

Sreedhar and Nilesh Bhagat, *Pakistan : A Withering State?* New Delhi, Wordsmith, 1999, 208 pages.

To the outside world, Pakistan's image as a nation-state is both enigmatic and stigmatic. The nation succeeded not only in withstanding the traumatic experiences that marked its birth but that it engaged itself in a *struggle for parity* with India, a country much more powerful than her. The nature and intensity of the struggle have varied from time to time only to end up in recent Pakistan's nuclear test as a compliment to that of India's. The nation's emphasis on Islam, the *raison d'etre* of its creation, did not vanish even with the creation of Bangladesh and the Islamic ideology is still being used by its rulers not only as a tool to mould domestic politics but also to entrust the nation with a new geo-political status in the Muslim world. In Pakistan, the international community probably finds a sort of 'miracle at work'. Despite being geo-politically less important in post-Cold War period, economically shaky and socially fragile, she continues to nurture few regional and international ambitions with no secrecy. And in recent years, *Taliban* control in Afghanistan with men and material support from Pakistan may, indeed, add credence to the nation's prowess. The other side of Pakistan's story, however, remains to be gloomy depicting a picture of bad and non-democratic governance, authoritarian threat, absence of civil society and rule of law, religious fundamentalism, internal ethnic violence, drug related feuds and clashes, bankrupt economy and a host of other related evils. All these problems, in recent times, seem to have attained such a critical dimension in Pakistani polity that even the country's recent nuclear success may not camouflage all of them. If not all, the dwindling economy of nuclear Pakistan has, at best, drawn the rapt attention of the international community on the country's politico-strategic and economic future. The book **Pakistan - A Withering**

State? by Sreedhar and Nilesh Bhagat is, therefore, an endeavour in this direction to bring a number of Pakistan's internal and external problematic issues within an analytic discussion. The methodology of the book is based on an empirical and analytical approach towards understanding the Pakistani polity in various dimensions. Works from books, journals, newspapers and publications of few international bodies constitute the research documents of the authors.

The introduction to the book under the title 'A Dirge for Pakistan' may, at the outset, appear to be provocative as the readers come across certain views (gathered from writings both in Pakistani and international press) that regard Pakistan as a *failed state*, a *failing state*, an *anarchic state* likely to end up either in disintegration or in continuation of an out and out authoritarian regime in the country. Admittedly, the book seems to be all about it. The authors try to substantiate the above views with facts and events sifted from the long history of Pakistan's existence as a nation-state. In this connection, they focus on a number political, social and economic maladies that Pakistan has been suffering from since long. The readers find elaboration of such problems in ten chapters of the book. In the first chapter entitled "A Crisis of Identity", the authors try to explain Pakistan's failure in creating its distinct national identity for few particular reasons. In their opinion, Islam which has been the *raison d'etre* of Pakistan's naissance, has been selfishly used by its ruling elites and that too in a very coercive manner, to realise their narrow interests. As a result, Islam instead of becoming a cohesive force rather became a divisive force in Pakistan's polity : an argument elaborately explained by the authors with the help of few empirical examples like non-absorption of Muhajirs in Pakistani society, constant rift between the country's Sunni and Shia population, non-Muslim status to the country's Ahmadiyyas and secession of the Bengali speaking Muslims from Pakistan in 1971. As argued by the authors, the factors of language and history having their respective origin in the heartland of India, equally failed to

become the unifying forces in Pakistani society. An insightful aspect of the chapter seems to be the authors' attempt to explain the aggravation of such handicaps due to non-democratic system of governance in Pakistan. In contrast to it, the authors are boastful about good and democratic governance in their own country which they confirm has evolved a political system based on majority rule and common acceptance of the nation's fundamental values. However, empirical evidences suggest that good and democratic governance has neither been easy nor a magic to wipe out many of India's socio-political, religious, cultural, racial, caste and ethnic problems in its polity. In particular, one notices how in recent years, secularism, one of the fundamentals of Indian governance has lost its credibility to the outside world. In this respect, the authors could have reflected more of their objective thinking by dealing frankly with few of the problems encountered by the present system of Indian governance.

The second chapter entitled 'A Mixed Polity' reflects the distortedly zigzag manner in which Islam has been used by the Pakistani elite in power to decide the destiny of their country's domestic and foreign policies. Towards this end, an interesting discussion in the chapter centers around the questions like i. who is a Muslim in Pakistani polity? and ii. what would be the Islamic character of Pakistan? The confusing and conflicting approaches of *Ulemas*, *Maulvis* and other Islamic theologians on the one hand, and the ruling elite on the other, towards these questions ultimately have led to, what the authors view, a vapid debate in the country. The authors have very aptly drawn a clear picture of the Islamisation process in Pakistan bringing within the fold of their discussion a number of measures taken by Bhutto and Ziaul-Haq to islamise Pakistan respectively. An interesting discussion also centers around Pakistan's Islamic orientation in its foreign policy with central focus on its involvement in Afghan crisis in the name of Islam. In their discussion, the authors seem to remain indifferent to the overriding

geopolitical and strategic imperatives that led Pakistan to get involved in the Afghan crisis directly. The crisis, despite many of its negative implications for Pakistan, has given the former a political leverage over Afghanistan that it retains till to date.

In the third chapter entitled 'Tacky Institutions of Governance', the authors try to draw an agonising history of Pakistan's trampling on its democratic practices and institutions right up from the day of its independence. The frequent dissolution of Constituent Assemblies, long absence of a viable constitution, absence of elected leadership or representative political institutions, bad governance and above all, the entry of military strong men into politics through coup d'etat are few empirical evidences that the authors have taken into account to show how democracy has been flouted in Pakistan at different points of time. To these are added the troubled economy and sectarian violence in the country. The chapter elaborated in a chronological analysis of various political developments and supported by reasonable explanation of each such development is expected to be an interesting reading for all. However, there should be a limit to the authors' overtly expressed skepticism and apprehension about the proper functioning of present and future democratic government in Pakistan. Although there is the suppression of judiciary, amendments in the constitution at whim and caprice and somewhat a secret entente between the civilian and armed forces in Pakistan, a shift from democracy to earlier form of authoritarian government is not envisaged in the immediate future. Like in many other Third World countries, the democratic norms and practices are beginning to take root in Pakistani polity. Besides, several imperatives, both internal and external, in particular, decline in Pakistan's strategic importance in post-Cold War period, need for Western aid and a growing antipathy of the masses *vis-a-vis* the armed forces are most likely to gear Pakistan towards democratic governance in the future. Thus, the country's present experimentation with democracy may be viewed as a transitory period of trials and

tribulations for the nation. This argument should have created a bit of optimism in the authors' mind about the future prospect of democracy in Pakistan.

The fourth chapter entitled 'Arrogant Armed Forces' begins with an opinion expressed in the following sentence: "In the contemporary world, the State possesses an armed force to carry out some of its functions. In Pakistan, it is the other way around : the armed forces possess a state called Pakistan". Understanding the armed forces' sway over Pakistani politics would not be problem for the readers as various measures and mechanisms of restoring military power, mainly through political intrigue and trickery, by such army stalwarts like Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan and Ziaul Haque would be known to them from the previous two chapters. Of new interest to them would be the authors' insightful reflection on certain elements like militarisation of Pakistan's civil bureaucracy and the entry of armed forces into the nation's foreign policy. In case of the latter, Pakistan's preoccupation with Kashmir and Afghanistan gets a proper elaboration with relevant facts and events. Still more provoking would be the naissance of terrorism as an instrument of Pakistan's foreign policy at the hands of the armed forces about which detailed discussion is carried forward on to chapter sixth. The chapter speaks about the authors' success in depicting very clearly and intelligently a peculiar *state of affairs* in Pakistan where the specter of its ubiquitous army can hardly be neglected even at the time of on-going civil-rule in the country.

The fifth chapter entitled 'Foreign and Security Policies' makes a critical appreciation of two important factors i.e., Islamic and India, that according to the authors have significantly influenced Pakistan's geo-strategic and security outlook. The authors, in the chapter, have tried to identify few reasons for which Pakistan, despite its Islamic credentials and commendable military power with nuclear and missile components, has failed to create a niche for itself in the

Islamic world. As far as the India factor is concerned, a fresh reappraisal of important geo-strategic events in the sub-continent having direct linkage with Pakistan is made in the chapter. This goes to include two wars on Kashmir, Pakistan's extra-regional linkages, the Sino-Pakistani entente, renewing of Islamic connection after Pakistan's disintegration, its support to Iranian revolution and proxy in the Afghan war. In all these developments, the authors' trace out an Indo-centric attitude of Pakistan aimed at reaching an artificial parity with India through its cosmetic capabilities. While making such an introspection, the authors seem to remain totally silent over few geo-strategic policies and strategies of India during the time. Common wisdom would suggest that the Indo-US rapprochement following the Sino-Indian war in 1962, the Indo-Soviet strategic alliance, India's bid to fill up the power vacuum in the Indian Ocean by a powerful blue marine, the Pokhran nuclear explosion and above all India's rapid augmentation in military power following the Afghan crisis were but few important strategic developments having far reaching security and strategic implications for Pakistan. Besides, Pakistan is not a country without some sort of image in the Muslim world. Its Islamic credentials have allowed it to maintain significant influence in the Gulf till to date. Pakistan also maintains a modicum of influence in the Central Asian Muslim Republics. More important, its Afghan policy can not probably be viewed as a total failure resulting in spread of drugs and violence and bringing in theocratization in its polity. If so, how would one look at the Taliban control over present day Afghanistan with Pakistani military and political support? These aspects, if taken into account, could further strengthen the objective vision of the authors.

Chapter six titled 'Terrorism as an Instrument of Foreign Policy' centers around the authors' argument that Pakistan's long support for low intensity conflict in Kashmir and Afghanistan is mainly to bring few changes in South and Southwest Asian maps. As they view it, terrorism, in its various violent and subversive forms, has been the

cardinal element in such strategy. In this regard, the authors' attempt to present the names of several terrorist training camps and organisations operating in Pakistan and the persons (including foreigners) and weapons used in the mission in seven tables in the chapter would take the readers by surprise. The reading would, thus, be of interest provided all such information are given due importance and credence by the readers.

Chapter seven of the book, 'The Economic Quagmire' depicts a very gloomy economic scenario of Pakistan that, in authors' view, can be explained by the country's three persistent economic ills - feudal order, large defense expenditures and debt burden. The eight chapter entitled 'A Mauled Sovereignty' narrates, with facts and diagram, the entire episode of 'US Tomahawk cruise missile attack on Afghanistan' across Pakistani territory to eliminate the hideout of Osama bin Laden, a suspected international terrorist in US agenda. From the description, emerges a conspicuous scenario of conflicting positions of the parties like the Prime Minister, the Navy, the armed forces and the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) with respect to the missile attack. The message across the chapter is that the US attack, done with the connivance of the armed forces and without the knowledge of the government, once again puts into question the credibility of Pakistan's democracy and politicians.

In chapter nine entitled 'Future Scenario', the authors, in the above backdrop, try to draw four possible or rather hypothetical future scenario for Pakistan : i. a country with neither democratic nor authoritarian regime but with an alternative form of government under the aegis of a National Security Council; ii. a Soviet syndrome in the Pakistani context i.e., eventual disintegration of the nation on ethnic lines; iii. the birth of a pure Islamic kingdom in Pakistan; and iv. the formation of a Great Pashtunistan with NWFP. In drawing out each of these scenario, the authors put forward their own line of arguments and reasoning. The last chapter 'Implications for India'

makes a final review on Pakistan's standing at national, regional and international levels, in each of which the authors find Pakistan in disorder and with tarnished image. For this and other reasons mentioned earlier, few speculations about Pakistan's future, in particular, its 'withering away' get an academic discussion in the chapter.

The book under review is a comprehensive work towards understanding the current political, economic and social stresses as present in Pakistan's polity. Each of the problems gets a proper academic and intellectual treatment not out of vacuum, but with relevant facts, figures and data. The work can, thus, be said to be based on well-documented research. In this connection, the important fact to take note of is the authors' recourse to sources or reference mostly of non-Indian origin. The end-notes and appendices at the end of the book are extremely rich and may be the future sources of reference for a further study on Pakistan.

However, it is to anybody's guess that a book on 'Pakistan' authored by Indian writers cannot probably escape the debate over the question of objectivity in it. This is because barrage of literature on India and Pakistan seems to remain coloured by hopes and fear, by wishes and desires, by prejudice and propaganda of the writers belonging to these countries. As far as the authors' objective vision in the book is concerned, it can be said that it has been damaged to a certain extent by few provocative sentences fashioned in a journalistic manner here and there. Also the hypothetical scenario of Pakistan's eventual disintegration due to its complex internal ethnic problems appears to be overtly provocative despite authors' frank admission that they have incorporated certain element of subjectivity in their hypotheses. Critics would probably demand of the authors to bring into discussion a similar situation of ethnic unrest and violence in few Indian states. In this context, it is relevant to mention that ethnic conflict or violence in any national polity mainly originates

out of a complex web of internal political, economic and social factors and that the external factors intervene only to further exacerbate the process. The resolution of such problem mainly depends on redressing the wrongs through internal mechanisms and recourse to diplomacy and dialogue to forestall any external intervention. Thus, ethnic conflict once arrested, may not have the potential to break-up a sovereign nation. Empirical evidences suggest that in post-World War period, Bangladesh is the only country that has succeeded in seceding itself from a nation-state on ethnic line. Thus, a myriad of internal problems that Pakistan is beset with do not necessarily justify the nation's withering away. Thus, the authors who have succeeded in portraying these problems with important facts and figures, should probably have captioned the book under a different title. More important, the authors themselves do not want disintegration of Pakistan by saying that a strong and united Pakistan is in the best interests of India.

At the end, the authors deserve congratulations for their intellectual courage in writing a book on a country with which their own country has known so much animosity. The book, written from an Indian perspective, would at best let the Pakistanis know what the Indians think about them. And in many cases, the book may provide the Pakistanis few lessons as well.

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