

BOOK REVIEW

***The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics.*
Ayesha Jalal. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard
University Press, 2014. Pp. 435.**

After more than 67 years of independence, a nuclear armed Pakistan is still struggling to cope with its external and internal challenges. Some of these challenges are being confronted by Pakistan since its birth, while other challenges have emerged recently.

Against this backdrop, Ayesha Jalal, in *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics*, has made an attempt to critically evaluate and trace the origins of contemporary problems including religious extremism, regional dissidence, political, and economic challenges being faced by Pakistan. She made this attempt in order to develop a narrative for the future of a modern Pakistan in a changing globalised world. She argues that in the formative phase, the national character and identity of Pakistan could not be established due to an imbalance between non-elected institutions and elected institutions; and between narratives of Islamic and modern ideology to govern Pakistan. As a result, this imbalance gave rise to military authoritarianism where democracy did not flourish and the country was ruled by the non-elected institutions rather than by its ideology. Through her arguments on military dominance vs. democracy, she points towards flaws in the system and its surrounding or supporting structure. She argues that frequent military rule influenced political and democratic processes and accentuated tensions between provinces, especially between Punjab and non-Punjabi provinces.

To support her main arguments, she gives a comparative analysis of more than five decades of military dominance and the role of democracy in the country. Jalal re-visits the history of pre- and post-colonial Pakistan and identifies the cause and affect of its impact on the struggle for Pakistan. Based on her findings, she has tried to explore a contemporary narrative on Pakistan. She has viewed historical and contemporary developments from her own narrative and tried to explore the national

character, culture and identity of Pakistan by questioning the dominance of military rule and narratives of Islamic ideology to govern Pakistan. She points out that during the transformative phase, military dominance emerged as a one of the salient feature of post-colonial Pakistan. As a result, Jalal argues, the transition from one regime to another was a more like a struggle for power, but not a struggle of an independent Pakistan. Citing the sudden and unexplained deaths of key politicians including Liaquat Ali Khan to Benazir Bhutto, she argues that civilian leadership has not had a full chance even after more than five decades. The lack of public transparency and accountability also led to the rise of military dominance in the backdrop of the Cold War politics.

To debate the question of the rise of military as an important development in Pakistan's state structures, Jalal has established a link between internal and external factors. Global politics, regional rivalries, domestic dilemmas, and institutional imbalance within the country tilted in favour of non-elected institutions. She argues that the Cold War politics greatly influenced strengthening and prolonging military authoritarianism in Pakistan. Military too, utilized Pakistan's unique geo-strategic location towards prolonging their hold to rule the country. She critically views Pakistan's relations with the western powers, particularly with the US, and argues that the country has paid a heavy price in terms of increased internal threats, regional rivalries and collateral damage by becoming an American proxy in Afghanistan. This made Pakistan a security state at the expense of social and economic development.

Jalal believes that Pakistan is still paying the price. Pakistan's image as the axis of global terror network also worked against the Pakistani society. Floods, energy shortage, and bad planning have further added to downgrade Pakistan's economy. Shrinking employment opportunities, flight of the educated class from the country, the role of America and India, class and regional divide, sectarianism, impact of the Afghan war, Talibanisation and increasing radical agenda of Islamic groups has proved disastrous for Pakistan. She further narrates that the military still dominates the current political landscape in the country. It has impacted Pakistan's regional outlook as a nuclear state, and its relations with extra-regional powers, especially with the US and its growing rifts especially

after the latter's withdrawal from Afghanistan. She highlights that growing Indian designs against Pakistan and over Kashmir, could again result in a broader role for the military with reference to ensuring security and maintaining peace with its neighbours, and stability in Afghanistan. Pakistan, Jalal states, has become a 'divided nation' which raises many questions on the kind of Pakistan we are struggling for: an orthodox, religious state or a modern enlightened one? Is military an obstacle or a solution? And questions like, how to secure a nuclear state from imploding?

In order to find answers to these questions, she argues that since the Cold War era is over continuation of military rule the country would be damaging for Pakistan, and any troubled civil-military relations will have severe implications for internal stability, as well as for global peace. However, the resilience of ordinary Pakistanis still presents a hope, as they are still looking for ways to get the country out of all these ills and troubles. They are looking for a better future based on an Islamic identity with the imperatives of a modern nation state. She stresses that there is a need to complement cultural layers of the society and geographical diversity to ensure harmony. Therefore, there is a need to initiate a public debate to address constraints and available opportunities. She believes that Pakistan is at a crucial crossroads and it requires a commitment to Islam and modern state. According to Jalal, the time has come to stand up and speak about our identity, sovereignty and society.

Jalal has been successful in drawing out important lessons by critically evaluating history for the future of Pakistan in a changing global order. The book is a very significant study and provides a fresh perspective on the history of Pakistan. Although at times, her narrative becomes too critical and gives a conflicting view of certain developments in the past, her criticism is objective, especially if one views this study as a guide to correct the future course of Pakistan by looking at past mistakes. This claim can be verified by many experts who have read Jalal's work. According to Vali Nasr, "the book is a perceptive look at the idea and reality of Pakistan, its history and future in the context of the global order." Ahmed Rashid considers Jalal's work as a serious academic and political debate in Pakistan about the role of military. Khaled Ahmed

believes that this work can serve as a “diagnostic observation” for the problems of Pakistan.

This book is recommended for historians, policy making experts, students of international relations, and for the political leadership.

Malik Qasim Mustafa, Senior Research Fellow,
Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad.
