

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Cover point Impressions of Leadership in Pakistan**

Jamsheed Marker

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Ambassador Jamsheed Marker's latest book "Cover point Impressions of leadership in Pakistan" is a collection of his "sad" yet insightful impressions about Pakistani leaders since 1947. The book comprises fourteen short albeit comprehensive chapters about the roles of different leaders during the last six decades and how they helped create the "political tragedy" facing contemporary Pakistan. With the exception of two, each chapter is dedicated to a single leader. Marker's *previous book* *Quiet Diplomacy: Memoirs of an Ambassador of Pakistan* provided a history of his various ambassadorial appointments and his dealings with foreign personalities. In doing so he juxtaposed events in Pakistan alongside his official assignments providing continuity to the narrative. A diplomat par excellence, Ambassador Jamsheed Marker joined the Diplomatic Service in 1965 when Foreign Secretary Aziz Ahmed, during Ayub Khan's presidency, appointed him Pakistan's Ambassador to Ghana. Thus began a distinguished career as a diplomat in various parts of the world spanning almost three decades.

In his own words, his "fielding position of

cover-point” in the diplomatic service enabled him to “observe from reasonable distance” the “methods and styles of work” of different leaders as well as the strengths and foibles in their personal character. Throughout the book, Marker highlights how even the strongest-willed leaders would sway in the face of sycophancy and flattery, marring their judgment and ability to create a genuine democracy in Pakistan.

While Marker’s descriptions emphasise the numerous flaws and weaknesses of the individuals, he also recognises their strengths. Notwithstanding Marker’s acknowledgement of their qualities, his account is mostly a sorrow tale of incompetence, greed and opportunism that ultimately led to the downfall of the Pakistan Jinnah had envisioned.

Although Marker tries to remain impartial throughout the book, leaving it for the reader to reach their own conclusions, there are instances when his personal opinions influence his ability to remain neutral. In his reflections, for example, Marker talks about how some leaders such as President Zia-ul-Haq were not given enough public recognition, while others such as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto earned more recognition than was actually due to them. His contempt for Bhutto becomes more pronounced in the subsequent chapters when he refers to him as an “evil genius” responsible for the eventual breakup of Pakistan. Not-with-standing his opinions about individuals, his dedication to and

patriotism for Pakistan shine throughout the book. His chapter about Benazir Bhutto however acknowledges that Bhutto was “far superior in intelligence than his daughter” although there was nothing to choose between them in terms of arrogance, amorality and lack of scruple.”

The author’s respect and admiration for Muhammad Ali Jinnah becomes evident in the opening lines of the first chapter where he attributes the creation of Pakistan to Jinnah’s “vision, dedication and determination.” He also describes both Jinnah and Liaqat Ali Khan as being “incorruptible.” The author’s hagiographic accounts of the lives of Jinnah and his successor are a sharp contrast to the leaders who ruled the country for the next six decades. Marker’s almost uncritical opinion about Liaqat Ali Khan becomes difficult to reconcile when Marker himself acknowledges Khan’s failure to “frame a constitution” and the introduction of the Objectives Resolution, declaring Pakistan an Islamic state. According to Marker thus, “This was arguably not what Jinnah had intended,” and moreover that it “provided an entry to the mullahs into the politics of the country.

Following comparatively brief impressions of various leaders including Field Marshall Ayub Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Marker provides a detailed analysis of his associations with General Zia ul Haq in two subsequent chapters. According to Marker, Zia-ul-Haq’s greatest achievement was his role in the

creation of Pakistan's nuclear capability as he goes on to provide detailed accounts of how European firms helped Pakistan in the process. Talking about his role in the endeavor, Marker asserts that it "involved a bit of James Bond stuff and I remember Ikram and myself meeting characters, genuine and shady, in tiny cafes tucked away in obscure villages deep in the beautiful Swiss and German countryside." And further that the Pakistani Embassy "had a Procurement Department (the nomenclature really fooled nobody) headed by a most able officer of Minister rank named Ikram Khan, who was seconded from our nuclear establishment headed by Dr A.Q. Khan. Ikram was a superb officer, knowledgeable, low-key and efficient, and went about his sensitive job with the combination of initiative and discretion that were its primary requirements."

The chapter on Muhammad Khan Junejo revolves primarily around the relationship between Junejo and Zia-ul Haq ultimately leading to the latter's dismissal at the hands of Zia in 1988. He goes on to talk about Ghulam Ishaq Khan as one of the best administrators in the country second only to Chaudry Muhammad Ali and Ghulam Ahmed. According to Marker, their similarities did not end there as both Khan and Ali entered politics, achieved brief success and ended their tenures in "undistinguished fashion."

In his chapter about Nawaz Sharif, Marker relates an incident during the 1990s when

following sanctions imposed by the US Sharif's government confiscated all foreign currency holdings in banks, in exchange for Pakistani rupees at a depreciated rate. People were falsely made to believe it was a sacrifice for the country. Subsequently rumors emerged that the leadership closed their own foreign exchange accounts and remitted the proceeds abroad prior to the decision. He also terms the Bhutto/Zardari Dynasty and the Sharifs equally corrupt, their methods of "acquisition and concealment" very similar.

Marker identifies General Pervez Musharraf as a decent and patriotic man although he acknowledges that his patriotism was sometimes "misplaced as in Kargil." He also attributes the proliferation of TV channels to Musharraf's conducive policies. According to Marker however, Musharraf too eventually succumbed to flattery and sycophancy that ultimately led to his downfall.

The book is a fascinating read for those interested in the history of Pakistan and especially those who want to know "what took Pakistan from its turbulent but pristine formation in 1947 to its present condition?" According to the book, "Jinnah would find it difficult to recognise much less accept the country in its present form." However while speaking to the audience at the recently concluded Karachi Literature Festival's session on his book, Marker asked, "Has Pakistan succeeded? If you think where we were five or 10 years ago, the jury would be

out but if you think of 1947 when a large part of the world's population didn't believe Pakistan would exist, I think we have done well."

*Amina Afzal*