

Book Review
By
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Dilip Hiro, *The Longest August: The Unflinching Rivalry between India and Pakistan* (Nation Books: 2015) pp.503

"The Indian fixation on cross-border terrorism paralleled Pakistan's insistence on treating Kashmir as the core problem...India...missed the logical point that terrorism stemmed from...the Kashmir dispute...the cause had to precede the result", writes Dilip Hiro, the author.

The book '*The Longest August: The Unflinching Rivalry between India and Pakistan*' is divided into 20 chapters, encompassing Hindu-Muslim/Indo-Pak rivalry since the British rule/Partition to date. The author's perspective more often than not supports India's stance on Indo-Pak bilateral issues such as terrorism and 'Kashmir insurgency'. His repeated comparison of political systems of India and Pakistan in many ways reflects his preference for Indian political system.

The book's title, *the Longest August*, stems from the communal bloodbath in August 1947 and the ensuing Indo-Pak rivalry, including three wars, possibility of nuclear Armageddon, terrorist activities and fomenting rebellion in the rival state.

Three landmark events, according to the author, precipitated India's partition—all due to the Indian Congress: Jinnah's leaving Congress after Nehru Report annulled the separation of Muslim electorates; Congress' rejection of Jinnah's proposal for forming coalition-ministries in Bombay and UP after 1937 elections; and, Nehru's acceptance of Cabinet Mission Plan only to change his stance later on regarding 'Grouping' and Jinnah's subsequent withdrawal of his earlier acceptance of it.

Comparing Gandhi with Jinnah, the author portrays Gandhi's greatness in his tactically innovative political moves to achieve his objectives: non-cooperation/civil-disobedience movement and moral coercion through fasting/hunger-strike. It stood in sharp contrast to Jinnah's constitutionalism and avoidance of street politics. However, according to the author, Jinnah, who spurned Gandhi for mixing religion with politics during the Khilafat Movement, had presided over a party whose candidates appealed to Muslims' religious sentiments in the 1945-46 elections. Moreover, Jinnah also allegedly resorted to extra-constitutional methods with reference to the Direct Action Day that resulted in communal violence in India. It is indeed the author's deliberate disregard for the fact that Congress' hostile policies had compelled Jinnah to change his tactics.

About the wars between India and Pakistan, the author makes some contestable remarks. For example, the 1965 war, according to Hiro, was a failure of Pakistan to change the status-quo in Kashmir. By so stating, the author ignores the Kashmir dispute as an international issue and India's illegitimate claims over it in the face of UN Resolution for a plebiscite. Moreover, his subscription to the Indian argument that in 1971 War Pakistan's Two Nation Theory had collapsed does not match the fact that Bangladesh did not reintegrate into India. It became a separate Muslim state. It further strengthens the Two-Nation Theory. Furthermore, he considers Pakistan's support of the Sikh insurgency in the 1980s and terrorist incidents in India as a tit-for-tat to India's sabotage activities in Afghanistan and its state oppression in Kashmir. An unbiased approach, however, would reveal that Kashmir struggle or Sikh insurgency is, in fact, largely due to India's own oppressive policies in the state. Above all, his support of the much-touted claim that Pakistan is involved in the terrorist incidents in Afghanistan is based on outdated information. Latest BBC report about Taliban's controlling a major portion of Afghanistan and their self-financing

through drug-and-opium-smuggling invalidates the allegation of Pakistan's financing them or providing safe haven to them.

What the author also misses to highlight is that Pakistan has been a victim, and not sponsor, of terrorism. What he accentuates, instead, is that India is the victim of terrorism and Kashmiri freedom struggle is an insurgency against the Indian state. He, however, does mention in the chapter on Afghanistan, the Indian involvement in provoking secessionist sentiments in Balochistan and perpetrating terrorism across Pakistan.

As for the solution of the Kashmir dispute, the Shimla agreement, according to the author, has been a touchstone of all bilateral dialogues over Kashmir issue since 1972. Of all the available solutions, in author's views, Musharraf's formula stood out reflecting an adjustment to the contemporary geostrategic scenario. His four-point agenda stipulated Pakistan's giving up its claim to Indian-administered Kashmir if people from both regions had freedom of movement through open borders, and recommended a phased withdrawal of troops from both sides of the LoC. But, the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008 transformed the foundations of resolution of the Kashmir issue. From then onwards, India's primary focus on resolving terrorism issue would override the Kashmir dispute.

In the last few chapters, the author mentions the Afghanistan conundrum as another flashpoint between India and Pakistan. Kautilya's quotation, "a ruler with the contiguous territory is a rival. The ruler next to the adjoining is to be deemed a friend" explains India's policy regarding Pakistan and Afghanistan, in the author's perspective. India's efforts at building security and economic partnership with Afghanistan, including development aid and soft power of its Bollywood movies and soap operas have played a significant role in attracting popular perception in its favour. Apart from that, Bush administration's efforts to coopt Northern Alliance

in Karzai's administration, disregarding its earlier promise with Musharraf against it, only tilted the balance in India's favour in Afghanistan. Added to these factors is the joining of hands by Indian RAW and Afghan NDS for promoting sabotage and terrorist activities in Pakistan, as reported by Boston-based *Christian Science Monitor*—the author highlighted.

The author labels Indo-Pak competition in Afghanistan as a zero-sum game. Yet, he alludes towards a gap in Pakistan's soft diplomacy in Afghanistan, as Pakistani dramas, student scholarships and development assistance can effectively help build a positive imprint on young Afghan minds.

In conclusion, according to the author, the things that unite the otherwise rival nations are cricket, movies/dramas, people to people contacts and the bilateral trade. At the end of the last chapter, the author recommends that in order to end the *Longest August* (unflinching rivalry) between the two neighbours, movement of goods and people can play a pivotal role in bringing about "prosperity underpinned by peaceful coexistence".

Dilip Hiro was born in Sindh (province of current Pakistan) during British Raj and then had moved to India after partition. He received education in India, Britain and the U.S. and is settled in London since mid-60s. He is not only an author but also a journalist, commentator and an expert on Asian geopolitical affairs. He has authored a total of thirty-four books, the *magnum opuses* include *Inside India Today*, *Inside Central Asia*, *War Without End*, and *Apocalyptic Realm: Jihadists in South Asia*. He also frequently writes in The Guardian, New York Times, Washington Post, Yale Global, TomDispatch, Observer, and The Nation.

The book is well-referenced, written in a narrative form, in an easily understandable language, and offers a detailed account of Hindu-Muslims antagonism under British Raj and the ensuing Indo-Pak rivalry after the Partition. It would be helpful for students, teachers

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and researchers who are studying or writing on Pak-India relationship, in the perspective of the fundamental issues confronting the two states.

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