

Jamshed Marker, *Cover Point* (Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2016), 193

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Ambassador Jamshed Marker, a distinguished diplomat with a rich experience of holding several important positions in the Foreign Service of Pakistan, in his book *Cover Point*, gives an in-depth analysis of the various military and civilian leaders of Pakistan. Marker's book is a detailed account of how Pakistan progressed or regressed, for that matter under the various leaders, both civilian and military. The book starts with the recollection of the author's experience as a test cricketer, from where he moves to shed light on his experience as a diplomat. In cricket terms, he was at cover point, 'near enough to the wicket to follow the action around the stumps...yet sufficiently distant for a general overview of the state of play.'

The author states that all leaders in Pakistan, with the exception of its founding leaders, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan, usurped power, at some point through coups, military interventions or manipulated electoral processes. The book is not a chronology of the historical events in Pakistan's history but the author's remembrance of his experiences while working with various Pakistani leaders. Pakistan, being a nascent state, located in an important geo-strategic neighbourhood and being caught in the cross hairs of the Cold War, required many behind the scenes efforts in negotiating with great powers. The book starts with explaining the early days of Pakistan and how a smooth succession of the leadership, in a newly created state, was the only time when power transition was smooth and conducted under acceptable norms. The newly created state of Pakistan, struggling with the birth pangs of a new set up, confronted various challenges like the massive inflows of refugees which the author witnessed as a young government officer.

Marker tells his readers that he did not have the opportunity to meet Muhammad Ali Jinnah but his rendezvous with the leadership that followed to help him gather impressions. While talking about Liaquat

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Ali Khan, the author quotes his association as “entirely social and personal” as it was Liaquat Ali Khan who suggested him to join Foreign Service of Pakistan. The author gives credit to Liaquat Ali Khan of holding the newly created country together as well as making the effort of strengthening the institutions. The author also recounts Liaquat Ali Khan’s visit to the United States and denies the popularly held belief that Liaquat Ali Khan had received invitations from both the United States and Soviet Union.

The author briefly mentions his brief interaction with Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and Iskander Mirza, and narrates how power was cultivated in the nascent state of Pakistan. The detailed chapter on Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan describes his rise to power and decision to send back the troops to the barracks and depend on the civil bureaucracy for administration purposes. He admires the decade of economic development and harmony under the leadership of Ayub Khan when the government functioned smoothly and the public reposed a certain level of trust in the government. On the foreign front, he states that Pakistan’s standing considerably improved and the international media termed Ayub Khan “De Gaulle of Asia”.

While moving forward beyond the Ayub Khan era, the author reflects on his impressions of General Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan whose tenure was marked by turbulence and the disintegration of Pakistan. Here, the author criticizes Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman for exploiting their differences. In a chapter on Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the author writes that Bhutto, despite his diplomatic skills, failed on many accounts due to his dictatorial tendencies.

Shedding light on the era of General Zia ul Haq who ruled Pakistan with an iron fist until his death in a plane crash in the summer of 1988, Marker points out the dictatorial character of Zia in domestic affairs but who displayed utmost courtesy with foreign delegations. The author also mentions the uncomfortable relationship between General Zia and Mohammad Khan Junejo, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, duly selected by Zia himself. President Ghulam Ishaq Khan has been described as a patriot, a good administrator, incorruptible and dedicated to his work by the author. However, the author terms Ghulam Ishaq’s inability to adapt to political climate as his failure.

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General Zia's death was followed by the elections and the subsequent political instability ending in the short lived governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. The very brief tenure of Moeen Qureshi has also been mentioned in some detail, while praising his ability as a brilliant economist. Marker mentions Benazir Bhutto's courage and boldness but he is highly skeptical of her incompetence and style of governance and considers her to be a no match for her father who was far more intelligent. The author has also criticized Nawaz Sharif's leadership qualities. In the last chapter, he mentions that General Pervez Musharra's inclination for defensive behaviour and how his fixation to cling to power led to the many grave mistakes that he made in due course of time.

The book is an interesting account of a seasoned diplomat's impressions of the various leaders of Pakistan, both civil and military. In doing this, the author gives an account of history and the events that unfolded in the most interesting manner.