostensibly secular texts as the American constitution. As things stand, this understanding runs so counter to the conventional religious connotations of fundamentalism as to empty it of meaning. However, it allows for the distinct possibility that there are secular as well as religious fundamentalists and the distinction between the two is not as divergent as it initially seems.

The focus of the book then shifts to Western academia's reaction to Islamic fundamentalism and the way they have tried to define it over the years, either by adopting a modern rationalist approach or simply trying to make it fit in the mould of Christian fundamentalism paradigm. The author then moves to evaluate the prevalent theories of Islamic fundamentalism and presents a renowned Egyptian scholar, Syed Qutb, as a case study. She takes to this course in an effort to arrive at a definition of Islamic fundamentalism and all that goes in the making of it from a Muslim perspective. She maintains that Syed Qutb's contribution offers a highly influential picture of the Islamic world view. To her, Qutb's text is not definitive but illustrative of the critique of post Enlightenment modernity and epistemology in the Islamic political thought. Continuing her arguments, she says that Qutb's continuing influence over the ideas and actions of contemporary Islamists makes his text particularly illuminating for any attempt to understand the movement's meaning. The power of the fundamentalist's ideas, as enunciated by Syed Qutb, is certainly related to the political, cultural and economic conditions. His is a well-documented empirical study of fundamentalism and it portrays a critical, utopianist and revolutionary movement.

Then, the author simultaneously approaches Qutb and Imam Khomeini and highlights continuities and unifying patterns that have interesting implications for larger arguments regarding Qutb's critique of modernity and of rationalism in particular. Syed Qutb shares with Khomeini, for example, a critique of all forms of modern, secular authority as corrupt and of obedience of such authority as idolatry, a focus on sovereignty as the means by which to fulfill God's will on Earth. The list of commonalities and differences is very large, yet the glimpse of these as enumerated above suggests a rough convergence of Islamic fundamentalist ideas around a rejection of modern forms of sovereignty. The echoes between Syed Qutb's and Imam Khomeini's rejection of modern forms of sovereignty and emphasis on the limits of human reason means that Qutb's fundamentalism projects shares with other Islamists – Sunni's and Shiias, Arabs and non-Arabs, a critique of a vision of modernists that embodies and expresses the supremacy of rationalist ways of knowing and mastering the world. Convergence of these fundamentalist ideas means that Sunni and Shiite varieties of fundamental thoughts can be understood as engaged in a common critique of rationalist epistemology.

To conclude: This study intelligently offers ways to interpret Islamic fundamentalism and its many manifestations. This study logically proves that there is no prospect of clash between Islam and the West. Euben is convinced that the subject needs a detached and objective analysis and scrutiny. Sharp, unequivocal and convincing as this study is, it is hoped that it will greatly help in dispelling doubts that exist among the Western academics with regard to the true connotation of Islamic fundamentalism. The Western scholars must now look beyond the rationalists—modern planks that have only obscured the reading of Islam in a post cold-war world. ■