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BOOK REVIEW

ANGER MANAGEMENT

THE TROUBLED DIPLOMATIC
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
INDIA AND PAKISTAN

BY

AJAY BISARIA

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Safoora Yousuf*



India and Pakistan, two nuclear-armed neighbours, share a relationship characterised by mutual hostility interspersed with periods of relative peace and calm.

Reflecting on this dynamic, Shyam Saran, former Foreign Secretary of India, describes the India-Pakistan relationship as a puzzle that cycles through dialogue-disruption-dialogue dynamic. Islamabad remains a particularly challenging neighbour for New Delhi given that their bilateral relationship has historically been fraught with complexity with the former Indian diplomat Sharat Sabharwal aptly terming it as India's "conundrum."

Over the years, this fraught bilateral relationship has received significant scholarly attention to unravel its multiple complexities. One of the latest attempts in this regard is a book titled *Anger Management* by Ajay Bisaria, a seasoned diplomat who served as India's High Commissioner to Pakistan from 2017 to 2019 when Islamabad downgraded its relationship with New Delhi as a reaction to the Jammu and Kashmir's constitutional rearrangement through the de-operationalisation of Article 370. The author invites readers to examine the tempestuous ties between these two

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nations through the lens of diplomacy and explore the way India navigates this puzzle. It is an exhaustive account of the Indo-Pak relations, with as many as 34 chapters divided into eight sections, tracing their engagements of over 76 years right from 1947 through 2023.

For Bisaria, the relationship between India and Pakistan has been stormy, rocky, and turbulent since their birth as the successor states of British India amidst the chaos of partition in 1947. In the introduction of the book, he argues that “anger” is the defining motif of the Indo-Pak dynamic, stemming from issues such as partition, territorial disputes, and terrorism, hence the name *Anger Management*. These issues are deeply entrenched and challenging to resolve, making the effective management of relationships essential to prevent further deterioration. Moreover, the book seeks to answer critical questions such as what do Indian diplomats do in Pakistan, and how do they manage a relationship that is fraught with more lows than highs and more pessimism than hope?

The author highlights the vital role of diplomats in improving the strained ties between the two nations, particularly lauding the efforts of early diplomats who, despite

operating under the shadow of a traumatic partition, managed to pave the way for significant milestones such as defining the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir, the Indus Waters Treaty for sharing river waters, and the Nehru-Liaquat Pact (1950) for protecting minority rights. While political leadership has often been the driver of diplomacy, structural factors such as the dominance of the Pakistani military in its polity have also significantly influenced the bilateral relationship. Bisaria particularly highlights the Pakistan Army’s role in its policy approach towards New Delhi, which, as he argues, is demonstrative of its paranoia about India.

The book argues that Pakistan’s foundation on the two-nation theory was inherently flawed, as it defied the dominant Western notion of a nation-state rooted in territorial identity rather than religion. India, in contrast, embraced a composite nationalism based on territorial integrity with a minimal role for religion in state affairs. For Bisaria, it is this identity crisis for Pakistan to define itself and build an image of significant other of India that has significantly impacted its relationship with New Delhi. Pakistan has persistently sought not just parity with India but also emphasised its differences, going so far as to designate August 14 as its

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Independence Day to distinguish itself from India's "midnight moment" on August 15 (chapters 1-4).

Besides this identity crisis, the book highlights that the ideological precepts, territorial sovereignty and security considerations heavily weighed on Pakistan's psyche vis-à-vis its relationship with India. Moreover, it emphasises that partition became South Asia's major turning point in the 20th century, triggering debates on identity, territory, security, nationalism, minority rights, and migration. While Pakistan struggled to create new state mechanisms, India inherited the administrative structures left by the British colonial state. These early years of state-building and diplomacy are highlighted in chapter 5.

In Section 2 (Dictators and Democrats), which examines the developments during the 1957-1967 period, Bisaria argues that despite signing the Nehru-Liaquat Pact and a 1951 trade agreement that prioritised economic sense over political animosity, the two nations diverged in their trajectories. Whereas India operationalised its secular democratic republic, Pakistan experienced its first military coup in 1958 under General Ayub Khan, turning it into a 'garrison state' and

straining relations further (Chapters 6-8). It argues that these divergent political trajectories transformed their initial 'working' relationship of the 1950s, which subsequently led to a significant reversal in bilateral ties, marked by wars in 1965 and 1971, with the latter resulting in the creation of Bangladesh (Chapter 9).

Bisaria reviews efforts to revive diplomacy in the 1970s, particularly through the Shimla Agreement (1972), by attempting to establish a framework for peace, with both nations committing to resolve disputes bilaterally. However, this optimism was short-lived as Pakistan exploited unrest in Punjab in the 1980s to "bleed India by a thousand cuts," followed by its support to the insurgency in Kashmir and adopting terrorism as its state policy vis-à-vis India, as highlighted in Chapters 8-12.

The book explores (chapters 13-17) how moments of thaw in bilateral relations were often deceptive, given that the underlying tensions never disappeared. For instance, the establishment of SAARC in 1985 offered a platform for dialogue when bilateral summits were politically infeasible. Meetings between Prime Ministers Rajiv Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto in 1988 briefly raised hopes, but these were dashed by political

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upheavals and tragedies, including Gandhi's assassination in 1991. However, Bisaria argues that the tactical use of cross-border terrorism by Pakistan, including the Pakistan Army-sponsored incursion into Indian territory in Kargil (1999), was to offset its strategic disadvantages and avenge the 1971 defeat. In this context, the book (Chapters 18-22) highlights how any subsequent bilateral engagement, such as the Agra Summit (2001), has been disrupted by terrorist attacks, including the 2001 Indian Parliament attack and the 2008 Mumbai attacks, by groups nurtured by Pakistan Army over the years, thereby highlighting a policy discord in Islamabad between the powerful military establishment and docile civilian executive.

Bisaria provides an exhaustive diplomatic account of the back-channel negotiations between the two countries in the early 2000s that have been regarded as the most productive means of bilateral engagement. For instance, the book reveals how this track-two diplomacy, led by Ambassador Satinder Lambah and Tariq Aziz, had by 2007 resulted in a broader understanding of the contours of a deal over Kashmir based on President General Pervez Musharraf's 'Four Point Formula'

and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's 'Amritsar Speech.' Despite nearing a breakthrough in Jammu and Kashmir, these efforts were derailed by the fall of Pervez Musharraf and the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

In the book's final section, *Tough Talking (chapters 31-34)*, Bisaria focuses on the rise of the BJP under Narendra Modi and its impact on India-Pakistan relations. He argues that while PM Modi initially sought innovative diplomatic outreach, including the "swearing-in diplomacy" of inviting SAARC leaders to his 2014 inauguration or by making an impromptu visit to Lahore while returning from Afghanistan (2015) to wish Pakistan's PM Nawaz Sharif his 66th birthday, subsequent events such as the terrorist attacks in Uri (2016), Pulwama (2019) by Pakistan-based groups, India's Balakot strike (2019), and the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's Article 370 plunged their relations to a new low. The hope of a *modus vivendi* has remained out of sight.

In the conclusion of the book, the author emphasises the need for both nations to prioritise long-term interests over short-term animosities and move from a securitised hostile relationship to a normal neighbourly,

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if not friendly, one. This shift would require creativity, flexibility and mutual trust, even as he argues that diplomacy must evolve from anger management to interest management to ensure the prosperity of the two billion people of South Asia.

Nevertheless, Ambassador Ajay Bisaria's book overall is very insightful and well-researched work

on the India-Pakistan relationship and presents a diplomatic account of what transpires behind the curtains between the two countries as they navigate the challenges. Anyone, be it the students of South Asian studies, IR, political science, policymakers, experts, journalists, or the general public interested in understanding the nuances of Indo-Pak relations, would find the book helpful. ■

Note for readers and subscribers

We are happy to inform you that from January 2009 we have introduced the system of peer review of articles to ensure quality of publications and improve the scholarly value of our journal. We have a renowned group of scholars and academicians associated with our Centre and they are helping us in this process. We are grateful to them for their kind support and cooperation.

We would request our readers and subscribers to take note of these changes and we would, as ever, encourage them to send in research articles for publication to us. The manuscripts of research papers submitted for publication should be neatly typed in double space and the length of the papers should be ideally between 3,000-5000 words including the references. They should contain an abstract and a short introduction of the author. The authors should use Chicago Manual Style for their references. The articles can be sent to us in an electronic format, preferably Ms Word. For detailed guidelines they may send their queries to us in the following address.

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