

### ***Book Review***

**Rafi Raza, (Ed.), *Pakistan in Perspective, 1947-1997*, Oxford University Press, 1997. pp. 320.**

This is undoubtedly a most useful, updated collection of articles on various aspects of the Pakistani canvas. It is a valuable contribution given the relative paucity of material and literature on such topics. Aside from the somewhat tedious chapter on foreign policy, tiresome by virtue mainly of its bulk (stretching over a total of about a hundred pages in its entirety), the articles make for interesting and refreshing reading for not merely the specialist but the layperson as well.

If length is any indication of importance, then surely it is a case of misplaced priorities to have given so much space to a subject such as foreign policy and, in comparison, the pieces on such vitally crucial issues as population planning and human rights are allocated, for whatever reason, a considerably less quantum of space in the book.

Mr. Abdus Sattar's Foreign Policy analysis is insightful, though as mentioned earlier, could have been more terse and to the point. It elaborates on a diversity of topics such as the Kashmir question, relations with the superpowers and other nations, alliances, the 1965 war with India as well as the 1971 disaster, the Simla Agreement, relations with Bangladesh, the nuclear programme, Afghanistan and related issues. These topics are essentially tackled from a historical perspective, the author spinning a yarn simply retelling the sequence of events which, in a sense, snuffs out the life in them, though the views are usually balanced, accurate and enlightening to the uninitiated.

The next section on economic development by Mr. Aftab Ahmad Khan is a far cry from being novel in any sense, since the author on the whole belabours the obvious and the major part of the article is simply old wine in new bottles. At the outset a historical overview of development policies is presented followed by Pakistan's planning experience and the hiccups it faced. This is followed by summations of the country's five year plans, their contents, outlays, targets and objectives. No kudos here again because they appear to have come right out of the plan documents themselves and very little, if any original, creative thinking is involved. The fate of each plan is stated which, in itself is useful, but then at the cost of sounding over critical, one cannot help but remark that the author seems to miss the fundamental point that in a non-socialist dispensation national planning inevitably ends up as a virtual exercise in futility and hence this is

one reason for the shoddy performance of planning in most parts of the developing world.

In assessing Pakistan's development record, the author in all fairness does highlight the shortcomings and failings right on target. One fact that is of vital importance which the author ignores, is that what seems to have gone amiss is the harsh reality that our leaders with only the rare exception, have seldom had their fingers on the pulse of the people. And with such a divorce between those in power and the majority of the people, no development effort can bear fruit in any sense at all. But all said and done, Mr. Khan does categorically keep the flag of national planning flying high in his optimistic conclusions and he deserves credit for that.

The piece by Nafis Sadiq on Population Policy is loaded with home truths, reflecting a deep understanding of the subject and insight into the reality of the matter, despite the author's 'exalted' and glamorous position in the higher echelons of the United Nations Population Fund. It begins with a rundown of vital statistics and social sector indicators followed by a historical overview and impartial assessment of the population programme of Pakistan, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses. Not only is it critical in its approach, the article adopts certain very valid prescriptions such as the need for a broader approach and what this would entail. Its formulas touch on several points such as the gender issue.

The recommendations at the conclusion of the chapter are weighty and clear and display a remarkably wholesome understanding of the entire gamut of issues facing population planning. The nub of the issue as the author quite rightly points out, is that 'the programme should be rooted within the framework of poverty alleviation, sustained economic growth and sustainable development, and the social sectors must find a central place within it.' This itself is no understatement.

I.A. Rehman writes on Human Rights and sets out initially on a historical trajectory, tracing the roots of human rights in the country, its evolution, the fate of human rights during the Zia era, trends thereafter, and questions of enforceability and access. The section on the Zia era is most enlightening since it sweeps away the myths one was unfortunately compelled to believe at the time of the dictator's rule. The author explains in a fair amount of depth how 'quite a few constitutional amendments carried out by his regime hit both fundamental rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights'. The importance for a democratic dispensation for human rights to flourish is emphasised.

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With further enhances the appeal of the piece is the lucid and seasoned journalistic style in which it is written, while the contents themselves touch the very core of one's being. Those not quite in the know wake up to certain hometruths of the deplorable state of human rights in the country, not without a sense of trepidation.

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