

BOOK REVIEW

***Kashmir: New Voices, New Approaches.* Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu, Bushra Asif and Cyrus Samii, eds. New Delhi: Viva Books Pvt. Ltd., 2007. Pp. 292.**

The Jammu and Kashmir issue is a longstanding dispute that goes back to the time when India and Pakistan gained independence. Winnowing out the traditional postulations that conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir is an integral part of the national identities of both countries; the authors of this volume have tried to suggest approaches to divert the rivalry towards the resolution. While analysing the role of state and non-state actors in the resolution of the dispute, authors have also written about the political, religious and economic transformations in Jammu and Kashmir – both in the Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), which signify new promises for peace. This volume successfully presents an innovative and multidimensional approach to address the diverse challenges posed by the Kashmir issue at national, sub-national, regional and international levels. This book has three parts: sub-national and national dimensions, international dimension and ‘towards settlement’. Each of these parts reflects Pakistani, Indian and international perspectives by presenting a set of two or more options.

The objective of this book seems to be twofold:

1. To bring together the voices in the region in order to articulate their concerns about the Kashmir issue.
2. To provide solutions to push the process forward, while identifying the challenges.

What comes out of the exercise on the sub-national and national dimensions is that ownership by the Kashmiris to ameliorate the security and economic conditions is vital to change the attitudes. Such ownership is also a prerequisite for peace. It is evident that political, economic and social communication across the Line of Control (LoC) would bring in a sense of respite to both the communities. While presenting the interstate dimension of the conflict, some of the contributors have suggested that

functioning around the existing *status quo* might well be the best choice for a doable solution.

It is important to enhance the international profile of the Jammu and Kashmir issue. In this book, the authors by applying international relation theories to the Kashmir dispute conclude that the regional institutional building and norm setting could alleviate the tension between India and Pakistan. Suggestions have been made to make room for a real peacekeeping in Kashmir. The evolving contemporary normative framework makes the international community's attention to the Kashmir issue imperative. However, despite this compulsion; international community's engagement with the Kashmir issue continues to be episodic, intermittent and by and large unproductive. Pakistan and India's overt acquisition of nuclear weapons, stressed by the contributors, has also impacted the Kashmir Issue. Though nuclearisation itself has not made any noticeable difference in attitudes of the two countries – India and Pakistan, yet stakes for security have escalated dramatically. The authors caution against risks of excessive nationalism and its implications for the Asian balance of power.

The book suggests that the potential for both the process for the resolution of the conflict including internal issues definitely exists. It presents a compelling logic for dealing with the internal dimension on priority basis before any final status settlement at the broader level.

Interestingly, the book brings out the problems that lie ahead in regard to the Kashmiri issue and provides many thought provoking ideas, but, it is obvious that it is fairly tricky to make a dispassionate analysis of the Kashmir issue. Mindsets are hard to modify. In one instance it is suggested that persistence of players is important, but there is also a strong recommendation for exploring substitute/alternative options to resolve the Kashmir issue. This requires, in some authors view, to distance from the Westphalian model of sovereignty. The book highlights that a military solution is not viable. But the authors do not adequately focus on peaceful, constructive approaches to resolve the issue. One of the constructive approaches could be demilitarisation of the Indian Occupied Kashmir and restraining the police force.

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Remaining optimistic, the authors believe that an extraordinary opportunity has arisen to make progress in addressing the Kashmir issue. The authors however, have failed to analyse different sections of society that always benefit from a conflict situation. It is crucial to deal with them effectively.

Peace-building consolidates peace, ensures equitable distribution of resources and helps build social, economic and political institutions. This requires organisation, coordination amongst stakeholders, democratic participation, promotion and protection of human rights and gender equality. The society as a whole needs to embrace peace. In case of Kashmir, the root causes, the interplay of vested interests need to be tackled.

The book is recommended to researchers and analysts focusing on Kashmir because it is certainly a good attempt at writing and compiling different perspectives of the Kashmir issue. It is also useful for students of world politics, Pakistan, Kashmir and conflict studies. Policy makers may also find some out-of-the-box ideas for solution of the one of the most intractable disputes.

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