

# UNDERSTANDING PAKISTAN THROUGH LITERATURE: AN APPRAISAL OF SOME RECENT WORKS

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## ABSTRACT:

*Pakistan, the second most populous Muslim country after Indonesia, came into existence on 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1947, after the division of 'British ruled' India (into India and Pakistan). From its inception to present, Pakistan covers a tumultuous history of over seven decades (1947-2019). Among the South Asian countries, no quantum of scholarship has been produced on any country—its history, religion (and religious ideology), politics, society, economy, and other inter-related issue—than Pakistan. This has continued in the last as well as present century. From 2010 onwards, numerous works have been published on religion, politics, military, and other aspects of Pakistan. This review essay, in this framework, presents an assessment of three (3) important works, published in between 2012 and 2014, so that to get clues of the various aspects of Pakistan. Following a descriptive-cum-comparative methodological approach, the books assessed and examined are: Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A New History* (2012); Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (2013); and Aqil Shah, *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan* (2014). This assessment helps us in understanding the diverse scholarly approaches adopted (by different scholars) in studying Pakistan. The major argument put forth is that such an appraisal helps us not only in understanding the history of Pakistan, but in analyzing the issues and challenges Pakistan has faced, and is facing—be they religious, political, or related to military and security, etc.*

**Keywords:** *Pakistan, Religion, Politics, Democracy, Dictatorship*

## INTRODUCTION

Muslims are distributed throughout the globe, with a significant majority in the Arab world and Asia. Besides the Middle East and North African (MENA) regions, Muslims inhabit a significant portion in Asia—Central, South and Southeast Asia. Besides, Muslims also represent a significant number in many Western/ European countries, like USA, UK, Germany, France, etc. In the South Asia, among others, Muslims form a majority in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and a significant minority in India. A substantial amount of scholarship has been produced on each country, with a focus

on its religion (or religious ideology), politics, society, culture, civilization, economy, foreign affairs, diplomatic/ international relations, and other inter-related aspects. However, it is a fact, without any exaggeration, that among these South Asian countries a plethora of literature has been produced on the history, religion, religious ideology, politics, and political trajectory of Pakistan. From its inception in 1947 to present, encompassing a history of over seven decades (1947-2019), Pakistan is, after Indonesia, second most populous Muslim country. One of the seven declared nuclear states and the sixth most populous country in the world, endowed with

strategic location and actively engaged in world affairs, Pakistan has always been the “center of global attention” (Rahman and Adnan, 2006: 197; italics added). Its role in history-making events and developments during the last four decades has been crucial—for which it has always remained in the focus. That is why many have called it a country that is on the “Eye of a Storm” (Jones, 2002); politically “a failure state” (Hayes, 1984); and a “Country in Crisis” (Jaffrelot, 2002), facing mostly the “Crisis of Governability” (Nasr, 1992). Others have described it as a country that has made a “Drift into Extremism” (Abbas, 2005), and is “on the Brink” of “Chaos” and “Crisis” (Kapur, 1991). Many others are of the opinion that “Pakistan Cauldron” (Farwell, 2011) suggests its “Stability Paradox” (Misra and Clarke, 2013), and, thus, has always depended on the clichés of three ‘A’s’: “Allah, Army, and America” (Lamb, 1991).

This is clearly evident in the titles of many books written by the scholars of Pakistan, India, the West, and the rest of the world, especially in the post-9/11 era (11<sup>th</sup> September, 2001). Some examples are: Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan’s Drift into Extremism* (2004/ 2005), Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan at the Crosscurrent of History* (2005), Owen Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm* (2009), Ahmed Rashid, *Pakistan on the Brink* (2012), Farzana Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (2009/ 2018), James P. Farwell, *The Pakistan Cauldron* (2011), Maleeha Lodhi, *Pakistan: Beyond the ‘Crisis State’* (2011), Ravi Kalia, *Pakistan: From the Rhetoric of Democracy to the Rise of Militancy* (2011), Ashutosh Misra and Michael E. Clarke, *Pakistan’s Stability Paradox* (2013), Christophe Jaffrelot, *Pakistan at the Crossroads* (2016), etc.

In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, numerous works have been published on religion, politics, military, and other aspects of Pakistan. Among these, three (3) important works, (published in 2012, 2013, and 2014), which are assessed in this essay are: Ian Talbot’s *Pakistan: A New History*; Faisal Devji’s *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea*; and Aqil Shah’s

*The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan* (for details see, Parray, 2012, 2013, 2014a–2014g, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016, and 2018).

It is a fact that Pakistan is the second most populous Muslim country after Indonesia. It came into existence on 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1947, after the division of ‘British ruled’ India into India and Pakistan (later East Bengal, a part of Pakistan, became Bangladesh in 1971). Encompassing a history of seven decades (1947-2019), Pakistan is the only South Asian countries which has seen a quantum of scholarship produced on its history, religion (and religious ideology), politics, society, economy, (inter) national issues, foreign policy, and other inter-related issues. This scholarship has seen a surge in post-9/11 era. One of the major reasons for such a surge in literature is due to Pakistan’s tumultuous history, as will become evident from the section that follows. From 2010 onwards as well, numerous works have been published on religion, politics, military, and other aspects of Pakistan.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Among these, this essay, presents an assessment and appraisal of three (3) important books published in between 2012 and 2014, so that to get clues and indications, signs and signals, of the various aspects of Pakistan. Theoretical in nature, the essay follows both descriptive and comparative methodological approaches. It presents an appraisal of these three (3) books—Talbot (2012), Devji (2013), and Shah (2014). This descriptive and comparative appraisal and assessment helps us in understanding the diverse scholarly approaches that have been adopted, by different scholars, in studying different aspects of Pakistan history, be it its political narrative, or military-government relation, or other varied aspects. Such an appraisal, the essay argues, helps us in understanding the history of Pakistan as well as in analyzing the issues and challenges—be they religious, political, or related to military and security, etc.—Pakistan has faced (in the past), and is facing (presently).

Before providing this assessment of these selected books, it is necessary to begin with a brief sketch of Pakistan, from religio-political angle. It is apt to mention here what Ian Talbot writes in the beginning of his Preface about Pakistan history writing:

The task of writing Pakistan's history since independence is an onerous one. The tumultuous and contested nature of the country's political development compounds the problems relating to source material for contemporary history. ... Indeed few countries' histories can be so marked by conspiracy theories, allegations and unresolved mysteries concerning a gamut of subjects from election riggings and attempted coups, to riots, massacres, and assassinations (Talbot, 1998: v).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Pakistan: A Brief Sketch

Pakistan—a sovereign country in South Asia, with a population of 212,742,631 (2017 census)—is the second largest Muslim country in the world, after Indonesia. Pakistan ranks at number six (6) in the list of 'world's most populous countries'. It is bordered by Iran to the west, Afghanistan to the northwest and north, China to the northeast, and India to the east and southeast, and the coast of the Arabian Sea forms its southern border. One of the seven declared nuclear states/ country in the world, it is endowed with strategic location and actively engaged in world affairs. "Contemporary Pakistan" is, as Ian Talbot (1998: 21) puts it, "strategically located to the east of the Persian Gulf and in close proximity to China and Russia. Its geopolitical position particularly during the Cold War era gave it greater international interest than its size and economy would otherwise warrant".

Pakistan's story is—like any other country in the world—a mix of successes and failures, achievements and disappointments. It is an ongoing story and many more chapters are anticipated in the future. What the future holds for this important Muslim country is yet to be determined. Will it emerge as a leading civilized nation of the world or will it become

infamous as a "failing" state? Will it create an enabling environment to enhance and utilize all its potential, both human and material, or succumb to the multifaceted challenges it faces? These questions and their answers are important for everyone interested in Pakistan and its existence and position in the comity of nations (Rahman and Adnan, 2006). Moreover, having attracted more scholarly attention and interest, than most of the third world countries, due to its "considerable variety of factors that have determined its destiny"—political, religious, practice of secular/ democratic/ undemocratic institutions/ practices—Pakistan is thus a state built on a "complicated historical legacy of modern, traditional, secular, and religious components" (Hayes, 1984: 1). It has struggled, since its inception, with "constitutions, governments, and the structure of the state" (Newberg, 1995: 9), and thus Pakistan's political history is "one of frequent crisis and incomplete resolution" and its "history and future alike are intractably linked to its overlapping ideological moorings, its economic and social conditions, and the instrumental goals of state" (Newberg, 1995: 2-3).

Pakistan was born on 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1947. Almost all the works on Pakistan throw light on the emergence/ genesis of Pakistan. Few examples, of past and present, are: Khalid bin Sayeed (1980; 1968), Ayesha Jalal (1985; 2000; 2008; 2014), Ian Talbot (1999; 2008; 2012), Iftikhar Malik (2012), Muhammad Qasim Zaman (2018).

Sayeed (1968: 102, 105) describes the 'Emergence of Pakistan' as: "The origin of the idea of Pakistan as well as the composition of the word Pakistan have often provided lively subjects for controversy among scholars and publicists. ... Choudhry Rahmat Ali is considered the originator of the word Pakistan. The word was first used in a four-page leaflet entitled *Now or Never*, published in January 1933. ... Explaining the composition of the word Pakistan, Choudhry Rahmat Ali [1947: 225] wrote later: "Pakistan' is both a Persian

and an Urdu world. It is composed of letters taken from the names of all our homeland—‘Indian’ and ‘Asian’. That is, Punjab, Afghania (North-West Frontier Province), Kashmir, Iran, Sindh (including Kachch and Kathiawar), Tukharistan, Afghanistan and Baloshistan. It means the land of the Paks—the spiritually pure and clean. It symbolizes the religious beliefs and the ethnical stocks of our people; and it stands for all the territorial constituents of our original Fatherland’.”

To this may be added the summary presented, very beautifully, by Iftikhar Malik:

Achieved through a constitutional struggle led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948) under the banner of the All-India Muslim League (AIML), *Pakistan* was the term coined by some Muslim students at the University of Cambridge in 1933. Inclusive of areas like Punjab, the Frontier (identified as *Afghania*), Kashmir, Sindh, and Balochistan, it was visualized as the heartland of the Indus Valley, which has been the home of some of the oldest cultures in this part of the subcontinent [Ali, 1933]. Sought as a political dispensation for various ethnic communities living across the Indus regions, *Pakistan* was not only perceived as a neutral term among all these regional identities, but was also seen as a utopia where rural, tribal, and urban population groups would have equal opportunities and unalienable citizenry irrespective of their religious and ideological diversities. Although Pakistan was established as a Muslim state ... [Muhammad Ali] Jinnah and his associates were emphatic with regard to equal rights and opportunities for all Pakistanis. Even today, despite Muslims being an absolute majority, around 10 percent of Pakistanis belong to various other religious traditions, although further Islamization of the country has never been too far away from the public discourse and the agenda of religious political parties [Malik, 2002]. Pakistan, like several other countries, is a pluralistic society, although Islam and Urdu are two of its main national characteristics. From its history to its population and from its topography to its climate, however, the country is quite diverse (Malik, 2012: 1-2; italics in original).

Furthermore, Malik introduces Pakistan, as a geo-political entity, in these lines: “Pakistan, once the largest and most populated Muslim country in the world, still remains a significant actor in regional and global

affairs. Formed in 1947 from what used to be called British India, Pakistan was idealized by south Asian Muslims to be a state where the forces of tradition and modernity would unite, offering economic welfare and peaceful coexistence to its inhabitants” (Malik, 2012: 1). He also provides an overview of the genesis of Pakistan in these lines:

Division of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 remains one of the most significant events in recent world history and has certainly proved a turning point in the course of Islam in south Asia, where the world’s largest numbers of Muslims reside. Divided into the three states of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, this region witnessed the ascension of British power during the closing decades of a weakened Mughal Empire. Political decline only exacerbated anguish among the concerned Indian Muslims who felt that, educationally and financially, they had been an underprivileged community requiring some reorientation. At different times in subsequent centuries, Muslim intellectuals and activists proffered diverse solutions until, during the 1940s, it was the demand for Pakistan—a Muslim state—that caught their imagination. The emergence of Pakistan, divided into two parts in 1947, was thus the culmination point of a long Muslim heritage, which appeared to have been overshadowed by divided and unfavorable forces after 1720 when the looming political crisis assumed multiple dimensions (Malik, 2012: 111).

Pakistan’s political history—the story of which has been told in many ways for many different purposes and each narrative chooses new victors and victims, internal and external—is, like many of its neighbors, one of frequent crisis and incomplete resolution. Since its inception, Pakistan’s history has been defined by the uneasy relationships between state institutions and civil society, because of the “conflicts over role of religion in society, democracy in polity and the transformative capacities of state institutions in the economy have been in the underpinnings for a politics of unique opportunity and often, profound division and dismay” (Newberg, 1995: 2-3). In my previous writings (see, for example, Parray, 2012), this situation was summarized as:

The political evolution of Pakistan has taken a complex and multifaceted path. Its founders

intended it to be a 'democratic state', but, in the course of its history, up to the present times, Pakistan has experienced many vicissitudes, including three wars with India, repeated *coup d'état*, and political instability. The several efforts to establish democratic systems in Pakistan since its inception were 'short-lived' and never really operational enough to test their 'suitability'. These democratic experiments were replaced by authoritarian regimes, usually dominated by the military that were invariably identified as a 'transitional stage' to a reformed and revised democratic system. For example, among the dictatorships/ authoritarian regimes, the reign of General Ayub Khan (r. 1958-69), General Zia ul Haq (r. 1977-88), and of General Parvez Musharraf (r. 1999-2008) are most significant and noteworthy, while as democratically elected regimes include those of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (r. 1971-77), Benazir Bhutto (r. 1988-90; and 1993-96) and of Muhammad Nawaz Sharif (r. 1990-93 and 1997-99). Benazir and Nawaz succeeded each other twice in power, but dropped the country into many 'crises'. Many common factors were responsible for the failure of their regimes: unstable economic situation, ethnic conflicts, and corruption charges. Sharif's regime was followed by a 1999 *coup d'état* in which General Parvez Musharraf assumed executive powers (r. 1999-2000; 2001-08). In 2001, Musharraf named himself President of the country, but the assassination of Benazir Bhutto (on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2007 in Rawalpindi, Pakistan) resulted in a series of important political developments, including electing Asif Ali Zardari (Benazir Bhutto's husband) as the new President in 2008. This was followed by the democratic regime of Nawaz Sharif, who came to power third time for an incomplete term (r. 2013-2017), but was replaced by cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan in 2018 (who officially took charge as PM on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2018). Thus, Pakistan has headed back towards parliamentary democracy rule.

Since its creation, there have debates over the state's relationship with religion. Questions have always been asked if Pakistan was created

as a '*state for Muslims*' or as '*an Islamic State*'. The question of what the role of Islam could be in the public life of the new country, writes Farhat Haq (2010), "arose before the Pakistani state was created". For Haq (2010: 122), the question of whether Pakistan should be an "Islamic state" or simply "a state for Muslims" of subcontinent became "a source of enduring conflict". Pakistan's "Islamic identity" has consistently generated tension within the political system as the country's secularly-oriented ruling elite has confronted intermittent demands from the '*ulama* (religious scholars) and Islamist groups for the imposition of the Shari'ah. At the socio-cultural level, Islam remains an important factor in the life of most Pakistanis, but Pakistan does not present a "monolithic structure" of Islamic beliefs, practices, and interpretation (Hussain, 2009; 2014, II: 225-232). There is considerable variation in the ways people articulate, interpret, and practice their faith and work out its implications in their lives, individually as well as collectively. The political, religious, and intellectual situation of Islam in Pakistan can be discussed with reference to, at least, four categories, orthodox/ traditional, Sufi, reformist/ liberal, and revivalist/ fundamentalist Islam, apart from minority groups such as Shi'a, Isma'ilis, and Ahmadis (Hussain, 2009; 2014). This is well described, and beautifully summarized, by Muhammad Qasim Zaman as:

The first modern Muslim state to be established in the name of Islam, Pakistan was the largest Muslim country in the world at the time of its foundation [i.e., in 1947]; today [i.e., in 2019], it is the second most populous, after Indonesia. All the key facets of modern Islam worldwide were well represented in colonial India and they have continued to be so in Pakistan: Sufism; traditional scholars, the '*ulama*, and their institutions of learning, the madrasas; Islamism; and Islamic modernism. Several of them receive their earliest and what [proved to be highly influential] articulations in this vast region (Zaman, 2018: 1).

Since 1947, Pakistan has faced critical political, economic, and ethno-regional problems that continue to shape political developments and contribute to its continuing sociopolitical instability. At the ideological level, the issue

of the role of Islam in politics and the state has generated the most controversy. The ideological and political history of Pakistan has been marked by a continuous debate on the nature of the Islamic political system and its manifestation in constitutional structure and socioeconomic policies (Hussain, 2014, II: 226). This situation is presented in these lines: “The turmoil in Pakistani politics has many sources—the most important being the *dominance of the military* and an arrogant but woefully *incompetent federal government*... —but to the outside world, the most important source of turmoil appears to be the *role of Islam in politics*” (Haq, 2010: 119-120; italics added).

Ravi Kalia, in his edited volume on Pakistan, introduces Pakistan through the lens of ‘political rhetoric’ vs. ‘grim political reality’; he writes:

From its inception, Pakistan has striven, at least in the political rhetoric provided by both civilian and military leaders, for democracy, liberalism, freedom of expression, inclusiveness of minorities, even secularism; but in practice, Pakistan has continued to drift toward increasingly brittle authoritarianism, religious extremism, and intolerance of minorities—both Muslim and non-Muslim. This chasm between animated political rhetoric and grim political reality has baffled the world as much as the Pakistanis themselves (Kalia, 2011: 1).

The ideological orientations and power imperatives of those who have controlled the state since its emergence—the higher echelons of the civil service, the military, the feudal landlords—the ‘triad’ is now known as “the establishment” (Cohen, 2006: 93), and the urban-based capitalist class—did not always coincide with those of the ‘*Ulama* and the fundamentalists. Three distinct groups have played an important part in the controversies associated with the conception of an Islamic state and constitution since the early 1950s. These include the traditionalists, represented by the ‘*ulama* of various schools of thought; the modernists, represented by politicians, westernized businessmen, and professionals; and senior civil servants and segments of the military. The military has been a

source of modernist as well as Islamic influences (Hussain, 2014, II: 226).

In the history, it is various factors which contribute both to its failure and success, to its stability and strength, and to turmoil and disorder, to its progress and to decline. The same is the case with Pakistan, which, for most of times, has seen turmoil, instability, and variability. Farhat Haq (2010) regards the role of religion in politics as an important source of “turmoil”. For her, three issues are central in understanding the relationship between religion and politics in Pakistan. These are: (i) the conflict over the identity of Pakistani state: can it ever be secular, democratic state if it is an ideological state that must be committed to the creation of an Islamic state? (ii) the inability of the Islamist political to win elections and take power via the democratic procedure; and (iii) the impact of Pakistan’s foreign policy on the dynamics of religion and domestic politics (Haq, 2010: 120). In the words of Khurshid Ahmad (2006), history of Pakistan is characterized by changes and transformations related to two major issues: firstly, ideological, i.e., the role of Islam’s politico-social ideals and the processes for their implementation, and the challenges that beset them from the forces of secularism; and second, the clash and conflict between the forces of democracy and despotism (Ahmad, 2006: 367).

From political point of view, Pakistan has struggled with constitutions, governments, and the structure of the state, and thus throughout its history has oscillated and fluctuated—like a pendulum—between the poles of democracy and dictatorship, between civilian and military rule. Although it was created as the first ‘Islamic democratic state’, it seems not to have managed to achieve its democratic goals. It was dictatorship that proved relatively stable and successful, whereas democracy constantly appeared volatile and frail (see, for example, Newberg, 1995; Esposito and Voll, 1996; Khan, 2005; 2006; 2008; Parray, 2012; 2013).

Thus, even after about seven decades after its

emergence, the struggle over the role of Islam in Pakistan remains unresolved; and in the words of Ian Talbot (2013b: 404), Pakistan still “continues to face the problems of democratic consolidation, civil-military relations, and the establishment of a culture of religious and political tolerance that have beset it from birth”. Hence, the political trajectory of Pakistan gives an impression of a rhythmic succession of cycles of about ten years in the course of which democratic phases and military governments alternate—e.g., General Ayub Khan in 1960s, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1970s, General Zia ul Haq in 1980s, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in 1990s, General Parvez Musharraf in 2000s, etc.

Safdar Mahmood (2000: 365) is of the opinion that looking at its political balance sheet from 1947 to 1997, it becomes clear that “democracy in the real sense of the word was never introduced or practiced in Pakistan” because for most of this period, “the country was under ‘bureaucratic-cum-parliamentary’ rule or under a military rule”. He further states that after Jinnah’s death, the “elections were delayed unnecessarily and system of controlled democracy and indirect elections was introduced”, and thus the “Democratic institutions were never allowed to grow freely”.

For Shahid Javed Burki (2014), “Pakistan, throughout its history, has struggled with the task of defining a meaningful role for the state”, and the pendulum has always “swung between two extreme positions”, democracy and dictatorship, and “sometimes stopping in between the two”. “For most of its history”, writes Stephen Cohen (2006: 3), “Pakistan has oscillated between unstable democracy and benign authoritarianism. ... [But] Pakistan does well in many areas and arguably can still emerge as a successful state and cohesive nation”.

Throughout its history, in the opinion of Paula R. Newberg (1995: 9), Pakistan has “struggled with constitutions, governments, and the structure of the state”; and has thus “swung between the poles of dictatorship and democracy, and between civilian and military rule”. Another

scholar is of the opinion that having “endured a history of vacillation between democracy and dictatorship”, and having “moved back and forth between civilian and military governments”, “Pakistan’s political turmoil and instability” has, thus, caused “public cynicism about the viability of a secular state”, envisaged by Jinnah (Khan, 2013: 212). Hamid Yusuf (1998: xi)—writing back in 1997, when Pakistan had completed fifty years of its independent existence—is of the opinion that during these 50 years, in Pakistan “martial regimes have alternated with civilian governments, which themselves have not been free from controversy. Events have followed each other in an almost breathless succession”.

“The failure of democracy to take roots in Pakistan”, another scholar argues, “can be traced back to its very origin, in particular the flawed premise guiding its creation. The fear of an unassailable Hindu majority riding roughshod over Muslim interests haunted the Muslim leadership from the time efforts for greater Indian representation in decision making began in the late nineteenth century. It led to the formation of the Muslim League in 1906 and, eventually, to the demand for Pakistan. The concept of parity between the majority (the Hindu community) and the minority (the Muslim community) put forth by the Muslim League, under Jinnah’s leadership, became, eventually, the basis for the formation of the state of Pakistan. But this quest for parity irrespective of numerical strength negated the majority principle that is fundamental in a democracy, that is, the will of the majority would prevail” (Rangachari, in Kalia, 2011: 106). Kalia (2011: 135) further states that the “tragedy of Pakistan has been that military men in power kept promising the nation that they would transfer power to the civilians while the civilians, when in power, did everything possible to facilitate the return of the military to power. Democracy, not surprisingly, has been the casualty”.

On similar lines, and in the same Volume, Zafar Iqbal summarizes the political history of Pakistan, with special reference to democracy and military rule in these lines:

In the past sixty-some years of its history, democracy has eluded Pakistan, although it is not clear whether the ruling elite—civilian or military—ever considered it seriously. Several reasons for this failure have been put forth, including military takeovers, a prevailing feudal culture (particularly in political parties), incompetent and corrupt leadership, an outdated institutional infrastructure, a low literacy rate, poverty and a weak middle class, a disoriented civil society, and, finally, foreign interventions due to Pakistan's geo-strategic location in South Asia (Iqbal, in Kalia, 2011: 138).

For Ashutosh Misra (2012: 39), as analysts have “predominantly studied Pakistan through the prism of a trilogy comprising ‘Allah, Army and America’,” so in retrospect this approach “appears to be flawed as it ignores the role of democracy in influencing developments of Pakistan”. While as Aqil Shah (2014: 1) sums up Pakistan's political history as a “story of repeated coups followed by protracted periods of military government, briefly punctuated by elected civilian rule”, because for him until 2013, “Pakistan did not experience even one democratic transfer of power from one democratically elected government that had completed its tenure to another. All its previous democratic transitions have been aborted by military coups”.

Raza Rumi (2016: xii, 3) puts it, very succinctly, as: “Since its inception, Pakistan has oscillated between authoritarian and democratic spells. The civil-military bureaucracy has directly governed the country for more than three decades and the brief periods of democratic rule were turbulent, with civilians enjoying limited powers, given the overarching powers of the unelected institutions”; “Pakistan's political trajectory is a tale of instability and repeated interruptions of its weak democratic process. Its military directly ruled for over three decades, with brief periods of feeble civilian government rule”.

From these quotations/ statements, it becomes clear that the governing structure of Pakistan, from its inception in 1947, has been oscillating and fluctuating between two *D*'s: democracy and dictatorship. Although Pakistan was created as the first ‘Islamic democratic

state’, which became ‘Islamic Republic’ in 1956, it seems not to have managed to achieve its democratic goals. Indeed, in the ‘new Muslim nation’ dictatorship has proved relatively stable and successful, whereas democracy constantly appeared volatile and frail and thus, it has been oscillating between these two “D’s” (Parray, 2014g, 2015a).

An assessment of the below mentioned books will reveal all these aspects and issues faced by Pakistan, in the past and presently as well. They will help in understanding the diverse scholarly approaches adopted (by different scholars) to the history, politics, religion, military, and other issues faced by Pakistan. The assessment begins with the work of Talbot (2012), followed by Devji (2013) and ends with work of Shah (2014)—preceded by a brief academic profile of these authors and followed by succinct comparative insights, and concluding remarks.

### **Ian Talbot**

Ian Talbot is a Professor of Modern British History at *University of Southampton* (UK), Talbot's main research area is history of Pakistan, especially ‘Pakistan's post-independence political history’. He has published numerous works, both books and papers, on this subject. His major work is *Pakistan: A Modern History*—first published in 1998, reissued in an expanded form in 2005 and its third edition was published in 2009—and his work under review is a culmination of his scholarship/ insights on this theme.

In addition to this, Talbot has recently published ‘*A History of Modern South Asia*’ (2016) and a co-authored study, ‘*Colonial Lahore: A History of the City and Beyond*’ (2016)—the latter builds on his earlier publications like ‘*The Partition of India*’ (co-authored with Gurharpal Singh; 2009) and ‘*Divided Cities: Partition and its Aftermath in Lahore and Amritsar*’ (2006).

### **Faisal Devji**

Devji is presently Professor of Modern South Asian history/ Indian History and Director of the Asian Studies Centre at *University of Oxford* (UK).



Born in 1964 (to an Indian family in Dar es Salam, Tanzania), he studied at *University of British Columbia* (BA in history and anthropology) and *University of Chicago* (MA and PhD). Devji has held academic positions at Harvard Society of Fellows, the New School in New York School, Yale University, and at The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. He is a Fellow at New York University's Institute of Public Knowledge and Yves Otramane Chair at the Graduate Institute in Geneva.

Besides *Muslim Zion*—the work under review in this essay—Devji is the author and/ or co-editor of these books: *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* (2005); *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity: Militant Islam and Global Politics* (2009); *The Impossible India: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence* (2012); and (co-editor of) *Islam after Liberalism* (2018).

Devji's areas of interest/ specialization are Indian political thought as well as modern Islam. Devji's broader concerns are with 'ethics and violence in a globalized world'; and that is why he is described as 'a historian who specializes in studies of Islam, globalization, violence and ethics'.

### **Aqil Shah**

Shah is presently working as Assistant Professor of South Asian Studies in the Department of International and Area Studies at the *University of Oklahoma* (USA). He is also a non-resident scholar at the *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.

Shah holds a PhD in Political Science from *Columbia University* and an M Phil (pre-PhD) in International Development from *Oxford University*. Prior to his academic career, Shah was a policy advisor in the Asia-Pacific Governance Program of the *United Nations Development Program*, and a senior analyst in the South Asia office of the *International Crisis Group*.

Before joining Oklahoma, he held academic positions at *Dartmouth* and *Princeton University*, and has been a Hewlett Research Fellow at the Center for Development, Democracy and the Rule of Law at *Stanford University* and a post-

doc fellow at the Society of Fellows, *Harvard University*.

Born and raised in Pakistan, Shah's research interests include democratic transitions, military coups, institutional norms and South Asian security issues. He has published his research work in the form of book chapters as well papers in the following journals: *International Security*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *Democratization*, *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, *Journal of Democracy*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Asian Survey*. *The Army and Democracy*, the book under discussion in this essay, is his major works so far.

### **Ian Talbot, Pakistan: A New History (2012)**

Building on his previous scholarship, mostly on his books, published in between 1998–2012 (see, for example, Talbot, 1998, 2009a, 2009b, 2012), the works under review, presents the history of Pakistan of last six decades. Talbot's book is a reflective of Pakistan's increasing problems, and it highlights the major turning points and trends, uncovers the continuities and contingencies that have shaped Pakistan's "historical travails", and in particular emphasizes on the "increased entrenchment" of the army in Pakistan's politics and economy, the issues surrounding the role of Islam in public life, the tensions between central and local and democratic urges, and the impact of the geo-political influences on internal development (Talbot, 2012: ix-x).

Divided into eight (8) chapters, an Introduction and Epilogue, the book discusses the history of Pakistan in a chronological order, era by era, from its inception in 1947 to 2011. Chapter 1 highlights the ways in which Pakistan's geography, culture, religion, and society have shaped its development since its inception. It also provides a general outline and insights into the land, people, and society of Pakistan. Chapter 2 presents the account of Pakistan's development and its "first experiment with democracy" (Ibid.: 47) in the first decade of its existence (1947-58). Herein Talbot argues that it was Pakistan's

“political inheritances” that finally “undermined its democratic development” (Ibid.: 47). Chapter 3 presents the history of era of General Ayub Khan (1958-69), country’s first coup. Khan’s era, for Talbot, was a “hinge period” between the emergence of Pakistan security state amidst the “chaos of Partition and its solidification under later military rulers” (Ibid.: 91). Chapter 4 covers the era of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1971-77), and looks at how he tackled the long-term problems of state construction and identity formation. Bhutto, who sought to transform Pakistan, but his era witnessed tumultuous events and thus was unable to “restructure civil-military relationship” and failed to resolve tensions between centre and provinces (Ibid.: 112). It is interesting to note that in one of his previous works, Talbot (1998: 215) calls Bhutto as “the outstanding political figure of his generation. No Pakistani leader since Jinnah had possessed his vision or authority. Bhutto’s charisma was rooted in his embodiment of popular aspirations .... His experience and competence in foreign policy for example was always an important part of his self-characterization”. But he concludes the chapter on Bhutto with these lines: “Bhutto ultimately failed to transform Pakistan because he was unable to institutionalize his authority by restructuring the PPP [*Pakistan’s Peoples Party*] itself. ... The resulting weak institutionalization of the PPP was a crucial factor in the regime’s inability to provide a counterweight to the military and bureaucracy” (Talbot, 1998: 244).

In Chapter 5, Talbot examines the career and legacy of General Zia ul Haq, and throws light on his “Islamization measures” covering the areas of judicial reform, implementation of Islamic Penal Code (*hudûd*), economic activity (interest free banking), and educational policy, etc. (Talbot, 2012.: 127-133). “Pakistan during the period 1977-88”, wrote Talbot in pre-2000 era, “was not only authoritarian in political structure; it also aspired to be an ideological state”; and the “Islamization” appeared, to Pakistanis and to foreigners, “to have reduced a great faith tradition, rich in humanity, culture and a sense of social justice to a system

of punishments and persecution of minority groups”, thus leaving behind “not only a political process distorted ... but an atmosphere of bigotry, fanaticism and distorted values” (Talbot, 1998: 245, 286).

Focusing on the era of “democratic decade” (1988-99), Chapter 6 seeks to underpin the workings of democracy from 1988 onwards and explains why democracy was not consolidated during the democratic regimes of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. This chapter seeks to find out the workings of democracy from 1988 and considers what differences it made to Pakistan’s long-standing problems and the circumstances in which consolidation failed to occur. It explains why democracy was not consolidated during their regimes and thus, for Talbot, neither Benazir nor Sharif replaced the “traditional patron-client approach to politics with strongly institutionalized party structures” (Talbot, 2012: 148) and it seems that both had not learnt any “lessons” from the “democratic failures of 1950s” (Ibid.: 149). Interestingly, in his previous work, Talbot had argued that the “use of presidential power [by the then President, Ghulam Ishaq Khan in 1990 and 1993] to dismiss elected governments was depressing enough in itself, but an even greater pall was cast on the restoration of democracy by the circumstances which has enabled this action to be taken” (Talbot, 1998: 287).

Chapter 7 deals with the success and failures of Parvez Musharraf, under the attractive heading, “The Janus State: Pakistan under Musharraf”—an era in which ‘much was promised but very little delivered’. This era, according to Talbot, lacked both “legitimacy” and the “way[s] of secur[ing] a popular mandate” (Talbot, 2012: 196). Chapter 8 examines, in terms of both contemporary challenges and longer-term historical continuities, the era of Asif Ali Zardari (2008-2012) who came to power through 2008 elections: the “fairest [elections] since those of 1971” (Ibid. 201). Although the post-2008 period was much in common with that of 1990s but the challenges of “democratic consolidation” were different and more acute than in the 1990s (Ibid.:

203). It is followed by the 'Epilogue' which seeks to move beyond the current security crises and considers Pakistan's long-term demographic, environmental, and infrastructural problems and challenges as well as prospects and possibilities.

Some of the major conclusions of this book are: (i) Pakistan's history is littered with missed opportunities for building political institutions, addressing socio-economic imbalances and inequalities and moving beyond ad-hocism to establish a vision for the country (Ibid.: 226); (ii) Pakistan's population problems are symptomatic of many of its future challenges in that the country is at cross roads, and the seriousness of issue should not be underestimated (Ibid.: 227); (iii) the failure of education has contributed to and mirrored the failure of the Pakistan state to achieve its potential since 1947 (Ibid.: 228); (iv) alongside a "demographic time bomb"—a phrase used for Pakistan's population problems (Ibid.: 226)—Pakistan is facing possible future shortfalls in energy and water supply, which are noticeably linked with growing demands because of population increase, but are impacted by climate change and failures of governance and management as well. Talbot concludes the epilogue with these insights and future prospects for Pakistan: "Pakistan faces massive future problems arising from population and environmental pressures" and thus present "potentially greater challenges to the state than the current security crisis" (Ibid.: 235).

Interestingly, Talbot earlier concluded his work with these insights: "Pakistan's post-independence political development has been considerably more complex than the traditional summing-up in terms of the 'three A's'—*Allah, the Army and America*, or of the official two-nation theory of history" (Talbot, 1998: 368; italics added). Talbot further states that:

Pakistan's politics could not be summed up in terms of the three 'A's' [rather] ... further polarization and instability can only be avoided by an internalization of the five 'C's' of *consensus, consent, commitment, conviction and compassion*. In other words, Pakistan's best hope for the future lies not in taking out begging bowl to internation-

al governments and organizations, nor in sham populist or Islamic sloganeering, nor in successive bouts of authoritarianism designed to keep the lid on popular unrest. The way forward can only lie in the genuine political participation of previously marginalized groups such as women, the minorities and the rural and urban poor. This would not only redeem the 'failed promise' of 1947, but also provide[s] hope that Pakistan can effectively tackle the immense economic, social and environmental challenges of the next century (Talbot, 1998: 373-74; italics added).

The book also contains 'Preface and Acknowledgments', 'Glossary', 'Abbreviations', (in the beginning), 'Notes', a rich and up-to-date 'Bibliography', and an 'Index' (in the end) as well. The book is a lucid and comprehensive exploration of Pakistan's past and present which highlights solutions for future prospects. It discusses all the issues faced by Pakistan—ranging from socio-political to economic and security issues—not only in the recent decades but throughout its history from 1947. Highly research-oriented, with updated information, Talbot's *Pakistan: A New History* is an excellent contribution and a must-read for all those interested in the history, culture, society, and security of Pakistan.

### **Faisal Devji, Muslim Zion: Pakistan as A Political Idea (2013)**

Devji's book provides a very distinctive frame for thinking about the nature of "Pakistan as a Political Idea". Though a strange blend and odd amalgamation of words (i.e., 'Muslim' and 'Zion'), Devji's main objective is neither to trace "causal relationships" between interests, ideas and events in some "mechanistic way", nor to show which ideas were the most common or "influential" in Indian politics, but "to describe the lines of argument or debate that have emerged as the most important and productive ones in the history of Muslim nationalism" (Devji, 2013: 8-9).

Using 'Zion' for "a political form in which nationality is defined by the rejection of an old land for a new" (Ibid.: 3), his guiding argument is that the idea of Pakistan can be compared with the idea of Israel as a type of 'Zion'—an idealized

national homeland. About the relationship of Pakistan and Israel, Devji is of the opinion that “both emerged from situations in which minority populations dispersed across vast subcontinents sought to escape the majorities whose persecution they rightly or wrongly feared. For it was only the emergence of national majorities in nineteenth-century Europe and India that turned Jews and Muslims there into minorities, whose apparently irreducible particularity posed a ‘problem’ or question’ for states newly founded on notions of shared blood and the ancestral ownership of a homeland. As a result of representing a problem or question for the national movements within which they were formed, both Zionism and Muslim nationalism held such forms of collective belonging to be deeply suspect, even as they sometimes attempted to fashion similar nationalities for themselves elsewhere” (Ibid.: 3).

*Muslim Zion* consists of six (6) chapters, excluding Introduction and Conclusion. In the Introduction, Devji draws the analogy between Zionism and Pakistani/ “Muslim nationalism”, concluding that Pakistan and Israel, the result of Muslim nationalism and Zionism respectively, constitute “ideal forms of the Enlightenment state, more so than the settler states of the New World or their imitators in the Old. And they do so because whatever emphasis is put upon the land these minority nations have won, both countries debate and resolve their nationality by a question that in effect divests the nation of its state: who is a Jew and who a Muslim?” (Ibid.: 48).

Chapter 2, “The Problem with Numbers” meticulously presents the description of how Indian Muslims came to see themselves as a minority, and why such a category of belonging made them turn outwards to embrace “an imperial or international identity” (Ibid.: 50). In Chapter 3, “A People without History”, Devji argues that it had something to do with the fact that “the Muslims of British India ... were a minority unevenly dispersed throughout the country, divided linguistically and ethnically, as well as by habit, sect and class (Ibid.: 90). Quoting a number of scholars, thinkers, including Jinnah and Iqbal, he explores “how Muslim nationalists rejected history, geography

an even demography as the foundations of their political life, opting instead for an abstract idea of belonging together” (Ibid.: 123).

In Chapter 4, “The Fanatic’s Reward”, Devji explains ‘what could such an idea mean in the practice of Indian politics?’ and reflects upon the ambiguous implications of such a practice. In brief, an exploration of the important role that negation plays within Muslim nationalism is presented. Devji asks many critical questions throughout this book, but mostly in this and next chapter, thus forcing rethinking of Pakistan idea as it operated in the thinking of various thinkers, including Jinnah and Iqbal—the *Qaid-e-Azam* (Great Leader) and ‘Pakistan’s spiritual father’, respectively. In chapter 6, “*The Spirit of Islam*”—taking its name from Syed Ameer Ali’s book of same name, first published in 1891 (Ali, 1978 [1891])—Devji tries to show “the consequences of turning Islam into a proper name”, one referring to a system lacking “traditional authority” (Ibid.: 203).

Some of the main conclusions and observations put forth by Faisal Devji—many being crucial and controversial, and thus questionable and debatable—are: (1) the idea of Pakistan as a “Muslim Zion” is largely abstracted from narratives of Pakistan’s history, as it tends to be “tedious” (Ibid.: 244); (2) “Islam in Pakistan has become, like Judaism in Israel, a national religion in such a strong sense as to take the place of citizenship” (Ibid.: 244); (3) Pakistan represents not only “the sepulchre of Muslim nationalism”, but also signifies “the grave of Islam as an ecumenical religion with its own form of politics” (Ibid.: 248); (4) “[I]n many ways Pakistan, both as a secular and religious ideal, serves as an illustration of the failure to escape or transcend the problem of minority politics in India, within whose ambit, after all, did these themes possess any meaning” (Ibid.: 248); (5) “If the role of religion in a Muslim-majority state like Pakistan is a national one”, then perchance “it is simply as a non-nation and thus a non-majority that Islam might exist as a global phenomenon”;

because instead of “protecting Islam”, Pakistan has “only nationalized it” (Ibid.: 248, 250; italics added).

Devji sees ‘the future of Islam’ as a ‘global entity’ in Muslim minority of India than Pakistan; he concludes his book with this prognosis:

Instead of protecting Islam as an abstract idea, Pakistan has only nationalized it. Its true home remains with the Muslim minority of India, which thus portends the future of Islam itself as a global entity, one that can no longer be brought together in some traditional way, whether as a caliphate, empire or indeed a set of nation states (Ibid.: 250).

In her critical assessment of Devji’s book, Sadia Abbas (2015), Associate Professor of English at *Rutgers University*, writes: “The most intriguing and provocative element in Faisal Devji’s *Muslim Zion* ... is not the analogy he draws between Zionism and Muslim nationalism... but his claim that the idea of a return to Zion, of return itself, in the modern political imagination ... has, in fact, a Protestant dimension”. She further argues that “*Muslim Zion* is not at all a disembodied intellectual history. It is, rather, a meticulous study of the embodiment of an idea” (Abbas, 2015). She concludes as:

*Muslim Zion* has opened new avenues of scholarship and discussion. Much more work is required on many of the themes in the book, especially the question of caste politics and its relation with Muslim politics in South Asia.... Equally necessary, is more scholarship on the way in which the histories of the Pakistan movement, of Pakistan, and of postcolonial nation-states ... continue to shape our worlds (Abbas, 2015).

Keeping aside the controversial statements/arguments, Devji’s *Muslim Zion* offers an exhaustive exploration of the various political and ideological forces that played an important role in the creation of Pakistan. It is an enthralling interpretation as well as a provocative and challenging historical exploration of the idea of Pakistan.

### **Aqil Shah, the Army and Democracy (2014)**

Pakistan’s political history is a ‘story of repeated coups followed by protracted periods

of military government, briefly punctuated by elected civilian rule’. This is how Aqil Shah, the author of this book, sums up the Pakistan’s whole history in this book. Examining the political role of the Pakistani army, Shah’s book is a significant work that provides deep insight into the military mentality. Shah focuses, primarily and predominantly, on the military’s institutional role in politics during significant historical junctures, such as periods of regime change to and from authoritarian government (Shah, 2014: 29).

Dividing his book into seven (7) chapters, excluding Preface, Introduction, and Conclusion, Shah begins by tracing the origins of military authoritarianism in the formative decade after independence (1947-58). It is followed by an examination of reinforcing military habits of generals Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan and the military’s reassertion of political power. Shah, in the subsequent chapters, elucidates the role of institutional beliefs and motives in shaping the military’s behavior during subsequent moments of transition from and to militarized authoritarian rule. Besides, he also takes into account the increased importance of influential new centers of power in both state and society, such as media and judiciary—which now harbor ambitions to “guard the guardians”—to assess their impact on how the military exercises its political influence in post-authoritarian context. Moreover, Shah evaluates the prospects of democratic reforms in civil-military relations in Pakistan in a comparative perspective. It is interesting to note the titles of the chapters as well: ‘Waging War, Building a Nation’ (Ch. 1); ‘Marching toward Martial Law (Ch. 2); “‘Revolution” to Revolt’ (Ch. 3); ‘Recapturing the State’ (Ch. 4); ‘From Zia to Musharraf’ (Ch. 5); ‘Musharraf and Military Professionalism’ (Ch. 6); and ‘The Military and Democracy’ (Ch. 7). The book also contains Preface, Abbreviations, and Introduction (in the beginning), Conclusion, Notes, Acknowledgements, and Index (in the end). For example, Shah begins chapter 3, “‘Revolution’ to Revolt’ (pp. 94-118), while referring to the first military coup (by General Ayub Khan), with these statements: “By seizing power in 1958,

the military institution moved from a position of political tutelage to that of political control, 'cementing many of the political distortions that rose in the first decade'. .... [Thus] General Ayub established a military-led presidential system, banned political parties, suppressed fundamental rights, and censored the press" (Ibid.: 94, 95).

Similarly, in Chapter 5, 'From Zia to Musharraf' (pp. 150-185), Shah argues that the "influence of institutional factors on the military's interest and involvement in politics stands out even more clearly in the period from 1977 to 1999. During this time, the military ruled for eleven years under General Ziaul Haq (1977-1988) and then permitted a transition to democracy that was marked by the alternation of power among four short-lived civilian governments (1999-1999), only to recapture state power in October 1999 under General Pervez Musharraf" (Ibid.: 150). It was in between 1977 and 1999 that Pakistan made a transition to democratic rule/civilian governments (1988-1999)—this period is generally termed, in Pakistani history, as 'the decade of democracy'. Iftikhar Malik has summed up this 'Democratic Decade' in these lines:

General Zia-ul-Haq's death in an air crash on August 17, 1988 removed a whole group of senior military commanders from the political map and ushered in a new era of democratic restoration characterized by several elections and civilian regimes. Structurally weak and featuring petty rivalries, these regimes were more often dismissed by generals who enjoyed an indirect role in routinely forming and dissolving such governments. Thus during the next decade, Benazir Bhutto (1953–2007) was twice chosen prime minister as the head of her Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Mian Nawaz Sharif (1950–) also obtained the same high office twice, but neither of these post-1947 Pakistani politicians could complete their five-year terms. They were often accused of incompetence and corruption, and some of their political opponents even encouraged the generals to oust the governments and elected assemblies. Since August 1988, Pakistan has held six elections: 1988, 1990, 1993, and 1996, 2002, 2008. In addition to the two-term prime ministerships of Bhutto and Sharif in the 1990s, the country was administered by three interim prime ministers who were appointed by the presidents and the army chiefs to run the administration and

conduct elections. During the 1990s, Pakistan enjoyed more civil freedoms, although many of the restrictive laws imposed by Zia remained intact. ... Finally, on October 12, 1999, the curtain on the second administration of Nawaz Sharif was drawn when the agitated military colleagues of General Pervez Musharraf (1943–) dismissed the prime minister through a military coup, and once again the country came under the strong purview of the khaki forces (Malik, 2012: 175-76).

This was followed by another military coup by General Parvez Musharraf. One of the "main motives" Musharraf cited for this coup was "a threat to the integrity of military institution", and Shah has described it "as a countercoup and praised the army for its unity" (Shah, 2014: 183). Shah quotes Musharraf's post-coup speech in which he explained that "It is unbelievable and indeed unfortunate that the few at the helm of affairs in the last government were intriguing to destroy the last institution of stability left in Pakistan by creating dissension in the ranks of the armed forces of Pakistan" (Musharraf, 1999, *as cited in* Shah, 2014: 183). Shah is of the opinion that in the 1990s, "the army's belief that civilian governments could not be trusted to govern effectively", posed, in the long run, "a constant threat to the quality and sustainability of democracy". This, along with conflict between political parties and military, thus "contributed to the ultimate breakdown of democracy" (Ibid.: 185).

In the last chapter, 'The Military and Democracy' (Ch. 7, pp. 215-253), Shah concludes as: "Although the military does not seem interested in direct rule, its non-interference in the governmental affairs is likely to remain conditional on behaviour by the elected government that does not undermine national security in the military's view" (Ibid.: 252).

Shah, in this book, makes clear the following points: (1) that in Pakistan, "the historically shaped combination of domestic and external factors—a strong perceived threat from India and weak national integration—defined the military's formative experience in the early years after independence and critically shaped its

institutional propensity to exercise independent political power grossly disproportionate to its appropriate position in the state” (Ibid.: 254); (2) “The perceived insecurity vis-à-vis India led Pakistan’s founding civilian elites to subordinate the needs of society to that of security, which fostered rapid military institutional development” (Ibid.: 255); (3) In Pakistan, “the military’s predominantly Punjabi composition worsened the Bengali sense of exclusion from and resentment against the state. And the more the state invested in an ethnically exclusive military at the expense of democratically inclusive political institutions, the more it undermined the prospects of forging national cohesion, or the ‘we’ feeling that provides a necessary background for building democracy” (Ibid.: 256); (4) The military under General Zia ul Haq, in comparison to Ayub Khan and Musharraf’s era, “ruled Pakistan with an iron hand”, and thus represented “a new phase of military intervention”, expanding from the armed defender of the territorial borders of an “imagined Muslim nation” to the protection of its “ideological frontiers” (Ibid.: 258); (5) Zia’s death in 1988, “paved the way for the transition to electoral democracy”—and beginning of so-called ‘decade of democracy’ in Pakistan—and “the military retreated to the barracks to preserve its public prestige. Hence its acceptance of democracy was tactical; rather the result of any commitment to democratic norms.” (Ibid.: 258); (6) The October 1999 military (‘bloodless’) coup brought General Parvez Musharraf’s dictatorship, which “reinforced officers’ beliefs in a politically expansive conception of professionalism that involved a direct military role in nation-building on the grounds that civilian governments in the 1990s had reduced democracy to a sham, politicized the bureaucracy, and undermined the state’s capacity. What many in military saw as parliamentary democracy’s inherent weakness, including the absence of ‘proper’ checks and counterchecks on the authority of the prime minister, led the military government to reinstate reserve presidential coup powers and to establish a military-dominated National-Security Council”

(Ibid.: 259).

This work begins with the “central paradox” of “*who guards the guardians?*” and ends with a related question: “*How shall we guard the guardians?*” (Ibid.: 254, italics added). Shah blames ‘military’s prominent and long-standing role in politics’ for having given ‘major blows to the process of democratization in Pakistan’, and thus having ‘deepened the country’s structural problems’ (Ibid.: 284). About this he writes:

The military’s prominent and long-standing role in politics has dealt major blows to the process of democratization in Pakistan. The military has either directly intervened to overthrow governments or has limited the authority and autonomy of elected governments. Military coups and rule have deepened the country’s structural problems—from weak state capacity to economic underdevelopments—by preventing solutions through the political process. In other words, the military has repeatedly intervened to arrest the normal development of Pakistan’s democracy. Until 2013, Pakistan seemed stuck in permanent authoritarian trap, briefly interrupted by formally elected governments. The first democratic transfer of power in May 2013 could well hold the key to a more democratic future (Ibid.: 284-85).

At the same time, Shah is optimistic, on certain conditions, about the democratic stability in present day Pakistan (with the democratic transfer of power in May 2013) as he points out very insightfully:

Although the challenges [faced by Pakistan], including a domineering military and resource constraints, are many and complex, democracy might have a better chance of consolidation if elected governments can deliver on public expectations, solidly move toward resolving Pakistan’s urgent problems, and, together with the opposition, respect democratic and constitutional norms in both rhetoric and practice. In this way they can continue to maintain both democratic and performance legitimacy and thereby deny the military the opportunity to exploit political divisions and assume responsibility for the direct or indirect conduct of civilian affairs (Ibid.: 285).

Thus, Shah’s book is a rich source of comprehensive orientation on Pakistani military’s dominance; military politics in Pakistan; military as an institution of the state; and military’s particular conceptions of professionalism which

shape its involvement in politics.

### A Brief Comparasion

By way of comparison, it would be apt here to summarize very briefly the major arguments, and main theme, of the three books evaluated above. Few such observations are:

Talbot's book is a comprehensive exploration of Pakistan's past and present which discusses all the issues faced by Pakistan—ranging from socio-political to economic and security issues. Talbot has built this work on his previous works, which he has been publishing from over two decades (see, Talbot, 1998, 2009a, 2009b, 2012) and he has published many other works, including the revised version of previous ones (see, Talbot, 2013a, 2013b, 2015). His works, and his scholarship, on South Asia in general and on Pakistan in particular have been appreciated well in the academic circles. A glimpse of which can be determined from the 'endorsements' on his work reviewed above.

However, one major shortcoming found in this book is that Talbot has brought together all the issues faced by Pakistan—from religious, social, to political and security issues—and thus no specific issue, except political, has been given a detailed description and thorough account. When seen in comparison to, for example, military issues, a number of books have been devoted only to military issues, and some prominent examples are A. R. Siddiqi (1996), Stephen Cohen (1998), Ayesha Siddiqi (2007), Shuja Nawaz (2008), and Aqil Shah (2014).

Similarly, Devji's *Muslim Zion* is a fascinating interpretation as well as a stimulating and perplexing historical exploration of the idea of Pakistan. The language, sources, interpretations of the data, is fascinating, but the only problem with this book is that it has been interpreted on 'Zionism' pattern, as can be seen in the very title of this book. That is why we see that

reviewers have criticized it on this ground, as is evident from Sadia Abbas's review (2015), wherein she mentions that "the analogy" drawn by Devji in "between Zionism and Muslim nationalism" is the "most intriguing and provocative element" in this work. It is, otherwise, a meticulous study which has opened new avenues of scholarship and discussion.

Shah's book is a rich source for knowing the military politics in Pakistan, civil-military relations, as well as the military as an institution of the state. Though there have been many works on this aspect of Pakistan history already (see, for example, Siddiqi, 1996; Cohen, 1998; Siddiqi, 2007; Nawaz, 2008), but the merit/ uniqueness of Shah's work lies in utilizing the archives from the Army/military department, especially the *Pakistan Army Green Book*. On this basis Shah's claim may be considered genuine and fair when he writes: "Except for Stephen P. Cohen's [*The Pakistan Army*, 1998] classical study, very rarely have scholars' illuminated military politics in Pakistan from the perspective of the military institution" (Shah, 2014: 9).

Besides the detailed evaluation of each work, the above mentioned points clearly reveal both the limitations as well as uniqueness of these works.

### CONCLUSION

The essay begins by providing a background context for the present evaluation. It then provides a succinct sketch of Pakistan history, and then introduces (academically) the authors' of the selected works. This is followed by an evaluation of the three selected books—Talbot (2012), Devji (2013), and Shah (2014)—published in the second decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is followed by a brief comparative analysis. From the whole discussion, thus, following points may be drawn as concluding remarks/ findings of the study:

That this discussion not only helps us in understanding the history of Pakistan, but it also benefits us in analyzing the issues and



challenges Pakistan has faced, and is facing—be they religious (ideological), political, or related to military and security. These works, collectively, analyze and evaluate different dimensions of the history of Pakistan, and thus help in knowing and understating the history, religion-politics relation, role of army vis-à-vis government, and other inter-related issues. All these works benefit us not only in knowing and understanding Pakistan through literature, but they also provide an edge and advantage in ‘Making Sense of Pakistan’ and its history as well as prove constructive in comprehending that Pakistan is indeed a country beyond the ‘Crisis State’. This assessment also helps us in understanding the diverse scholarly approaches adopted (by different scholars) to the history, politics, religion and religious ideology, military, and other issues in the Pakistan. Last, but not the least, this evaluation clearly reveals the significance of these works and their position in the area of the Pakistan Studies.

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