

## BOOK REVIEW

***The Longest August: The Unflinching Rivalry between India and Pakistan.* Dilip Hiro. NY: Nation Books, 2015. Pp: 503**

Dilip Hiro, one of the leading experts on South Asia, in *The Longest August* narrates a detailed history of the partition of the subcontinent into the two states of India and Pakistan. Hiro plunges into a deep account of how the Indian sub-continent was carved and what followed later in a lucid narrative, which describes the bitter and antagonistic relationship between the two arch rivals - India and Pakistan. The book is divided into twenty chapters which give an extremely detailed account of history in a story telling technique which makes the book a comfortable read. Interestingly, the author narrates, with comfortable ease, the account of the partition, which he himself experienced as a young boy while migrating from Larkana to Bombay.

The author delves into the details of the largest mass migration in history and how the communal bloodbath resulted in the death of millions of people. The book begins by narrating the eventful period prior to partition, explaining the pre-partition politics with great detail, while explaining the efforts of Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Mahatma Gandhi for Hindu-Muslim unity and self-rule in the Indian subcontinent. Although both Jinnah and Gandhi tried to aim for the self-determination of their people, yet each had a different approach to achieving the desired goals. Jinnah was a staunch constitutionalist, whereas Gandhi was inclined towards unconstitutional means, like civil disobedience. The British were exhausted by the World War and wanted to depart from the Indian subcontinent and while leaving, transfer power to Indian hands. However, the Muslim League and the Congress failed to achieve consensus, which resulted in the failure of the prospects of a United India. Subsequently, a rise in violence also further dampened any prospects of Hindu-Muslim unity. The chapters dealing with the partition of British India are the most interesting and the writer's grip on the subject is very firm and the characters of Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Mahatma Gandhi are brought to life by explaining their influence, intelligence and statesmanship. The author makes a convincing effort to explain how partition became

inevitable after going into the details of the events which lead to the partition of United India.

The second half of the book illuminates how the fledgling new states dealt with problems of governance and politics, explaining India's experiment with democracy and Pakistan's experiences with military dictatorships, and how eventually, these different types of governance choices lead to the various domestic and foreign policy outcomes and the shaping of their outlook as nations on the whole. The wars between India and Pakistan are also examined in great detail, and Pakistan's tilt towards the United States and India's non-alignment is also explained with great finesse, while subsequently explaining events in a lot of detail. The effects of the Cold War on the two countries foreign policy outlooks are also given considerable attention. The author also touches upon the evolution of Hindu nationalism in India and the Islamisation process in Pakistan, along with their foreign policy choices. Domestic political upheavals in Pakistan and the subsequent dismissal of democratically elected governments in Pakistan are also touched upon.

The author dedicates a chapter to the acquisition of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan, while explaining how leadership in the West tried to dissuade Pakistan from going forward and detonating nuclear devices.

Hiro's chronological narrative explains events in great detail but at times, misses out on analysis. The failures and successes of both India and Pakistan are dealt with fairly. While the book is about the two countries partitioned in August, only to become bitter archrivals, the author also mentions the role and influence of global players in playing their power games while aligning with either of the two countries to leverage the Indo-Pak rivalry to achieve their own ends. The bitter wars fought between India and Pakistan as well as the fall of Dhaka and the formation of Bangladesh is dealt with in great detail, along with the espionage activities taking place between the two countries. The highs and lows in relations between India and Pakistan, during periods of democratic rule as well as military dictatorships in Pakistan, have been given a fair share of space.

The book deals with India and Pakistan's efforts to woo the leadership in Afghanistan and win over the war-torn country's support. Since India

had no diplomatic ties with the Taliban government in Afghanistan prior to September 11 attacks, the fall of the Taliban government signaled the beginning of India's pro-active policy towards Afghanistan. Much detail is given of India's investment in Kabul and also of India's deft diplomacy in promoting Indian culture and influence. Pakistan's tense parleys with Kabul are also touched upon, including the exchanges of fire across the Durand Line.

The last chapter of the book deals with the common sharing of values between India and Pakistan and also the keenness on both sides for cultural exchanges in the fields of film and music. Cricket diplomacy is also touched upon, as both countries have a large number of cricket fans, who love to experience the thrill when the archrivals play against each other. The matches between India and Pakistan are a nerve wracking experience with millions of cricket fans on both sides of the border holding on to their hearts in tense nail biting experiences.

Dilip Hiro captures the reader's interest while throwing light on the bitter contours of rivalry between India and Pakistan, and the evolution of the two countries into their present form. The book begins by giving deep insights into the history of partition and the evolution of two modern nation states, with their past baggage of conflict and rivalry which has had an effect on their policy outlooks in present times. The author has masterfully captured every detail and the book offers great insights into both the countries past, present and future.

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