

ARTYKUŁY PRZEGLĄDOWE I RECENZJE

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THE MAGICIAN IN THE SIEGE PERILOUS: COMMENTS ON PERVEZ HOODBHOY'S NEW BOOK

Book Review: Pervez Hoodbhoy, *Pakistan: Origins, Identity, and Future*, Routledge 2023

Abstract

The book under review is a collection of essays analyzing Pakistan's past, attempting to reevaluate it in a critical, myth-debunking way, and describing the country's present state while formulating some prescriptions for the future. Many parts of the book reveal the author's deep insight, showing the fallacies of the official discourse in Pakistan. However, Hoodbhoy's discourse is often flawed by his disdain for religion, resulting in shallow and biased (if not simply wrong) analyses of Islamic-based thought, and by his inability to reconcile his commitment to modernism as a foundation of good politics with democratic principles.

Pervez Hoodbhoy, a Pakistani nuclear physicist and thinker, often voices his opinions in public matters, and the book in question may be seen as a summary of his efforts – at least the ones concerning his native country. While the main topic of his book is Pakistan's history – or rather, its focal points and heroes (and antiheroes), as well as the myths surrounding them – he also tries to formulate a positive program for today and make some humble attempts to foresee the future.

To clarify, do not be fooled by the publisher advertising this book as “an accessible, comprehensive, and nuanced history of Pakistan”. It is no such thing but a collection of sixteen independent essays about topics Hoodbhoy considered crucial – not to mention that in many of them discussions of the Present and Future are far

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more conspicuous than the Past. Furthermore, the author embellishes much of the historical content with lengthy commentaries on how a certain person or process is viewed in today's Pakistan. We will not find this in a typical academic synthesis or textbook, and yet it has a crucial role in understanding Pakistanis.

There is no point in denying that Hoodbhoy writes with a specific purpose – not only debunking the myths but also commenting on Pakistan's past and present from his position, that of a staunch rationalist supporting liberal and Leftist policy. Indeed, this is better than a situation when an author tries to hide his sympathies, only for them to lurk in the underground and confuse the reader. It should also be noted that Hoodbhoy's style is more literary than academic, just like in his bright little essays in "Dawn": witty, colloquial, accessible, similar to how the late Richard Taruskin had been writing about music. The author often catches the reader's attention with "But wait!", gives his chapters titles like "Postnatal Blues" (about the political situation and moods after Jinnah's death) or "Shotgun Wedding" (about Kalat's accession) and obviously aims at the wider audience. Still, he deliberately produced his book as a work aiming to observe the academic rigors, seek objectivity, and document the facts; thus it should be judged as such.

Another reason to do that is a very wise methodological credo, which we can find in Chapter I: "To moralize about historical events and judge them in the light of modern values leads one to a dead end. It is pointless to praise, condemn, or bear grudges for the wars waged by Alexander the Great, the invasion of Britain by the Vikings, the Peloponnesian War, the invasion of Korea by Japan, the conquest of Scotland by the English, and a thousand other bloody episodes of history that shaped the world into what it is today. Instead, if it becomes necessary to look at any particular region or episode, facts must be placed foremost and looked at dispassionately" (p. 30). If there is any major problem with the historical parts of his book, it is that Hoodbhoy does not always practice what he preaches.

Chapter I, devoted to the identities of Indians in pre-colonial times, effectively tramples some rampant myths, the Hindu ones (Hindus have lived here for tens of thousands of years, and their holy language – Sanskrit – is also a brainchild of the Indian soil!) as well as the Muslim ones (the Indian Muslims were a separate group, if not a nation, ever since Muhammad bin Qasim had conquered Sindh!). The author meticulously reminds us of the historical truths: that the ancestors of the Aryans are confirmed to have come from Central Asia (this was proven by genetics), that Indian Muslims were so different from Persians or Arabs, or Turks that the great medieval scholar al-Biruni considered them "Hindus" tarred with the same brush as the believers of the Hindu gods, that before the advent of colonialism most people identified themselves as inhabitants of a particular place or members of a specific caste. The conclusion of the chapter is, indeed, placed right at

the beginning: Two-Nation Theory, the cornerstone of contemporary Pakistan discourse about nationality and history, is absurd because there were zero nations in India before the British conquest. This also proves (although Hoodbhoy does not explicitly make this point) that British rule was not as divisive as it is perceived in India and by the critics of colonialism. It may even have been, in a way, unifying.

How the collective identities have changed under the British Raj is the topic of Chapter II. True, the Raj itself is presented in a way that hardly meets scholarly standards; whether the 1800s were “a terribly dismal time for Indians” (p. 44) or not, it cannot be proven just by quoting the American historian Will Durant, who visited India in 1930 and was shocked by ubiquitous poverty. While Hoodbhoy is right when pointing out there were more causes of the Mutiny of 1857 than just longing for freedom – the high taxation, for example – he is exaggerating quite a lot when stating that “In a display of unity that shocked the British, Muslims and Hindus stood together to fight the British” (p. 51). Or for the British, if not staying indifferent. We are also told that the East India Company “like the giant multinationals that rule the world today (...) thought far ahead of its times. It supposedly theorized that treating natives based on their religion would sharpen cleavages” and this was part of a “psychological warfare” (p. 47). We should remember that allowing various ethnic and religious groups to retain their own sets of laws was a concept cultivated in Europe from medieval times, and it was seen as a way of showing respect towards the diversity of the ruled. The British may be berated for treating the old theoretical treaties as the unchanging rulebooks for all Hindus or Indian Muslims, but what lay at the heart of their approach here was not *divide et impera*.

However, Hoodbhoy also provides us with many valuable insights. He is right – to a degree – that the British, constructing an image of Indian Muslims as fanatic savages (partly to justify their conquest), inadvertently gave a theoretical framework to an emerging Hindu right, which in the future would fan the flames of communalism. He is also right to say that after the Mutiny, the British preferred the Hindus or Sikhs over Muslims both in dispensing jobs and land grants, with long-lasting consequences in Punjab, Sindh, and Bengal. Most of all, however, he is right (in my opinion) in his answer to the question of why the Muslims found themselves at a disadvantage in 19th century British India; they were less eager to learn foreign knowledge or languages than Hindus, and less socially flexible, a claim supported not only by Ibn Khaldun but by a vast amount of data.

Three chapters about Pakistan’s “Founding Fathers” follow. The one about Syed Ahmad Khan – or Sir Syed for short – is, in my opinion, the best part of the book. I do not know another example of Sir Syed’s life, views, and achievements being described so neatly in just about forty pages. One thing which, in my opinion, is not

underlined well enough is that Aligarh, as a consequence of Sir Syed's priorities, tried to mold its students into activists who would work for the sake of the Muslim community in India, treating the theology problems as a secondary if not tertiary matter – a way of thinking that heavily influenced the Muslim League. However, it is only a small addendum to an otherwise brilliant essay.

The same cannot be said about the following three chapters, devoted to Iqbal, Jinnah, and Jinnah's Muslim political rivals (Hoodbhoy chose to describe three of them: Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan). Here, the author's worldview begins to cause problems for his scholarly objectives (and objectivity), and sometimes, he also has issues with the facts.

The main (though not the only) reason is simple: Hoodbhoy holds the very idea of religion in high scorn, as it is not rational or scientific – since certain things must be taken for granted when one is a believer. He has every right to do so, but in effect, he also has considerable problems with understanding a worldview founded on different pillars.

Jinnah first. The author quite aptly shows his political evolution, and there is much truth in his statement that Jinnah “looked at the case of Muslims in India just as a first-rate lawyer would in trying to secure the best possible deal for his clients” (p. 167) – both a compliment and a criticism, as lawyers do not prepare for their clients long-term plans for life after the court case would be won. The book is right when pointing out that the Quaid-i-Azam has never – even after the Partition – defined how he envisaged Pakistan's polity, unlike David Ben-Gurion.

Still, when analyzing his views, Hoodbhoy points out contradictions where there are none if we interpret Jinnah's speeches differently. For example, Jinnah's message to Pashtuns “You are Muslims first and Pathans thereafter” is said to be incompatible with his famous line from 11th August 1947: “You can belong to any religion, caste or creed; this has nothing to do with the business of the State”. The former was saying that Muslims must fight for Pakistan leaving aside their ethnic differences; after winning the struggle they would be able to choose their laws, being a majority. The latter, for its part, said: while yesterday a struggle for Pakistan was a duty of Muslims, today, when it exists, such a duty is nationalism, and it extends also to non-Muslim minorities. Fulfilling this duty is the only thing that matters to the state, while it is not important if the non-believers attend the shrines or the churches – it should be no one's problem, as long as they will be staunch Pakistanis. It is as simple as that.

Similarly, Hoodbhoy treats the whole speech from 11th August 1947 as a manifest of Jinnah's “inner liberalism” and secularism. Then he points out that Jinnah claimed he wanted an Islamic state that would not, by any means, be a theocracy; for Hoodbhoy, these are some “mutually incompatible demands” (p. 139). About

Iqbal, he also writes how in Allama's dream "Muslim states would not impose religious rule (i.e., the sharia) upon Hindus. It is unclear how that could be possible because Iqbal abhorred the secular state" (p. 125).

However, some more apparent interpretations can be made, and a brilliant attempt at such is Saleena Karim's recent book, which also deals with Iqbal's views. If Hoodbhoy had known this work, he would also have avoided attributing a false quote to Jinnah; the Quaid had never told Doon Campbell that he wanted a "secular, democratic state" (Karim, 2017, chapter II). Whether Karim is correct or not is another matter, but her reasoning analyzes the thought of Jinnah far deeper than Hoodbhoy did.

The conflict between the Raja of Mahmudabad and Jinnah who rejected Raja's ideas about "an Islamic state" (p. 163), may well not have been caused by the fact Jinnah did not want such a state (as Hoodbhoy asserts), but by his fear that Raja's ideas will force the League to prepare and discuss the blueprint of such state just when Jinnah tried to be as vague as possible about it as the political struggle with the Congress was entering its final phase.

One can only agree with the author's observation: "A common fallacy is to believe that a rejection of theocracy is an automatic endorsement of secularism. In fact, there is no binary here" (p. 156). Yes, there isn't, so why does Hoodbhoy write about "mutually incompatible demands"? Why doesn't he even consider the possibility that Jinnah may have been serious when invoking tenets of religion in his post-Partition speeches regarding Pakistan's polity? Is it because Hoodbhoy himself cringes at the thought that religion can be taken seriously in that sphere?

With Iqbal the problems are similar, but worse. The author is correct when he claims that Allama's views changed throughout his life, pointing to his trip to Europe in 1905 as the turning point that changed the young scholar into a champion of the Islamic cause. He is also correct in pointing out that when trying to prove the superiority of Islamic science over the Western one, Iqbal did not even know what he was talking about, as he had no more profound knowledge of physics or mathematics. (What this has to do with Iqbal's views in the context of the Pakistani idea, however, is a mystery.) And sure enough, Iqbal "can be cherry-picked for any given purpose or even for the very opposite one" (p. 103); Ayesha Jalal, too, considered the Allama "a multi-sided mystery in a state of perpetual flux" (Jalal, 2000, p. 176). However, when assessing Iqbal's thoughts, Hoodbhoy changes them into a caricature.

He assures us that Iqbal "errs fundamentally in placing the heart at the center" of his vision of Islam (p. 118) because even if Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown would obey the directions their hearts suggest, they may end in different places, while the Reason creates a platform for mutual understanding. This critique has some

validity, but in effect, Hoodbhoy feels so much wiser than Iqbal that he does not even try to reconstruct his views. True, many details of the “Islamic state” projected by Iqbal were left vague by the poet-turned-prophet, but he still defined it more clearly than Hoodbhoy is willing to concede.

With regards to a critical idea of Iqbal's thought, *khudi* [spirit/self], he condescendingly writes “what *khudi* really means (...) should be left for his admirers to explain” (p. 135). Not when this central point of Iqbal's philosophy is the source of his other views, including the ones about the polity.

Thus we are left without an explanation as to how Iqbal had developed his vision of polity, linking *khudi* with a vision of harmonious Muslim society helping the person to become closer to God. At the same time, Hoodbhoy ridiculously distorts the historical context of the Allama's thoughts. When Iqbal claims that every type of polity – monarchy or democracy – must end in barbarism if devoid of true faith, Hoodbhoy lectures him: „Wasn't Iqbal aware of counterexamples within Europe, with Iceland being one example? (...) Iceland is only one of many countries. Today, secular democracies across the world – Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Italy, Germany, Britain, and France, to name some – are peaceful countries towards which Muslim refugees flee and, in doing so, often risk their lives” (p. 130).

That Iceland during Iqbal's lifetime was not even independent, while Germany and Italy were not democracies, is the least important problem with that logic. At one point, Hoodbhoy quotes Iqbal's statement that “Leagues, Mandates, treaties, and Imperialism, however, draped in democracy, can never bring salvation to mankind” (p. 112) but makes no more of it.

And yet, much can be made. Lamenting that Iqbal was regressive because in his poetry he urged Muslims to recreate the days of their rule by the sword instead of embracing Reason and Modernity, Hoodbhoy forgets to add what kind of poems British kids were reading in their childhood at the same time – say, Kipling's *White Man's Burden* or Henry Newbolt's *Vitai Lampada*, where invading foreign lands (the context suggests Muslim Sudan) is equated with a game where a player has to give it all for the sake of his team. In Iqbal's times, Western secular democracies were not the countries where disillusioned Muslims could find a safe haven from Sharia or war atrocities; they were the ones committing such atrocities when annexing regions inhabited by Muslims and subsequently ruling them. In such a world, it was far easier to defend the point that secularization and democracy lead to the loss of moral fiber – as Humeira Iqtidar has rightly pointed out when analyzing Maududi's worldview (Iqtidar, 2020). Hoodbhoy seems unaware of her research, but it does not mean he can be absolved from being unjust, especially since he adds to all that a pure lie about Allama. Iqbal had not suggested “that the British ban the Ahmadiyya faith” (p. 138). What he wanted from the

British was to declare that group non-Muslims (which, at the time when he made this demand, meant primarily that they would be treated as part of the “General” and not “Muslim” electorate). There are more strange fragments, like “communalism, as is generally understood, is a negation of universalism” (p. 122). No, it was a negation of the idea of undivided India. Nehru and Patel did not preach universalism but Indian nationalism.

Where Hoodbhoy really does not hold back is the next chapter and the parts about Maulana Maududi. Of course, one may like the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami or not. Yet Hoodbhoy goes further than just disliking. He leaves no stone unturned to present the Maulana in the least favorable light, with a certain disrespect for historical analysis and sometimes also for the truth.

For example, we are informed that “his [Maududi’s] axe first fell upon the Ahmadis (...) In 1953 Ahmadis were targeted in a popular agitation led by Maududi and other clerics (...) Depending on whom you believe, between 200–2000 Ahmadis were killed” (p. 174).

A little research soon reveals who Hoodbhoy believes: Wikipedia, which gives the very same numbers with references to some books which, in turn, do not mention their sources. Let us mention, then, that the government of Punjab (which had no reason to be sympathetic towards either the rioters or the preceding government of early 1953) gave an official count in 1955 of how many Ahmadis were killed during the riots: 41 (Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates, 1955, vol. X, 21st March 1955, p. 719). Similar numbers, though smaller, can be found in the famous Munir Report. Far more people had been killed by the *army* as it subdued the rioters (the British estimates are between 500 and 1000 victims) (Laithwaite to Percival Liesching, 1955, p. 38), again leading to a question of who was more dangerous here or more bloodthirsty.

More importantly, the anti-Ahmadi agitation was led by religious leaders of a different blend, mainly the Ahrars. Maududi supported the demand to declare Ahmadis non-Muslims, but when the other protesters started leaning towards “direct action” (a euphemism for mass protests leading to possible riots), he distanced both himself and the whole Jamaat-e-Islami from the protests. In fact, he tried secret negotiations with the Ahmadi Caliph, suggesting he may convince other Ulama to stop the agitation if the Caliph would renounce the parts of Ahmadi teachings that suggested that one cannot be a good Muslim (or even a true Muslim) without being an Ahmadi. Hoodbhoy cannot even claim ignorance in that matter, as one of the first readers of his book was Ali Usman Qasmi, whose own work about Ahmadis deals with these problems extensively (and is mentioned in Hoodbhoy’s footnotes) (Qasmi, 2014, p. 96–97).

After reading Hoodbhoy's book, a reader may think that Maududi was the leader of the riots and thus was rightly sentenced to death; in fact, while some of the real leaders avoided any punishment, Maududi's "crime" was writing a pamphlet in which he criticized Ahmadis. A death sentence was nothing short of an attempt at judicial murder to scare pious (Hoodbhoy would probably say "zealot" or "fanatic") Muslims away from politics, which explains why this sentence resulted in a storm of protests from leftists and secular politicians as well, including the Awami League.

When in 1974 a constitutional achievement barring Ahmadis from calling themselves Muslims was passed after a national wave of agitation, Maududi again was not the only or even the main force behind it (as Hoodbhoy suggests). In fact, his voice was hardly being heard at this time (old and sick, he had even left the leadership of Jamaat-e-Islami to Mian Tufayl a few years earlier), and the agitation was led by people like Maulana Yousuf Bannuri or Maulana Shorish Kashmiri, who had nothing to do with Maududi (Zaman 2021, p. 174–177; Khan 2021).

There are more distortions of this kind. When mentioning that Maududi recommended against teaching Islamic history after the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, Hoodbhoy presents this as an attempt to cut Muslims off from the knowledge of their rich and nuanced history. In fact, Maududi had different aims in mind: he perceived the epochs of Umayyads and Abbasids as the triumph of degeneration as well as of tyranny, while the time of the Rightly Guided Caliphs was – in his opinion – a period of equality when a common Muslim had a say about the state polity. No wonder that Maududi's book *Caliphate and Monarchy*, which presented said vision of Islamic history, was treated as "subversive" by Ayub Khan's regime since it was perceived as a critique of Ayub's dictatorial rule.

By mentioning that Jamaat-e-Islami was supposed to breed "the Bolsheviks of the coming revolution" (p. 178), Hoodbhoy indicates bloodshed and ties Maududi to the militant Islamists who would cause such bloodshed later; though Maududi's "God Troopers" were to be Islamic Jansenists, a cadre organization fighting for the faith with intellectual, not actual weapons.

Jamaat-e-Islami's legacy in the political field is far more ambiguous than Hoodbhoy is willing to concede. In the 1960s, Maududi was at the forefront of the opposition against Ayub Khan's autocratic rule and took part in Fatima Jinnah's presidential campaign promising the democratization of the system, despite Jinnah being a woman (let us be reminded that modernists like Fazlur Rahman or Ghulam Ahmad Parwez, the latter praised en passant by Hoodbhoy, sided with the dictator at this time). In the 1970s, Maududi's comments about the mismanagement of democracy by Zulfikar Bhutto were among the sanest, and the Jamaat joined the other opposition parties in protest against rigging elections by the PPP in 1977. Ten

years later Jamaat openly demanded democratization from General Zia ul-Haq, although earlier, it had significantly benefited from his Islamizing measures. (There are also examples of the opposite kind, most notably the Jamaat's role during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971; however, while the East Pakistani wing of Jamaat led by Gholam Azam did its best to organize paramilitary troops to aid the army and help Biharis, it is uncertain how much of the actual situation in East Pakistan was known to the Jamaat's leaders and members from West Pakistan. Only two of them – Mian Tufayl and Nasir Ahmad – are known to have visited East Pakistan during the carnage, and the latter had later criticized the army's excesses).

In the 1970s, Jamaat-e-Islami was not “against labor unions” (p. 291) but actively organizing them, which was one of the reasons Bhutto was relatively lenient towards Maududi; it was easier for him to deal with unions created by Jamaat than the Maoist ones. Generally, the Jamaat's approach towards the economic ideas of the Left evolved, and in the period in question the party even suggested land reforms, albeit limited in scope. In 2010, Humeira Iqtidar wrote about the Jamaat that “no other national political party in Pakistan has institutional links, however tenuous, with peasants or small farmers (...) no other national political party in Pakistan currently raises the issue of feudalism in its rallies” (Iqtidar, 2010, p. 286).

In another place, Hoodbhoy poses a question: “Why did leaders starting from Jinnah and Liaquat and all the way down to Bhutto never talk about Pakistan's ideology? Why did it have to start with Zia?” (p. 272) The problem is: it had not started with General Zia-ul-Haq. Ayub Khan and the highest-ranked officials of his regime repeatedly assured that Pakistan is “an ideological state, and its ideology is Islam”². Not to mention Zulfikar Bhutto's times, when an alleged hostility towards the “ideology of Pakistan” was one of the official reasons to ban the National Awami Party and send its leaders to jail.

The next part of the book (“Stubborn Angularities”) consists of two chapters presenting the major ethnic problems of Pakistan: the Bengali one, which finished with the secession of Bangladesh after a bloody civil war in 1971, and the Balochi one, which remains unresolved.

As for East Pakistan/East Bengal, the author rightly reminds us that “Bengalis had been the most vociferous and the earliest to demand Pakistan. It is therefore somewhat paradoxical that they were also the quickest to reject Pakistan” which “was not what the Bengalis had bargained for” (p. 201). After that he describes various ways the Bengalis had been discriminated in pre-1971 Pakistan. Granted, serious scholarly literature has already made these same points many times, but

² *Provincial Assembly of West Pakistan Debates*, vol. I, part 1, 1966, 21st November 1966, p. 186; see also Mohammad Ayub Khan, *Friends not Masters: A Political Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 196–197.

Hoodbhoy writes about them with admirable clarity (and adds a few juicy anecdotes from his childhood about the treatment of Bengalis).

The other parts of this chapter are more illuminating. Firstly, the author gives us a lucid description of contemporary Pakistani memory of 1971 (including quotes from army generals). Hoodbhoy rightly points out that school textbooks either try to avoid the sensitive topic of Bangladesh's secession or try to blame the "Hindu conspiracy" in accordance with what most of the Pakistanis think.

Secondly, the author presents data that clearly show that while at the time of secession, East Pakistan had more inhabitants and far more poverty, an independent Bangladesh turned out far better than people in 1971 (not only Pakistanis) thought. Instead of being a "hopeless basket case", as Henry Kissinger predicted, Bangladesh (while not free of problems) has bigger foreign exchange reserves and less debt than Pakistan, generally beating the latter in most of the indicators of life quality or economic growth, including population control, and its citizens have a longer life expectancy. "In 1971, Pakistan was 70% richer than Bangladesh; today, Bangladesh is 45% richer than Pakistan" (p. 214).

Hoodbhoy's main points when explaining this are as follows: unlike Pakistan, Bangladesh does not have "a Kashmir-like problem" and thus the need for spending massive resources on the military; Bangladesh treats its minorities and women better, being rewarded for this by the fruits of their labor; feudalism in Bangladesh is long gone (it had been abolished when it was still part of Pakistan), and that also helped the civil society to develop itself.

The next chapter's topic is Balochistan, which had never felt comfortable in Pakistan since 1948 the threat of military action forced the Khanate of Kalat to accede. Only in 1970 had it been made a full-fledged province, the first elected government (1972–1973) had been dismissed after less than a year, and the Centre had always had Balochis in high scorn, interested mostly in exploiting their regions' natural resources. That, in turn, resulted in a sense of deprivation, pushing many towards more brutal forms of struggle (in April 2022, a member of the Balochistan Liberation Army became the first Pakistan female suicide bomber ever). The Pakistani government for many years was not helping its own case, giving a green light to a proliferation of militant Islamist organizations in Balochistan, hoping it would make Balochis forget the blend of their nationalism and Marxism which dominated their movement in the 1970s.

Hoodbhoy also does not whitewash the Balochis themselves, unlike many scholars who prefer to do so as a kind of tribute to the victims. "Although there are examples of caring and concerned Baloch sardars, far too many lead luxurious lives while their tribesmen suffer poverty and deprivation. Where democracy has yet to take root and where corruption coexists with a tribal culture, elections are also not

a panacea. Incompetence is fairly evenly distributed across provinces, as is the acceptance of bribery as a tool to extract concessions” (p. 227).

The next chapter is called “Was Pakistan Worth the Price?”. Here Hoodbhoy tries to analyze the circumstances of Pakistan reaching its independence. “One cannot rule out the possibility that a still bloodier Partition would have happened if the British had left some years or decades later” – he points out rightly (p. 241). Then, he presents some alternative historical scenarios, but a question of what would have happened if the Cabinet Mission Plan from 1946 had been eventually accepted leads him to the only possible conclusion: it depends on whether we are pessimists or optimists.

Chapter ten has an all-telling title: “What Is the Ideology of Pakistan – and Does It Matter?”. Even without reading, one can guess Hoodbhoy’s answer: it doesn’t because a healthy country needs no ideology. A worthy fragment of this chapter is a reminder that the Two Nations Theory was preached not only by the Muslim League under Jinnah but also by the ideologues of Hindutva. They agreed that Muslims are a nation separate from Hindus, although – according to, say, Vinayak Savarkar – it was not giving them rights to any piece of the sacred Hindu soil: instead, they had to “live in undivided India as subordinates or leave for elsewhere” (p. 266).

Chapter eleven poses the question “Why Couldn’t Pakistan Become an Islamic State?”. Hoodbhoy gives two reasons: firstly, because there is no agreement, and can never be, on what the phrase “Islamic state” really means, and secondly, such concepts are at odds with the very foundations of modern state polity.

Whether or not this is right can be decided by the reader himself. Still, Hoodbhoy too often goes for cheap ridicule, like: “Would an Islamic bank credit card be somehow morally superior to the credit card of, say, that issued by Bank of America? If that is not enough, bitcoin and various cryptocurrencies pose ethical and moral problems that can send anyone’s head spinning”. True enough, but does Hoodbhoy not know that the Islamic scholars do face these problems instead of turning their back on them? One may not need to subscribe to the theological reasoning employed by Ulema when dealing with such problems. Yet Hoodbhoy’s assertion that if the Quran is “a complete code of life” it would be impossible to justify Quranic basic things like “photography, television (...) vaccines, plastic surgery, blood transfusions” (p. 284) far from a severe scholarship, is a silly caricature. He also assures us that the Islamic model of state is incompatible with today’s world because when it was developed, society was very different from the current one – no white-collar crimes, no climate change, no population boom. Sure, but the same can be said about Montesquieu’s times.

The reader also gets an analysis of “three presumed models for the Islamic state” (the Prophet-led Medina, Maududi’s concept of state, and Afghanistan run by the

Taliban). In fact, Hoodbhoy could have spared himself the effort: since he believes that the only right path for Muslims is “to move forward and become part of the normal world” (p. 307), he could not care less about what other paths anyone could propose. Thus, he neither analyzes the possibility that there could be more models nor explains his reasoning concerning the details of those three (Maududi’s state would not permit birth control or bank interest; Hoodbhoy may feel it is wrong or harmful, but why does he think it would be *impossible*?).

“What if Pakistan Becomes an Islamic Sharia State?” – is the title of the last sub-chapter, and in the opening paragraph we have been given an answer: it will mean “that Pakistan will fall completely to religious forces”, but this is unlikely, as “any serious move in the direction of a sharia state could lead to civil war” (p. 301). We will deal with that later.

Chapter twelve asks a more relevant question: “Why Is Pakistan a Praetorian State?”. The author even asserts that “Pakistan, together with North Korea, is the world’s most heavily militarized praetorian state” (p. 311). Strictly speaking, it is not true (there are worse cases than Pakistan, like Eritrea), but the army’s peculiar position in Pakistan’s political system cannot be doubted, and it is unlikely to change anytime soon. Hoodbhoy describes it broadly, including the fact that the officers invariably consider themselves the best custodians of Pakistan’s national interest. The interest in question “is understood almost exclusively in relation to India” – concludes Hoodbhoy – while “missing is a positive vision for Pakistan’s future” (p. 319). Where the author goes wrong is when he lays. Moreover, that is because neither the army nor the Establishment can formulate such a vision.

True enough. The author goes wrong when he lays Pakistan’s praetorianism at the door of the British. He states that the country had an “overdeveloped military (...) inherited from the British”, and because of that the rulers were “happy and willing to serve as sepoyes of the United States” (p. 320). However, just four pages later he correctly adds that immediately after Partition “the army’s size was modest” (p. 324). Had the Kashmir issue not been on the table, it would have likely stayed as such, not to mention the possibility of Pakistan’s foreign policy having a different tilt.

Chapter thirteen: “Identity. I am Pakistan, but What Am I?” – describes Pakistan’s identity crisis. When asking for its solution, Hoodbhoy has a simple answer: “Colloquially speaking, chill out! We are all pretty much the same, the progeny of an African mother with similarities far exceeding differences” (p. 347). This thought is reiterated at the end of this very long chapter: “We must accept our principal identity as global, not national” (p. 374).

We will return to the pesky regularity of Hoodbhoy’s advice on what we *must* do. For now, let us mention that his detailed observations are more valuable. The

author quotes one Pakistani writer by calling the country's urge to link itself to the Arabian world "Arab Wannabe Syndrome" and describes the syndrome in detail, as well as the reactions to a Turkish TV series "Diriliş: Ertuğrul", treated seriously as a source of the identity of *Pakistanis* (Ertuğrul was a 13th century Turkish chieftain). The Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan hailed the series as an unforgettable lesson for Pakistani youth about "our Islamic history" and "Islamic values" – making it clear: the history of Turks and Arabs too (like the Prophet's Companions) is "our history". As an Indian newspaper summed up, "If it was possible, Ertuğrul would have been named the first Pakistani ever" (Inayat, 2023). Lately, many Pakistanis want to perceive themselves as the descendants of mighty Turks and Arabs who brought Islam against all odds to the subcontinent and mixed with its inhabitants – a vision fully endorsed by Imran Khan and not likely to fade into oblivion with his dismissal. Hoodbhoy points out that constructing a nation this way is full of dangers: not only it excludes minorities again (minorities are even constitutionally not treated as "full" Pakistanis), but also divides Pakistani Muslims themselves, as Sindhis or Balochis are hardly willing to subscribe to the efforts of linking them with Turkish and Arabic ancestry.

Chapter fourteen lists "Three Physical Perils Up Ahead". The first is climate change, described aptly and often at odds with dominating trends. Hoodbhoy agrees that the rich countries – the so-called "global North" – bear the lion's share of responsibility for the change. But then the author hits the bull's eye: "However, was it [Pakistan] richer, there is no doubt that its economic system would have worked in the same way and contributed just as much – or perhaps even more – than the global average. But the local environmental degradation is certainly of its own making and a result of poor governance". After that, he proves his point – the rich countries, their guilt notwithstanding, do much to stop global warming while Pakistan does not – with well-selected examples. I will mention only one of them: "The U.K. government uses only 83 pool cars for all its ministries as against 20,000 cars used by the Sindh Government alone" (p. 384).

The second "peril" is a population boom ("every two years its [Pakistan's] population increase is enough to create one more Israel" [p. 385]). Hoodbhoy may be exaggerating when he scares the reader by describing the possible consequences of the Malthusian trap – the latest research results suggest that the world's population will begin going downwards at the end of the century, unlike now³. Yet he is undoubtedly correct when pointing out that said trap is a mortal danger for *Pakistan*

³ See for example: S.E. Vollset et al. (2020). Fertility, mortality, migration, and population scenarios for countries and territories from 2017 to 2100: a forecasting analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study, *The Lancet*, 396, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30677-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30677-2) [access: 31.03.2023]; W. Lutz et al. (2018). *Demographic and human capital scenarios for the 21st century*:

and that the country would find it easier to escape if not for the influence of religious conservatives. While in Iran – mistakenly perceived by the West as a den of the worst religious reaction – 77.4% of women or their husbands use some method of contraception, in Pakistan it is 34.5%. As the author comments, “Pakistan must declassify its best kept national secret – knowing how babies are made (...) A proper diagram of the mammalian reproductive system – even for rabbits – cannot be found in any Pakistani school textbook” (p. 387).

The third “peril” is the possibility of nuclear war, although Hoodbhoy admits that acquiring the Bomb by Pakistan reduced the risk of another armed conflict.

Chapter fifteen, “The Paths Travelled Post-1971”, is devoted to four “experiments” – large-scale concepts of reinventing Pakistan presented by its rulers. Those are Zulfikar Bhutto’s “Islamic Socialism”, Zia ul-Haq’s Shariatization, Pervez Musharraf’s “Enlightened Moderation” and Imran Khan’s promises to rebuild the “State of Medina”. The explanations for their downfall are nothing new – Bhutto because of his authoritarian streak, Zia and Imran Khan due to their inability to link Islamization with good and just governance. As for Musharraf, according to Hoodbhoy, he lost because he was also an army chief and thus was unable to be firmer towards jihadists, as they were helpful in a hybrid war against Kashmir.

The last chapter’s main point is: “The Two Nation Theory gave birth to Pakistan in 1947. Now, three-quarters of a century later, it is time to abandon it in favor of a Single Nation Theory”. Again, we are getting a set of prescriptions helping to achieve a better future and many taunts as well. The latter are mostly directed at the religiously orthodox who see more Islam as a cure for everything, but Marxists, still believing in “some imagined working class revolution” (p. 423), are not spared either.

As I mentioned earlier, a solid point of Hoodbhoy’s book is an analysis of how the historical events and processes he tackles are presented in the Pakistani official discourse and what collective memory has done with them. The 1971 war and the secession of Bangladesh are good examples. The author aptly observes that the Pakistanis have put all the blame on Yahya for drunkenness and womanizing, thus absolving not only Zulfikar Bhutto and his party but also themselves of guilt. And yet, in West Pakistan, especially Punjab, not many voices were raised against the military operation. In fact, the slogan chanted by crowds after the fall of Dacca in December 1971 – “One voice, one thought, Yahya Khan is a murderer” – did not refer to the murderous crimes against Bengalis but to the fact that the military reaction against them was not swift or firm enough, so East Pakistanis were able to secede and the nation was “murdered” (Talbot, 2021, chapter VI). Hoodbhoy

has more illuminating comments of that kind, and many gem phrases, like the one about Zia's times: "Religion was now the currency of power – if you wanted to get somewhere, you had better be religious or at least appear religious" (p. 403).

On the other hand, his book contains many factual errors – aside from the ones I have already mentioned – that sometimes lead the author to more severe mistakes in broader interpretations. Jogendranath Mandal was not a member of the Muslim League (although he was a Minister in the first Pakistani Cabinet). Krishak Praja Party did not attend a conference of parties opposing the Pakistani demand in April 1940; in fact, it was Fazlul Huq, the party chairman (and a member of the Muslim League at the same time), who presented the Lahore Resolution during the M. L. session just a month before. Hoodbhoy has simply copied this from the introduction to the book *Muslims Against the Muslim League* (the co-author of said introduction, Ali Usman Qasmi, later admitted it was a mistake) (Qasmi, Robb, 2017, p. 2–3). In Bengal before and during Partition "there was no Muslim landed aristocracy" (p. 201). Seriously? Not even the Nawab of Dacca qualifies? Jinnah did not remove Nawab Iftikhar Hussain Mamdot from Punjab's chief ministership in 1946; it was done by Liaquat in 1949, long after Jinnah's death. Hussein Shaheed Suhrawardy was not "the only one ever" Prime Minister from East Pakistan (p. 202): Khawaja Nazimuddin and Muhammad Ali Bogra came before him (President Iskander Mirza was also a Bengali, although his ancestral home was in Murshidabad which after Partition had become part of India). Balochistan did not become a province thanks to the 1973 constitution but earlier in 1970, courtesy of President Yahya Khan.

The fact that Jinnah's state funeral was led by Sunni alim (a Constituent Assembly member, Shabbir Ahmed Usmani) is called a "hint" of "the unraveling of pluralism" (p. 367), even though Jinnah was quite indifferent to Sunni-Shia conflict and would likely frown to the suggestion that the alim leading the prayers must be a Shia. We are also informed that "some of his [Jinnah's] fiercest opponents were certain mullahs and pirs" (p. 157). True enough, but some others were on his side, and their number was not negligible.

Commenting on the Partition carnage, Hoodbhoy quotes Blaise Pascal – "men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it for religious conviction" (p. 13) – after 20th century experiences with the crimes of Nazism or Communism, both essentially secular and placing science on a high pedestal; one should be more cautious in blaming only faith for the "evil". And in any case, Pascal never even said it. The original quote does not mention religion but the "false principle of conscience [*un faux principe de conscience*]", which means simply being wrongly convinced that something is moral. As for religion, Pascal saw Christianity more or less the way Iqbal or Maududi saw Islam – as the ultimate moral compass – which

is no secret if someone knows this philosopher from anything more than Internet quotes. That Hoodbhoy's limited knowledge about religion can also be seen when he asks dramatically if Jinnah wanted to "create a state governed by 7th-century sharia law?" (p. 162). The Quran was indeed (according to Islam) revealed in the 7th century, but Sharia was developed for many centuries after that.

The fact that many of Pakistan's social problems have their source not in Religion but Tradition – which is sometimes openly at odds with the religious prescriptions – is a topic mostly absent here. For example, as Matthew Nelson or Stephen Lyon points out, according to Sharia, women are to get half of the inheritance received by men. Just try, however, to tell that to Balochis or Tribal Pashtuns, who routinely give them nothing (as far as the land is concerned, at least). Lyon even suggests that to date it is Sharia, not the liberal notions of equality, that has lately enabled some women to try to get their Quranic share of inheritance successfully – thus making Sharia genuinely emancipatory⁴. There are more paradoxes of this kind in Pakistani history, but we will not know that from this book.

When Jinnah mentioned that "in Germany Hitlerism came into existence because of socialistic and communistic movements. So did Fascism rise in Italy", he had a point: Hindenburg in Germany and King Victor Emmanuel in Italy gave power, respectively, to Hitler and Mussolini because they feared radical Left and many citizens welcomed this change for that very reason. Yet Hoodbhoy berates Jinnah, calling his enunciation "strange" and "counter-factual" (p. 244).

On the other hand, the author seems to think that "communism" and "progressive politics" are synonymous, as when Jinnah criticizes the former, he is accused of spurning the latter – quite a fallacy (Joseph Stalin, anyone?). More importantly, Hoodbhoy assures us that Jinnah was a staunch enemy of socialism and egalitarianism, and so the Muslim League did not use this kind of slogans to mobilize the masses before Partition. This is a grave error. Let me quote, for example, Jinnah's Presidential Address at the Muslim League's session in 1943: "I have visited some villages. There are millions and millions of our people who hardly get one meal a day. Is this civilisation? Is this the aim of Pakistan? Do you imagine that millions have been exploited and cannot get a meal daily? If that is the idea of Pakistan, I would not have it. If they are wise, they will have to adjust themselves to the new modern conditions of life. If they do not, God help them; we shall not help them"⁵. Such rhetoric often appeared in his speeches during the Second World War; it only disappeared when large Punjabi and Sindhi landlords had begun to jump into the Muslim League's bandwagon.

⁴ M.J. Nelson (2011). *In the Shadow of Shari'ah: Islam, Islamic Law, and Democracy in Pakistan*, Columbia University Press; S.M. Lyon (2019). *Political Kinship in Pakistan: Descent, Marriage, and Government Stability*, Lexington Books, pp. 69–74.

⁵ Quoted from: Karim, *Secular Jinnah & Pakistan*, p. 191.

But even during the 1946 elections, Jinnah's subordinates were still using it in Bengal as well as in Punjab, and in both these provinces the League's manifestos were written partly by communists. Before Partition, the party's message often was egalitarian, whatever Jinnah himself had thought about it.

Having analyzed the pros and cons, what is the main message of the book reviewed here? Hoodbhoy's ambition is – no less – to show his country a new, bold way to follow, which would be progressive as well as scientific. Let's first present the assumptions his ideas are based on.

First of all, he argues that the world moves inevitably toward more liberalism, and religions have to follow the trend: "Whether for good or for bad, the arrow of time is unidirectional and irreversible" (p. 307). This by the same author, no less, who wonders how it is possible that Syed Ahmad Khan was able to comment on Islam in his articles with a boldness that no Pakistani thinker would dare today! Hoodbhoy's problems with predicting the future become obvious when he mentions that the superpowers – the United States, China, and Russia – "are frankly driven by pragmatic objectives. National interest is now defined as having a high standard of living, a contented populace, and some degree of influence in world affairs". He agrees that Russia's politics towards Ukraine "borders on the abnormal" (p. 319) but clearly forgot to edit this fragment after the Russian invasion, unlike the other parts of his book. Here we have the first iceberg on the way of Hoodbhoy's ship: not everyone's objectives are pragmatic, especially with high emotions at stake.

We are also assured that "global citizenship is around the corner unless it is perversely opposed by forces that benefit from conflict – armies and politicians" (p. 376). A mere review is not a place to argue with that optimism (assuming this vision is really optimistic, anyway), although if Hoodbhoy would not take into account that the societies themselves may not be eager to dissolve themselves in "global citizenship" (for any reason possible, including lack of drive to share their resources), there will be no way to discuss the problem seriously. Not to mention that Hoodbhoy himself ridicules the idea of harmonious cooperation inside the ummah, pointing out rightly the grave political differences between Muslim countries (he does so to emphasize that such cooperation is no way to boost Pakistan's Islamic identity). But if Muslims cannot be friends even with each other, where exactly does the author see this corner around which global citizenship is?

Is the change to come from some mass campaign of persuasion? It certainly will not help if it is led by people like Hoodbhoy, who unabashedly and continuously writes as if "every thinking person" just has to think exactly like him. We can see this when he comments on the fact that many U. S. voters endorse Trump or, more generally, Republicans. Here we learn that, yes, "every thinking person" wonders "why political culture is regressing towards primal values (...) stone age politics"?

Shortly after, the person mentioned above gives an answer through Hoodbhoy's mouth: the reason is "cultural nostalgia", which in excessive quantity is just "a disease" (pp. 350–351). However, in the 2020 elections, Trump got support from almost half of the Americans. If they are not "thinking persons" – and according to Hoodbhoy, they certainly are not – then what to do with democracy?

This becomes important when Hoodbhoy begins to unravel his vision of the future of Pakistan. We find it early – in the Introduction: "As a *gedanken* experiment, imagine being given a magic wand. How to fix Pakistan? It is almost a no-brainer: make peace with Pakistan's neighbors; let civilians, not soldiers, rule the country; decentralize massively but intelligently; choose trade over aid; redirect education towards skill enhancement and enlightenment; stop official efforts at political or religious indoctrination; give women a voice; allow labor and students a role in the democratic process; eliminate large land holdings through appropriate legislation; collect land and property taxes based upon current market value; speed up the courts and make them transparent; and make meritocratic appointments in government" (p. 17).

Some of these points are obvious; others (the Kashmir issue) suggest that the wand would have to fix more countries than just Pakistan. But the truly eyebrow-raising moment is the single sentence in which the word "democratic" appears. "Allow labor and students a role in the democratic process"?

Are they disenfranchised now? I do not know anything about it, so Hoodbhoy has rather meant – and as a "no-brainer", mind you – that they should have a more significant role in the democratic process than their number would suggest. But why would anyone have such a special status, and why these two groups? Is it because one can find a Leftist or a liberal in them far more easily than among, say, villagers or soldiers?

So democracy – or the notion that societies can decide about themselves – is clearly downplayed here: the effect of voting should not be what people want but what the reformists (like the author) want. At one point, Hoodbhoy mentions the famous discovery of the Pew Global Survey from 2013: 82% of Pakistanis want Sharia to be the law of the land. (Let's not discuss the veracity of these results here, as the author does not do that either⁶) Yet he assures us that "delusions of political Islam must be dispensed with" (p. 307) and give way to secular, liberal values; only then will we have true democracy in Pakistan. But what if this is not exactly what Pakistanis would have chosen if there were free and fair elections? That problem is left unanswered, and the very hierarchy of purposes – let's introduce reasonable standards first and have democracy afterwards, especially since the Pakistanis

⁶ It is discussed, however. See for example: P. Balcerowicz, A. Kuszewska (2022). *Kashmir in India and Pakistan Policies*, Routledge, p. 113.

are “confused” (p. 309) when discussing the practical consequences of Islam (this is how Hoodbhoy comments on some student debate about Sharia punishments) – is quite similar to the vision of Ayub Khan, which makes me wonder why is he even criticized in the book. Similarly, Hoodbhoy’s pen makes Musharraf’s failure a consequence of the General not being firm enough in his struggle with radicals. And what if he was? Would his brutal tutelage be praised by the author?

If there is ever to be a true democracy in Pakistan – i.e., one freed from the influence of military-bureaucratic “deep state” – Pakistanis will have to discuss between themselves how to translate the (quite common) longing for a truly Islamic state into the detailed vision of polity. While that would certainly not change Pakistan into Iran, the results may be quite different from the ones envisaged by Hoodbhoy. For example, the formal exclusion of Ahmadis from the pale of Islam in 1974 did not happen because the elite got scared of the war cry of some fundamentalists. The demand had a solid popular backup, and it would have been changed into a law far earlier if society had had a say in that matter; such attempts were made both in the 1950s and 1960s. Comparing Musharraf (unfavorably) to Kemal Atatürk, the author fails to see that Kemal’s secular policy was by no means endorsed by the majority; at first people (mostly) forgave him due to his enormous contribution to ensuring the preservation of Turkish independence, but later the secular character of the state had to be guided by an army until finally the soldiers were sent back to the barracks by Erdogan. One simply cannot sweep the people’s sentiments under the rug forever.

This is an elephant Hoodbhoy pretends not to see in the Pakistani room, a dilemma that makes many of his intellectual searches ultimately barren. If his “magic wand” was to give effect to what he dreams about, it would have to change not only the circumstances barring the Pakistanis from exercising their vote but the society itself. This, in turn, is perilously close to Bertolt Brecht’s satirical prescription: “Wouldn’t it be easier if the government has dissolved the nation and elected a new one?”. Well, good luck.

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