The future for Pakistan

Brendan O'Leary


"Can Pakistan Survive?" recovers the answer that the demise of Tariq Ali's home state is a consequence of the West's dealings. Ali tells us why Pakistan ought not to exist. Born amidst the sweat of independence and partitions, the scrounging child of the imperialist-ridden Muslim League of Jinnah and the confluence of India and Pakistan, Pakistan's existence seemed to depend on history. East and West were divided by 1,000 miles of Indian territory and, until the establishment of Bangladesh, a quasi-geopolitical repression of the Bengalis was stopped by a much-needed, self-interested, Indian invasion. The West pillaged the East in a manner worthy of their British predecessors. Not the West, of course, but rather the dominant class of the Punjab, the bureaucratic-military landed power elite that Ali demonstrates to be one of the most philistine and unskilled blocs of parasites ever to preside over a state. Pakistan even after the scission of Bangladesh did not possess linguistic, ethnic or territorial unity, only the legacies of the British Raj, and the use and abuse of Islam gave the state coherence.

In a book well-woven narrative Ali takes the reader through the origins of Pakistan, the first decade of independence, the military dic- tatorships of Ayub and Yahya, the civil war, Bhutto's populist debacle (1971-77), and finally the military take-over by Zia-ul-Haq in 1979. Perhaps the weakest section of the book is here, because, unlike elsewhere, a lot is presumed of the reader. Ali writes with the vision of a South Asian internationalist in- spired by the best of the liberation struggle ideology. The declarations and扭曲s of the Masters and Stalinists in Pakistan (and India), who have ended up critically supporting their own parts from the political stage in vassalage and the hands of imperialist rulers and con- stipality of Pakistan's generals, are well documented.

Ali's final chapter on Pakistan's ge- political position is a useful overview of recent developments in Central and South Asia. And yet it is not clear that Ali's picture of Pakistan's perpetual crisis, within sight of being defended from the stage, is realizable. The USA and India both "need" Pakistan. That "backward, nomadic, Balouchistan, should have produced a dedicated and interna- tionally cadre 'within equal in contemporary Pakistan' (p. 98) is, perhaps, an index for despair rather than hope. Ali holds to this tru- chain optimism, to his vision which is an en- tirely worthy one: a voluntary federation of South Asian Republics. This is the issue of the untold revolutionary, the militant refusal to accept the accomplished fact. Yet, I am, of with a more somber view; "could it be that History has something still worse to store?" will the amorphous gestures of South Asia, bedecked with former imperial medals, try to beat each other to the nuclear draw?" (p. 196)

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