

Book Review: The Pakistan Paradox: Instability and Resilience by Christophe Jaffrelot

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In *The Pakistan Paradox* Christophe Jaffrelot seeks to separate the causes of instability in Pakistan by exploring the contradictions in its foundations. He argues the instability is neither pre-determined nor impossible to move beyond. In this post, **Asad Abbasi** summarises key discussions put forward in this substantial work and writes that it is a necessary text for every student interested in Pakistan.

***The Pakistan Paradox: Instability and Resilience.* Christophe Jaffrelot. Hurst Publishers. 2014.**

Is Pakistan a democratic state, a garrison state or a military state? Is it a failed state or a failed idea? Is it a threat to the world, or a threat to its existence? Is it a religious idea or a political idea? Or is it a failed state or even a failed idea? Pakistan is a paradox, argues Jaffrelot, because of the contradictory elements, ideas and motives that continue to exist in the country. It is the tension between these contradictions that causes instability.

Jaffrelot writes that to understand the cause of instability in Pakistan, we have to consider three contradictions. These are 1) the tension between unitary identity of state versus ethnic identity of regions, 2) the complex relationship between civilian politicians and military institutions, and 3) the role of Islam in governance of Pakistan. Only by looking at these three dimensions can we see the foundations of Pakistan's instability.

The roots of the tensions originate long before the partition; however, they are not predetermined and each of the contradictions can be resolved. But to do that, politics in Pakistan has to be discursive rather than repressive towards opposing views. There is also a serious need for decentralisation of power and redistribution of wealth.

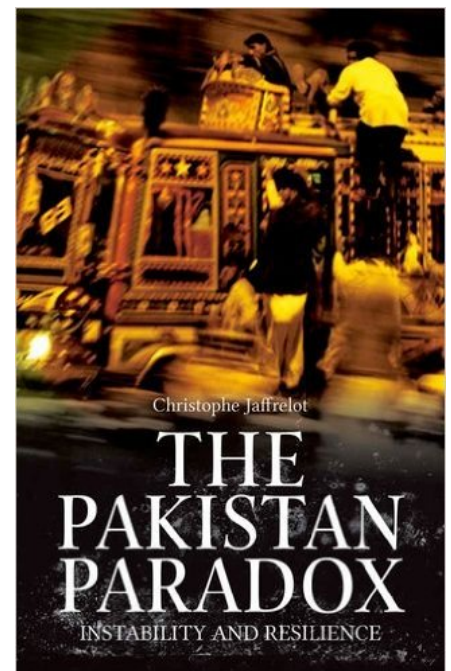
Unitary identity versus regional identity

Urdu-speaking Muslims of North India were economically and politically influential before the British Raj but in the late 19th century North Indian Muslims saw a steep decline in status.

When the British Raj introduced the Local Self-Government Act of 1882, North Indian Muslims, especially Syed Ahmed Khan, resisted this 'democratisation process' (p.38) for two reasons. First, Khan considered democracy a form of government where 'ignorant public will make government responsible'. Second, as a minority in North India, Muslims will lose more ground against Hindus in the region.

North Indian Muslims argued that instead of being judged on numerical strength they should be judged as separate but on parity with Hindus. This argument was continually emphasised by the All-India Muslim League, mainly comprised of North Indian Muslims, until partition.

In contrast, Muslims in Majority-Muslim provinces supported the democratic process because they were at a quantitative advantage. In fact, Muslims from Punjab, Sindh, NWFP, Baluchistan and Bengal considered themselves different from North Indian Muslims and rejected the Muslim League. In the 1937 elections the Muslim League won only one seat in Punjab elections.



Following this poor performance, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, leader of the Muslim League, attracted Majority-Muslim provinces through two strategies. First, he convinced these provinces that the Indian Nation Congress only represented Hindus and, therefore, under a Congress rule, Islam was in danger. Second, in the 1940 [Lahore Resolution](#) Jinnah promised his party would make all provinces 'autonomous' and 'sovereign'. These strategies boosted support for the Muslim League, transforming it into a mass organisation. The first strategy united Muslims under the banner of religion. The second strategy brought ethnic support. However contradictions between religious identity and ethnic identity soon emerged.

Immediately after independence, Jinnah spoke in East Bengal and Baluchistan against the 'poison of regionalism'. Jinnah argued against the promises that were made during Lahore Resolution. By forcing Islam and Urdu as identity of state, Jinnah— and later Liaquat Ali Khan— alienated regional and ethnic groups. The tension between regions and central state is responsible for Partition of Bangladesh, Baloch resistance and Mohajir separatism.

Jaffrelot, though, is optimistic that progress is being made on resolving tensions within the first dimension: he argues that when compared with 1950s and 60s, Punjab's hegemony has declined, multi-ethnicity is on the rise within the provinces, and that provinces having gained greater autonomy in Zardari period.



Credit: [Ejaz Asi](#) CC BY-NC 2.0

The civil-military establishment

There is 'structural tension' between the civilian politicians and military establishment (p.363), but Jaffrelot argues it would be wrong to see civilian politicians and military institutions as polar opposite groups (p.363).

The tug of war between Mohajirs, who controlled government, and Punjabis, who were majority in the army and bureaucracy, meant the constitution was only promulgated in 1956. The delay eroded people's faith in politicians and the political process while the military continued to strengthen and organise. As a result, Jaffrelot writes 'The strength of army [today] is such that even when civilians are in office, Pakistan is not a full-fledged democracy' (p.434). He also attributes the unceasing military influence to the fact not all politicians are democrats.

The authoritarian culture, which is reminiscent of the British viceroy's leadership during the Raj, started with Jinnah. He was not only as Pakistan's first Governor General and President of Constitutional Assembly, but also as minister responsible for Evacuation and Refugee Rehabilitation and minister for State and Frontier Region (p.200).

The vice-regal style of leadership continued under ZA Bhutto. Jaffrelot refers to this period as a 'missed opportunity',

primarily because Bhutto was a 'dubious democrat' (p.216) who abolished civil services to take greater control (p.234), restricted press freedoms, and— against the socialist manifesto of his party— allied with landowning class.

Benazir Bhutto, in both terms, didn't have any real power to make difference, though she did exhibit authoritarian tendencies. Nawaz Sharif's first term was homage to army, Islamists and the business community— privatized eighty-nine companies (pg.248). But in his second term, Nawaz Sharif had a real opportunity to democratise the country.

However, Nawaz Sharif established, what Jaffrelot calls, 'Parliamentary dictatorship' (pg.254) and continued the vice-regal tradition of Jinnah and Zulfikar (pg.259). He set-up press council to censor media (pg.255), appointed his family members and friends as ministers, most notably appointing his father's friend, Rafiq Tarar, as President.

It is for this reason that Musharraf's coup generated little opposition. It shows that, just like 1950s, citizens lost faith in politicians. In absence of serious land reform and tax reform, the relationship between civilian politicians and military will continue to exist.

The military influence also continues to exist. The [Azadi March](#) (Independence March) anti-government protest led by Imran Khan in 2014 is a recent example. Jaffrelot suggests that Azadi March took place only after 'military gave green light' (pg.285). Though Imran Khan denied any ties with army (pg.292), all observers agree that military played role of an umpire in government and protestors match (p.290).

Role of Islam

To combat decline in status during early decades of British Raj, the North Indian Muslims started two distinct and separate movements: Reformation and Restoration.

The Reformation Movement, led by Syed Ahmed Khan and Aligarh movement, focussed on political education of Muslim Youth. It was based on "entitlement syndrome" i.e. Muslims are superior to other groups because of their past glories and therefore have a right to govern.

The Restoration movement, led by Deoband *Ulemas*, also focused on theological education of Muslim youth, but argued that north Indian Muslims are special because they are part of Umma, global Muslim nation.

The divide between two movements was so severe that when [Al-Afghani](#), leading advocate of Pan Islamism, visited India he considered Syed Ahmed Khan 'his biggest rival'.

Debate between the two groups continued after the independence. Until 1973 constitution, the secular identity prevailed. However, the amendment of the constitution in 1974 decreed Ahmadis as non-Muslims and so began the Islamization of Pakistan that intensified and institutionalized under Zia. This resulted in violence against Shias, Hindus and Christians.

But now, everyone is a target. This year, on [Easter Sunday](#) in Lahore, bomb blast killed seventy people including women and children. Jammāt-ur-Ahrar, faction of Pakistani Taliban, targeted Christians but majority of those killed were Muslims.

According to Jaffrelot, sectarian and religious civil war is most pressing problem in Pakistan and threatens to 'cut the country vertically' if establishment doesn't resolve it.

External factors

The three contradictions discussed above give an elaborate insight into, what Jaffrelot calls, 'Pakistani Syndrome'. Only by looking through these dimensions we can see that Pakistan is neither a complete democracy nor an autocracy, it is neither a secular state nor a theocratic state, and it neither has a unitary ideology nor a heterogeneous culture.

But the three dimensions, mentioned above, are mainly due to internal factors. There is also a 'fourth dimension' – external factors. Just like British Raj was external actor that altered behaviour of Indian Muslims in late 19th century, so India and America have been the external factors that alter Pakistani policy since independence.

The Indian threat and American aid

India, and more specifically the perception of an 'Indian threat', is evident in every political decision. One can argue that army and politicians genuinely believe Indian threat to be real, and there are legitimate grounds to some of their concerns. Mainly, however, politicians exaggerate Indian threat to shape policy.

Jaffrelot identifies America as another external element that influences policy. Since the 1960s Pakistan has traded its sovereignty to US government in exchange for foreign aid. Ayub Khan confirms in his book *Friends, Not Masters* that American aid is important factor for Pakistani development. In this context, we can understand euphoria surrounding the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). As American forces are leaving, so are the dollars. And China is willing to fill the investment hole.

Jaffrelot suggests that Pakistan can cut its reliance on American aid, or any external aid, by funding development through tax reform. Unfortunately these reforms seem unlikely because they would directly impact the establishment.

Historical debate

For me, Jaffrelot shows his craft when he engages with Ayesha Jalal on Jinnah's legacy. On 16 August 1948, exactly a year before independence, the Muslim League organised Direct Action day which resulted in death of five to ten thousand people, mostly Hindus. Ayesha Jalal calls it the day that 'destroyed the India of Jinnah's dream'.

Jalal's assertion is problematic, according to Jaffrelot, because she assumes that Jinnah had a clear political agenda, and, Jalal portrays Jinnah as a victim of politics. Jaffrelot counters that Jinnah didn't have a clear political agenda and, although Jinnah may not have wanted partition, by arguing for equal parity with Hindus he created the condition that led to the partition. This exchange is fine piece of historical interpretation as one can see how the same evidence is used to make two conflicting claims.

Conclusion

This book is necessary text for every student interested in Pakistan. However, Hurst publishers have done a poor job as the editing and proof-reading leave a lot to be desired: the text is littered with spelling mistakes, repetition, tense conflicts and other silly errors— on page 130, Mumtaz Bhutto is cousin of ZA Bhutto, but by page 134 Mumtaz becomes Benazir's cousin!

Editing mistakes aside, message of the book is simple, important and optimistic. The trajectory of Pakistan and instability that we see is not predetermined, and there is potential for resolution in the decentralisation of power and redistribution of wealth.

This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the South Asia @ LSE blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.

About the Author

Asad Abbasi has a Masters degree in *Political Economy of Late Development* from LSE. Currently, he is researching conceptual frameworks of development.

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