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A History of Pakistan and its Origins

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Originally published in French in 2000 (1), this English translation of *A History of Pakistan and its Origins* was prepared for the English reader and released following the events of September 11. 2001. Although Afghanistan was the focal point for the initial American reaction to the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York City and the 'bombing' of the Pentagon in Washington, Pakistan was instantly made a critical actor in the war on terrorism waged by the American administration. The editor and contributors to this volume, supported by Anthem South Asian Studies and the University of Edinburgh, obviously believed a translation of the earlier work, somewhat updated to connect the events and the immediate aftermath of 9/11, was in order: hence the book here under review. This reviewer has not read the original French edition and he cannot therefore know if the chapters of the English version mirror the former. It is clear, however, that the 'Epilogue' is a new rendering and aims at bridging the Pakistan story prior to and following September 11.

Before discussing the contents of this history it is necessary to say something about its structure and the editor's effort at linking the work of nine individual authors. Single volume histories are generally the endeavour of a sole author. The twelve chapters of this volume, however, have been prepared by a 'research team' primarily but not exclusively associated with the editor of the volume, who is also the director of the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales and a researcher at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique of France. Among the non-affiliated contributors are professors from the University Institute of Higher International Studies in Geneva and Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad. A former French ambassador to Pakistan has also authored one of the chapters. Drawing together so large a team for the

production of a thin volume on the history of Pakistan is a substantial task, notably because the editor did not intend to produce a book containing a series of individual articles, but rather an integrated and seamless presentation. The several authors are identified only by a page in the front matter of the book, which lists their relevant chapters. Not being privy to why this approach was chosen, it can only be said that the book is uneven in its several parts. The reader will have to struggle with an awkwardness of language, or too much compression of facts, as well as a tendency for different authors to trace historical data that should have been dispensed with in the first chapter. There also is a problem with the translation, especially in the first five chapters, where more thorough editing would have caught errors of omission as well as commission.

A case in point is Jaffrelot's contributions that represent Chapters 1 and 3, in addition to the conclusion and epilogue. Chapter one thematically is concerned with the interface between Islamic identity and ethnic tensions. Context and analysis is ignored, in order to fit into this opening chapter all the descriptive material the editor/author judges salient to introduce the reader to illuminate the centrality of the Pakistan experience. The essential problem is organization of data and how to express it. Without the context for the events and issues raised, the initiate will have considerable difficulty in following the movement of the narrative. On the other hand, the informed reader will find little if anything that is new and the cursory manner in which the material is framed will do more to bewilder than edify. Just a glance at the opening page and first two paragraphs in Chapter 1 – mentioning in one breath Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Ayub Khan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Zia ul-Haq and Nawaz Sharif, and attributing specific roles to them in connection with Islamization – will confuse all but perhaps the author. The generalizations that define each of these personalities do little to inform the reader and without context may well mislead the novice.

East Bengal (now Bangladesh) becomes the subject of Chapter 2 and represents the work of France Bhattacharya. But if this chapter was meant to reflect another aspect of the identity dilemma, its limited focus only allows for an examination of some critical events: that is, the Urdu-Bengali language controversy, the failed provincial elections of 1954, and ultimately the aftermath of the 1970 election that led to the 1971 civil war and Indian intervention. Chapter 2 does not connect with the opening chapter, nor does it link with Jaffrelot's Chapter 3, which is aimed at Pakistan's failed quest for democracy. Having just read about the formation of Bangladesh and its succession of leaders in the closing pages of Chapter 2, the reader is treated again to the formation of Pakistan and Jinnah's role at the head of the Muslim League movement in Chapter 3. This drifting back and forth may not offend the knowledgeable reader but the uninformed will have difficulty in following the story line. No less important, the first-time reader interested in Pakistan history will be compelled to accept the one-line qualifiers that define the principal characters. In other words, there is little opportunity for the uninformed to question the author's view of people and events. And it must be assumed that this volume is primarily directed at readers with little, if any, knowledge of the Pakistan experience.

Part II of the book (Chapters 4-6) concerns Pakistan's foreign policy. Chapter 4 is authored by Jean-Luc Racine and is an abstract account of Pakistan's relations with the non-Muslim world, especially the United States. Divided chronologically, it traces Pakistan's membership in American-driven alliances, as well as the country's opening-up to China. In limited fashion it runs through Pakistan's role in the cold war and its immediate aftermath, and ends up with its reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its determination to become a nuclear power. Chapter 5 (also by Racine) centres on Pakistan's policies toward India and particularly the unfinished Kashmir problem. Again, there is a tendency to go back to the beginning, to repeat Jinnah's role in founding the state and the pattern of suspicion and animus created by irreconcilable differences with New Delhi. Pakistan's several wars with India and ultimately the Indian intervention in Pakistan's civil war in East Bengal that caused the dismemberment of the country are quickly reviewed. All are significant events but the author is more concerned with description rather than analysis. As with the preceding chapters, chapters four and five suffer from far too much compression. They leave the reviewer to lament that the design of the book did not allow the individual authors to address directly the more enlightened reader with a more in-depth discussion of such important subjects as Pakistan-United States and Pakistan-India relations.

The final chapter in Part II, Chapter 6, entitled 'Islam and Foreign Policy' is precisely what the book needed

more of. This too-short chapter by Olivier Roy is well-written, well-organised, and balances description with commentary that is informative and provocative. The information contained in this chapter provides the important backdrop to Pakistan's struggle with identity, and more so to the competing forces that push for modernization on the one side and those pulling for the rebirth of traditionalism on the other. 'Islam in Danger' was a major battle cry of the Muslim League in the formation of Pakistan. The continuing contest with India, most notably after the loss of East Pakistan, combined with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, only added to the sustained credence among Muslims in that call. Moreover, the dominance of the Pakistan army in Pakistan's political life led the military to pursue a strategy that, after its 'great debacle' in the 1971 war, argued for a programme that elevated the Pakistani traditionalists over the modernists. The alchemy of these events brought the Islamists into the active political life of the nation and set the scene for the emergence of the Taliban and its impact on Pakistan, as well as Afghanistan. These matters are however not examined by Roy, but are left to Jaffrelot to confront in his epilogue to the book.

The remainder of the book is divided into Part III ('The Economy and Social Structures': Chapters 7-9) and Part IV ('A Plural Culture?': Chapters 10-12). These are brief chapters focused on the land and the people, sociological data, and the problems of economic development. Chapters 7 and 8 have been written by Gilbert Etienne of the University Institute of Higher International Studies at Geneva and are well-constructed and sufficiently detailed introductions to the geography and demographics of Pakistan; in the opinion of this reviewer, Chapter 7 would have made a good introduction or first chapter in this history. It provides the reader with important reference points, although it would have been useful to include in this rendering the role of Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who was called upon by Lord Mountbatten to determine what Pakistan would actually look like following the British transfer of power. With at least this information in hand, it would have given the reader some understanding of why Pakistan's economic development (described in Chapter 8) was so pitifully weak. Nevertheless, like Chapter 7, Chapter 8 contains some useful information. Chapter 9, the work of Pierre LaFrance, a former French ambassador to Pakistan, is an erudite look at the role of caste and tribe in Pakistan. Somewhat an extension of the demographic review found in Chapter 7, it is difficult to understand why it did not follow that chapter; just as chapter 7 would make a better Chapter 1, so Chapter 9 should have been made Chapter 2. Given their placement toward the end of the book, the information they provide is a little belated and reveals the problem noted above in producing a seamless story from so many individual efforts.

Part IV is the last section of the book before the editor's conclusion and epilogue. Chapter 10, entitled 'The Diversity of Islam' and written by Aminah Mohammad, is again an introduction to the world of Muslims, notably those found within the subcontinent. In simple language effort is made to distinguish Sunni from Shi'a and to describe as well the many differences within both Sunni and Shi'a orders, especially between enlightened and modern Muslims and those more traditional in their bearing and practices. Once more, it is inexplicable why such fundamental information appears at the end of the book and not in the early pages. Certainly, this chapter was not drafted with the scholar of Islam in mind. The material in this chapter – as with that in Chapter 11 by Marc Gaborieau – belongs much earlier and should have been combined with Chapter 10 as a single presentation. Gaborieau endeavours to build upon Mohammad's Islamic demography chapter by discussing the clash of views between Islamists and secularists and the strenuous effort at defining Pakistani society and its essential ethos. Chapter 12, 'Languages and Education' drafted by Tariq Rahman of Quaid-i-Azam University, is barely six pages in length and might well have been incorporated in a combined chapter with the work of Mohammad and Gaborieau, eliminating duplicating material, and placed among the opening chapters of the book. Unfortunately useful content and its applicability to the Pakistan scene is lost by virtue of the book's organisation. Indeed, by the time the reader reaches the conclusion and epilogue the scattered nature of the detail has taken its toll.

Organisational problems also plague the unnumbered chapter described as a conclusion and the final more elaborate statement that is presented under the heading 'Epilogue'. Why Jaffrelot, the author of both pieces, did not string them together is not explained. The conclusion, three pages long, is a parting word on 'a country in crisis', whereas the epilogue is titled 'Musharraf and the Islamists: From Support to Opposition After September 11', clearly in response to that event, which took place roughly a year after the French

edition was released. Nevertheless, the subject and focus of the epilogue most certainly comes under the heading of ‘a country in crisis’, not simply Musharraf in crisis. Certainly here there was opportunity to write an entirely new conclusion, to relate it to the chapters preceding it, and to make some effort at forecasting the future. Unfortunately, the editor chose not to do this.

Considerable and diligent effort has gone into this publication of the English version/translation of *A History of Pakistan and its Origins*, but the book has substantial flaws that are more the responsibility of the editor (and to some extent the translator), rather than the scholars who have contributed to this volume. There is much useful data in the book and along with a chronology of events from 1940 to 1999 and a glossary of terms found at the end of the book, it is not without merit.

Notes

1. Published as Histoire du Pakistan (Paris: Fayard, 2000).Back to (1)

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