H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Ravi Kalia, ed. *Pakistan: From the Rhetoric of Democracy to the Rise of Militancy.* New Delhi: Routledge, 2010. 264 pp. $95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-67040-1.

Reviewed by S. Akbar Zaidi (Columbia University)
Published on H-Asia (November, 2012)
Commissioned by Sumit Guha

The Burden of History, and of Islam

This might sound like a contradiction in terms, but one of the strengths of this book also ends up as its major weakness. Or, if one wants to be more charitable, one can say that the major strength of this book is that it opens up a discussion which highlights serious problems that allow one to criticize a substantial core theme of the collection. This perhaps overshadows the subsequent analysis. The strength of this book, and its weakness, is its extensive recourse to history.

Books on Pakistan are now published fairly frequently, but Ravi Kalia's edited *Pakistan* is superior to many of the collaborative edited volumes recently published. First, many of Kalia's contributors are not the well-known usual suspects who write endlessly on Pakistan. This fact allows for a markedly different perspective. Second, while many books on Pakistan published in India demonize Pakistan far more than is justified, in this collection, apart from the occasional Pakistan bashing in which some contributors engage, most of the critical commentary is accurate and justified. This criticism is welcome, as it contains many insights not seen in previous analytic writing about Pakistan.

Even though this collection offers valuable insights, there are numerous serious flaws in the book. Although the book's subtitle contains both "democracy" and "militancy" as core themes, not all contributions deal with both or either, and, in fact, some go off on tangents–such as the "burden of history"–which are unrelated to the essay's theme. The editor's introduction is probably the book's weakest part; it is only two-and-a-half pages long and does not lay out the collection's plan, theme, or organization. Rather than an introduction, it could easily have been a preface, if anything at all. If potential readers open the book to the introduction to decide whether they should buy or read the book, they will surely not do either. The introduction does not inform prospective readers about what lies ahead and importantly, does not link the chapters to the book's overall themes. Furthermore, Kalia makes sweeping generalizations drawn from already existing preconceived (primarily negative) notions about Pakistan.

The second chapter, written by Kalia, "Jinnah's Pakistan," and the last chapter, by Ainslie T. Embree, "Pakistan: The Burden of Islam," like some others in this collection, suffer from too much irrelevant historical analysis used to explain present-day phenomena. The attempt to explain modern Pakistan on the basis of what Muhammad Ali Jinnah may or may not have said is as absurd as using quotations from the Quran, or descriptions from thirteenth-century Indian scholars and personalities to explain why Pakistan is the way it is today. Kalia does much of the former and Embree the latter. While the historical narrative in both pieces is not incorrect and is useful in understanding the history of particular periods, what seems quite senseless is to use historical actors, who have little bearing on the present, to explain modern features and events.

Kalia, for instance, asks whether Jinnah bequeathed "to Pakistan a legacy that has created a crisis of identity and political instability" (p. 14). It is odd to hold Jinnah responsible for what Pakistan is today, for better and for worse, since he had little or no role in setting Pakistan's course. Jinnah's Pakistan died soon after Pakistan was created, and the likes of Ayub Khan and especially Zia ul Haq forged Pakistan in different images more suited to their needs and personalities. Kalia, and some of his contributors, fail to understand the crucial difference between a Muslim consciousness and an Islamic one in the context of Pakistan, not just today, but also in the 1940s and in the following formative decades. Explaining Jinnah's nonaction in the Calcutta riots of 1946, for example, Kalia writes that "whichever way you look at it, the Calcutta killings were produced by his position and the demand for Pakistan," which leads him to say in the follow-

ing paragraph that "equally significant is that Jinnah set a precedent that would be repeated after Pakistan was formulated," which eventually led to jihadism in Pakistan. Kalia suggests that it was Jinnah's position on Muslim statehood that led to such religious violence in independent Pakistan, for "this was a terrible legacy from which Pakistan has not been able to rescue itself" (p. 17). Moreover, Kalia includes an extremely odd two-page diversion in this chapter, in which he compares Jinnah to Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, and argues that Jinnah was dissimilar to both. Other odd statements implicate Jinnah in making Pakistan a military state and in "ardently" promoting a U.S.-Pakistan relationship. Jinnah is irrelevant to modern Pakistan as too much has intervened since his time, and Pakistan has changed course from any of Jinnah's imaginary futures. Kalia misses this critical point completely, and uses Jinnah's statements to explain developments in Pakistan today.

Oskar Verkaaik, writing on *muhajir* politics and the Muhajir Qaumi movement, makes the extraordinary claim that "the Muhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) is perhaps the most interesting political phenomenon produced by the unique political culture that has come about in Pakistan's relatively short history" (p. 49). One can list dozens of political phenomena, including the separation of East Pakistan, the rise of militant Islam, the persistence of the military, praetorian democracy, and many more. Given this list, how can the formation of the MQM, though doubtless important, be the "most interesting political phenomenon" in Pakistan? Verkaaik, again oddly, discusses the "stunning decline" of the MQM since the mid-1990s, despite the fact that the party has consistently been the third largest political party in Pakistan, and was a key supporter of General Pervez Musharraf's praetorian democracy from 2002 to 2008, and in fact, from 1999, just as it has been a key coalition partner of the incumbent Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) since 2008. The MQM has seen its heyday after the mid-1990s. As events over the recent years suggest, Verkaaik is also wrong in stating that the party is "no longer capable of bringing large crowds out into the streets, as it had done in the 1980s and early 1990s" (p. 59). Anyone living in Karachi can vouch for the ability of the MQM to bring out huge crowds at a moment's notice. The BBC declared that a women's rally called by the MQM in February 2012 was the largest congregation of women ever organized in the world.

Annie Harper's intelligent chapter on the city of Islamabad seems to be a misfit in a collection on democracy and militancy in Pakistan, although if one broadens the notion of democracy, it does offer a critique by arguing that Islamabad represents the Pakistani nation and an "authoritarian, exclusive city … a space for the privileged and the powerful" (p. 65). It is a city "of the privileged, keeping the poor upon who it depends close by, but largely invisible," with "deep social hierarchies upon which the lives of the privileged depend" (p. 78). Unfortunately, the essay includes only a footnote regarding Islamabad's post-2007 predicament, of militarization and militancy following the radicalization of the Lal Masjid and the Marriott Hotel bombing, and of the city now more segregated by road blocks. An engagement with these new forms of social divisions would have been fruitful.

Tahmina Rashid's chapter on women in Pakistan, while rich in its historical accounts of the women's movement, spends far too much time on women's efforts to secure their rights in colonial and European encounters and in the anticolonial movement, since much of this is already well known in the numerous accounts of the history of women's rights in Pakistan. Similarly, the rise of women's movements under Zia has also been extensively researched by feminists in Pakistan. The essay lacks insight into the significant developments for women, and what they meant for feminist politics, in the "enlightened moderation" years of General Musharraf and the four years of democracy since then. Many of the achievements for women in that period–such as reserved seats for women in all three tiers of elected bodies, the attempt to dilute Islamic laws, and the opening up of social spaces for women in the last decade–deserve critical examination.

The next chapter by T. C. A. Rangachari, a long essay without subsections, an introduction, or a conclusion, also excessively recounts certain developments of history, which are then used to explain Pakistan's current dilemma of democracy. Details of what Syed Ahmad Khan said in Patna in 1883, or comments based on the president's speech at the third session of the Indian National Congress in 1888, for example, might be interesting as moments in history, but fail to explain modern Pakistan and its democratic dilemmas. Similarly, while separate electorates under the colonial government might help to explain why partition took place, they do not help to explain Pakistan's democracy. Nevertheless, Rangachari does provide good analysis of why democracy has failed in Pakistan when he examines the role and actions of more recent actors, such as the military and politicians. In numerous places, he emphasizes how the politicians and the military have collaborated, with the military always determining the rules of its game. Under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, he writes, "politicians were clearly in cahoots with the military, more than willing to play a

supporting role in the subversion of democracy," and "the army did not want to see the PPP and Benazir [Bhutto] in power" (pp. 115, 121). He also states that under Zia and Musharraf, "political parties were created for the precise purpose of being handmaidens of military regimes," and that "military rulers, at different points, sought to delegitimize not just the political process but even political parties" (p. 131). Perhaps the best lines from this chapter are: "the constitution is what the military allows it to be" and "civilians have not served Pakistan's democracy any better ... [and] have shown the willingness to seek the military's support for their political ambitions" (p. 133). Unfortunately, Rangachari does not look at the post-2008 resurgence and strengthening of democratic politics in Pakistan and the current marginalization of the military.

It is unclear why the editor includes Zafar Iqbals's piece in this collection. In his poorly written chapter, Iqbal repeats the well-known narrative about different political regimes in Pakistan since 1971, and makes numerous sweeping statements that are not backed up by references or argument. He writes, for instance, that "there is no dearth of unscrupulous leaders in Pakistan, but [Asif Ali] Zardari tops the list. His entire career testifies to unprincipled practices." Many of his statements are incorrect, such as his claim that there is concentration of power by Zardari who "has reduced the parliament to a rubber stamp" (p. 156). The truth is that Pakistan's parliament has never been this vibrant and argumentative in its history.

The chapter by Frederic Grare, repeating many details from previous chapters, examines whether underdevelopment is a cause or the consequence of authoritarianism in Pakistan. Without looking at scores of other countries that have been in the same predicament, he concludes that "because the country's economic development remained limited, its political system never went beyond an electoral democracy at best," and "overall the socio-economic structures likely to lead to the emergence of a democratic culture have been considered weak" (pp. 163, 164). Grare makes contradictory statements when he examines the role of the military in Pakistani politics. He writes that "the February 2008 elections reinforced the military's image as the defender of democracy, whereas the military was actually trying to sabotage democracy" (p. 169). Both impressions are completely incorrect: not only was the military not a "defender of democracy"–it has never been one–but it also did not sabotage the 2008 elections. Having been exposed and bruised, it stood on the sidelines. Then he makes one of the most preposterous statements about Pakistan's military: "surprisingly, however, the role and responsibility of the army in Pakistan's democratic failure remains controversial" (p. 171). No one else, including the military, thinks so. Another equally ludicrous statement is that "there is no reason either to believe that the elites of the two countries had fundamentally different mindsets. Independent India and Pakistan inherited the same political traditions" (p. 175). Grare reveals his complete ignorance of both countries.

Gilles Boquérat and Nazir Hussain contribute an interesting chapter on Musharraf's rarely studied moderate enlightenment, but not having lived in Pakistan in this period, they fail to see the nuances beneath the surface and beyond the headlines. In his chapter, J. Andrew Greig, a U.S. "mid-level foreign service officer" with experience in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the U.S. State Department, reveals the relationship and consequence of the George W. Bush-Musharraf association. Like many other contributors to the volume, Greig agrees that "Pakistan's [Inter-Services Intelligence] ISI has supported terrorist organizations in the past ... [some of which] have turned into Frankenstein's monsters" (p. 211).

Two themes emerge among most essays in this collection. First, the military has done a great deal of harm to democracy in Pakistan and politicians have collaborated with the military. (There is little mention of the judiciary.) Second, most contributors ague that Islam plays a major role in Pakistan but their understanding of the nature of Islam is often bigoted and biased. They fail to differentiate between Muslim culture and Islamization. The fact that even Zulfikar Ali Bhutto–no Islamist–used Islam as a political ploy is not well captured by many of the authors. There is an overemphasis on the "Islamic factor" in Pakistan's politics, and most contributors overstate their case. Embree takes this one step further; he keeps referring to "important segments of the population of Pakistan" who want Pakistan to be an Islamic nation as "Taliban," and through repeated references, seems to equate Islam with the Taliban. He is theoretically and conceptually flawed and quite incorrect in stating that "the burden of Islam for Pakistan is not just that some of its citizens, such as the Taliban, yearn to fight in the cosmic war, but that the nation is committed by its existence to seek to realize God's plan for human salvation in an Islamic state" (p. 239).

Despite these critical remarks, this book ought to be read by scholars of Pakistan. It addresses issues that are often overlooked, and is highly critical of Pakistan's lack of democratization. However, the collection has been mistreated by its editor, who should have done a

more professional job. He should have read the chapters more carefully, editing out excessive repetition by judicious cross-reference to other chapters. Also, had his individual contributors read more than just their own essays, they would have learned much from each other, and could have improved their own contributions. Too many identical themes are repeated ad nauseam in many chapters. We know who followed whom, and that politicians are equally guilty of bringing in the military (a strong point of book), but every essay says something similar if not identical. The analysis is not incorrect, but readers want to read something different in each essay. Better and tighter editing of the volume, of each essay individually and the collection as a whole, would have helped cut out these repetitions. Finally, it is unclear whether the editor actually knows much about Pakistan as he does not correct dozens of mistakes–not typos–made in different pieces. Aitzaz Ahsan is called Aitzaz Hasan in one chapter and Aitzaz Ehsan in another. Sindh has been spelled as such since 1986, and not as Sind. A Pakistani nuclear physicist is called a "historian." Zia was not killed in a helicopter crash. G. Alla was actually G. Allana, a prominent politician of Sindh, and the correct name for an Islamic scholar from the nineteenth century was Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, not Gangoni. It is the Federal Shariat Court, not the Sharia Federal Court, and the TTP is the Tehrik-e Taliban, not the Tariq-i Taliban. But finally, Pakistan came into existence on August 14, 1947, and not July 14, 1947.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: S. Akbar Zaidi. Review of Kalia, Ravi, ed., *Pakistan: From the Rhetoric of Democracy to the Rise of Militancy.* H-Asia, H-Net Reviews. November, 2012.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=33148

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.