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From Jinnah to Jihad: Pakistan's Kashmir Quest and the Limits of Realism

by Arvin Bahl

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The book under review is a work of passion, and rightly brings out the limits of realist paradigm while analysing Pakistan's pathological obsession with Kashmir. As a promising young scholar of international affairs, Bahl starts off his work on a promising note. Any reader for sure, especially if he/she is an Indian will savour his small book and agree with most of his observations pertaining to Pakistan's identity, its unreasonable quest for parity with India, its move to take out the valley of Kashmir by hook or by crook and the myopic formulation of its foreign policy on exclusive anti-India terms. The author minces no words when he dwells on the unsustainability of Pakistan's defence and security policy which he brings out quite clearly quoting figures on budgetary allocations. He concludes by quoting noted Pakistani commentators like Ardeshir Cowasjee, Faruqi, Haqqani and others that such pursuit of such myopic policies might lead to disastrous consequences for Pakistan.

Even if one would have liked the author to go beyond his rudimentary discussion of realism, liberalism and constructivism and wished him to provide a more useful account, the discussion that follows does justice to the central argument he makes in the book that Pakistan's foreign and security policies vis-a-vis Kashmir betrays the realist paradigm. As his supervisor's note indicates, he has banked on both primary and secondary sources as well as interviews with many knowledgeable sources in India and Pakistan to draw his 'cogently argued' conclusions.

One cannot agree more with some of his observations. They may look hackneyed to an Indian scholar in a way, but they would still require repetition given the lack of understanding of the Kashmir issue at the international level. In fact, in the world today, irrespective of the celebration of Indian democracy all around, the case of Kashmir is cited as an example where

Indian leadership has erred grievously. Due to aggressive propaganda on Kashmir by Pakistan, India's ethical and moral stand on Kashmir is often overlooked. But for the 9/11, even the US was not ready to accept Pakistani sponsorship of terrorism in Kashmir and displayed utter insensitivity to Indian concerns. In this context, the book is a welcome attempt to reiterate the position of India and explain the irrational stand of Pakistan on Kashmir.

The author makes a very perceptive comment quoting Atul Kohli's observation that unlike in the case of other insurgencies, there has not been an inverse 'U' turn in Kashmir, primarily because Pakistan did not allow Kashmiris to get used to Indian democracy. But for external incitement Kashmir would have been a brilliant example of India's pluralism and democracy.

The author also draws attention to the de-indigenisation of Kashmiri struggle and the disillusionment of average Kashmiri with violence. He rightly observes that it is primarily because of the way Pakistan's identity is defined that success of Indian democracy and its secularism is viewed as a negation of the very basis of Pakistani identity. Therefore, he argues quite convincingly that Pakistani sense of insecurity springs from its ideological core which has been partially discredited by separation of its eastern half in 1971. The author rightly alludes to Pakistan's Islamic identity and the corollary position that Pakistan has a duty to protect the interests of Muslims in Kashmir and around the world, which run counter to the realist argument that states are rational actors acting on the basis of reason rather than emotion.

The author takes a peep into domestic factors and in a short and crisp discussion outlines the reasons for institutionalisation of 'militarism' in Pakistan, which privileges the army over the civilian leadership. He quotes from the school text books to prove how anti-India sentiments are propagated across generations and how this indirectly legitimises military's hold on politics and society. He also hints at the Punjabi domination in Pakistani statecraft and argues quite cogently, based on his analysis of history, that the Punjabi elite would continue to be obsessed with Kashmir because it formed the core of Muslim nationalism in Punjab during the pre-partition days. In fact, many Kashmiri migrants to Punjab during this period carried with them tales of their oppression under the Hindu ruler in Kashmir. This situation is unlikely to change in Pakistan and hence Punjabi domination in Pakistani army and other organs of the state is likely to propel an aggressive and non-compromising pro-Kashmir agenda in future too.

The author makes some useful policy recommendations for the US administration towards the end of the book. He believes that the US can play a useful role without involving itself directly in the talks between India and Pakistan. He rightly endorses dialogue between India and Pakistan and the process of democracy which is taking roots in Kashmir. It is true, as the author argues, that if Kashmiris find Indian democracy least penetrative and beneficial to their interests then Pakistan will lose its standing among the Kashmiris. In this context, the author is quite confident that cross-LoC links will go a long way in assuaging Kashmiri fears and lay the foundations for Indo-Pak reconciliation.

The author's argument that the US should muster all its resources to promote democracy in Pakistan is also quite valid here. A democratic Pakistan, the author believes would be more

amenable to talks and settlement of issues through dialogue rather than through sponsoring of insurgencies, terrorism and war.

Last but not the least, the author could have been more cautious on his observations on 1987 elections in Kashmir, which he wrongly argues was manipulated by New Delhi. Similarly, his discourse on Pakistani domestic politics, especially through a constructivist paradigm, could have been more rigorously done.

All in all, the perspective of an American of Indian origin, who seeks to understand the issue in the post-9/11 context comes out loud and clear in the book. It is a welcome addition to the existing literature on Kashmir and Indo-Pak relations.