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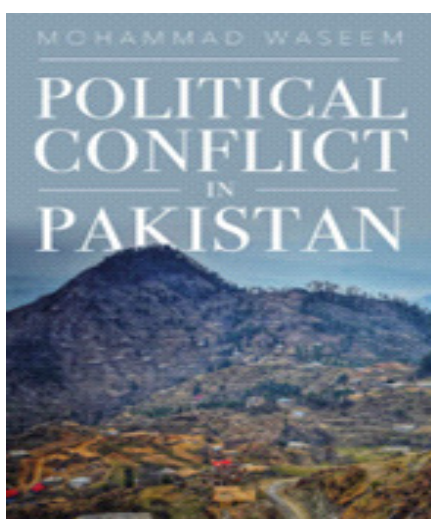
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BOOK REVIEW



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Afroz Khan

There is a good corpus of literature available on the history and the idea of Pakistan and the process which led to the development of a complex relationship between India and Pakistan. What is common in this rich array of literature is that they focus

on the history or origin of Pakistan and its descent into conflict. Most of the literature focuses on the cause of the conflict and its consequence in a chronological order. However, Mohammad Waseem's recent book *Political Conflict in Pakistan* has taken a different approach and tried to analyse the conflict in Pakistan thematically. The central focus of the book is on political conflict and Waseem argues in the book that political conflict can be studied as both destructive and constitutive for social order. In the book, he discusses conflict among groups, communities, classes, ideologies and institutions, which has shaped the country's political dynamics. The author examines the theory surrounding the millennium-long conflict between Hindus and Muslims as separate nations who practiced syncretic belief-systems and holds that the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs pursued their politics in such a manner that there was a twentieth-century clash of communities in the subcontinent, leading to partition.

The book is divided into seven chapters excluding the introduction

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and the conclusion. The thematic arrangement of all the chapters is quite logical and they deal with a whole range of issues, i.e., the history of conflict, the master narrative of the state, the friction between two power centres, the nature of democracy (establishmentarian), constitutional dynamics, the mass public and the last one, intriguingly labelled, 'The Outsider'. Waseem, in this book, has dealt exhaustively with political conflict concerning four major themes: conflict within (institutional design, master narrative, two power centres, clash of institutions); state and ethnicity (federalism, provincial autonomy, ethnicity, clash of cultures); subaltern (non-conflict) (patronage, justice, the status quo, the face of the state in a district and the subaltern in action); state and religion (the Two-Nation theory, Islamisation of laws, minoritisation of communities, modernism versus traditionalism etc.).

The author argues that the conflict itself is ingrained in the society in Pakistan as in many post-colonial countries in Asia and Africa. He argues that the politics of the post-colonial states are about the conflict between the state's various institutions, i.e., the Judiciary, the Executive, and the Legislature as well as conflict between the civilian

administration and the military. The conflict resolution mechanisms in many of these countries have not been too effective. The modern western states (mainly the liberal democracies of the west) like the USA, England and France experienced wholesale socio-political changes and the institutions developed in tandem. The institutions are as modern as the society in which they are embedded. This, however, is not the case with the postcolonial states. The colonial framework which was designed to rule constrained the development of socio-political forces. There was, thus, a gap between the institutions and society. They are often not on the same track. In postcolonial societies, the gap between the modern state and traditional society makes conflict endemic, Waseem would aver.

The reason for this conflict is also in the way the institutions were designed in many of these states. The states emphasised unity and integrity, born as they were, out of colonially administered territories, which were plural and diverse encompassing multiple ethnic and linguistic groups. The craze for unity in Pakistan, which, from the very beginning, emphasised the idea of uniformity in terms of one nation,

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ignored the linguistic, and ethnic identities which has been the reason for divisions and secessions in many countries including Pakistan. The author argues that the whole nation-building project which started with the independence of Pakistan on 15 August 1947, was problematic. The agenda of de-Indianisation or the idea that everything is bad about Hindu India defined this process. The idea that Pakistan must have a unique identity of its own was also problematic. The new national identity, i.e., exclusive Muslim identity, was in contradiction with the civilisational history of people. This agenda of de-Indianisation became the master narrative to re-imagine or remake history to give a sense of identity to the people. Waseem would regard this process as defective and recommends that this path should be shunned.

The author identifies two power centres managing or influencing the process of nation-building. They are the 'middle class' and the 'political class'. They are in an unending conflict with each other. In Pakistan, this middle class is the custodian of the state ideology and the power structure. Their narrative in Pakistan is the master narrative. Earlier the *Muhajirs*, as the migrant Muslims from India came to be known,

represented this middle class and later the Punjabis grabbed this place. This middle class owed a lot to the colonial process of administration and state-building. The British took power from the 'Ashraf' (the landed aristocracy) and handed it over to the 'middle class', to manage the state. This Muslim middle class, soon after the formation of Pakistan, took the first step to build the community and then went on to build the nation.

The author argues forcefully that in the post-independence era, the Indian middle class was represented in the politics through the party system, in a constitutional and parliamentary framework. But in Pakistan, this middle class found its institutional expression in bureaucracy and later in the officer cadre in the Army. The *muhajirs* constituted the middle class in Pakistan to begin with. They were educated and skilled and could easily fill the vacuum created by the middle-class Sikhs and Hindus who opted for and migrated to India after the partition. It is quite another thing that the Hindu and Sikh migrants from Pakistan did not get the status that Mujahirs got in Pakistan. This middle class in Pakistan found elections a challenge to the status quo and felt threatened by the prospect of new elites ascending to power at

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their cost. They never liked the idea of representative government due to their numerical insignificance compared to other communities. Therefore, they emphasized rule of law over public representation. This status-quoist attitude of the middle-class led to direct conflict with the political class represented by the landed aristocrats and feudal landlords. During the colonial period, they collaborated with colonial authorities to control the levers of administration. They lost their importance with the advent of representative politics and started demanding their share in the emerging power architecture through participation in the provincial governments. The middle

class consisting of the Muhajirs was the insiders and considered the political class that tried to assume power through representative and democratic means as outsiders. This led to a never-ending competition between the two power centres in Pakistan, which characterises the civil-military conflict to this day.

Overall, the book titled *Political Conflict in Pakistan* is a comprehensive work on political conflict, the nature of the state and political institutions and processes in Pakistan. It is must read for those aspiring to understand the conflict within Pakistan and its long-term impact on Pakistani society and politics. ■

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 footnotes. They should contain an abstract and a short introduction of the author. The authors should use Harvard style for their references. The articles can be sent to us in an electronic format, (Ms Word 2003 format) also. For detailed guidelines they may send their queries to us in the following address.

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