

## Short Reviews of Recent Books

**Politics of the All-India Muslim League, 1924-1940.** By Kishwar Sultana, (Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 364, Rs 995.00, ISBN 9780199402908.

The book under review is a simple, linear endeavour to understand the multi-layered, complex politics of the All India Muslim League, 1924-1940. The study, it is claimed, is unique: In the first place it gives importance to the subject it has not received 'in any of the works published so far' (Introduction); and secondly, it studies the challenges faced by the League 'in detail on the basis of primary sources not hitherto explored by any writer' (Blurb). On going through the book, however, I found both the claims long on rhetoric but short in substance. The learned author has not given us anything other than what others have given. As for the uniqueness of her primary sources, the less said the better. She has not touched any vernacular source. Surprisingly, even *The Tribune* (Lahore), one of the most relevant newspapers for her purpose, is conspicuously absent in her work.

The author tells us that there was revival of the League after 1924 (Chapter 2). Far from it. The revival of the elite organisation was not there even by mid-1930s. We find the mass-based Muslim provincial parties like the Unionist Party in Punjab, Khudai Khidmatgar Party in the NWFP, Krishak Party in Bengal and so on, and not the League, flourishing in those days of mass mobilisation in politics.

It was only after the passage of the Government of India Act, 1935, which gave autonomy to the provinces to form their elected governments and govern their people responsibly, the League supremo changed his stance. 'We feel that the time has come', he declared, 'when the Muslim League, like the Congress, established contact with the people.' He opened the doors of the League for the Muslim masses and cast his net over their leaders in the Muslim majority provinces. The author calls it 'reconstruction' of the League (Chapter 3). Facts, however, narrate a different tale. Take, for instance, Punjab, which Jinnah considered as the 'foundation-stone' of his future kingdom. Despite his hard efforts, neither the League could take its roots there nor Sir Fazl-i-Hussain, the tallest Unionist leader in Punjab came to his side. This infuriated Jinnah and he walked away from the province, saying: 'I shall never come to the Punjab again.' The author does not take note of these developments.

The 1937 elections reduced the political standing of the League still further. Its supremo lost his voice. But soon a miracle happened. The half-dead League came back to life. Mr Jinnah got his voice back. Had the author cared to look at the miracle, she would have seen the big Imperial hand in it. To counterbalance the Congress, they rehabilitated the League and presented it as, in Viceroy Linlithgow's words, 'in certain respects not even second to the Congress.' Its unstinted support to their war efforts (1939-45), empowered the League to the extent that it could lay the 'foundation-stone' of their separate state (Pakistan) on 23 March 1940 in Lahore. And with that the author formally closes her narrative.

Over the years, the historiography of Partition and Role of the League and Congress therein and other political issues have made substantial advance. Had the author taken note of it, she would have, to say it in the words borrowed from Asim Roy, offered us "a much clearer, more logical and convincing interpretation of 'this battle' between Jinnah and Congress in which both openly stood for what they did not want, said what they did not mean and what they truly wanted was not stated publically but only betrayed in their vital and purposive political decisions and actions".

*Dr KC Yadav*

**Multi-party Democracy in the Maldives and the Emerging Security Environment in the Indian Ocean Region.** *By Anand Kumar, (New Delhi, Pentagon Security International, 2016), p 192, Price 795/-, ISBN: 9788182748958*

The Maldives is an island nation that is geographically very close to India and occupies a crucial position in the busy sea lanes of the Indian Ocean. It is in such a backdrop that this book, which examines democratic process in the Maldives and places it within the larger geopolitical construct of the Indian Ocean, becomes an extremely important body of information.

Most books on the Maldives belong to the genre portraying it as a tropical paradise. Even the few academic ones have become dated considering the shifting quicksand of events in the Maldives and the globe itself. It is such a crucial void of information that this book tries to fill. In fact it addresses two separate voids – first, that of democracy in the Maldives which itself is a recent, fast evolving factor and second, the Maldives as a critical cog in the Indian Ocean regional security. It also attempts the third task, which is

more astute, of connecting these two seemingly distinct events of democracy and regional security, helping the reader gather a 'big picture' portraying the larger framework of geopolitics that influences them.

The book takes the reader through paces of history, of how the Maldives evolved as an autonomous nation, colonisation, eventual decolonisation and manoeuvres during the Cold War. The major internal political drivers are democracy, religion, economy and climate change. External powers calibrate their policies, catering to these driving factors as they engage the Maldives. It describes the tightrope walk that the nation does in balancing extreme forms of religion and the obvious economic and political benefits of the religious card, both within and outside the country.

The book also gives out the contours of its relations with others, notable being its careful balancing of all major powers to retain autonomy. It juggles China, India, Japan, the UK and the USA carefully, with due attention to what each of these nations deem important to them. When multiparty democratic movements want to gather their strength, it courts the democracies, especially India and yet balances it with China. Whereas the conservative regime draws its strength from China and uses that card astutely to draw maximum benefits from India and other democracies. The book also highlights the disproportionate role Sri Lanka plays in the Maldivian politics. One would have liked more details on the *iHavan* project, which due to proximity and position could affect India.

Overall, the book explains the democratic processes as well as regional security matrix remarkably well. It connects the two dots eminently, to show the reader the picture that is emerging in India's close neighbourhood. It pivots on internal democratic process and shows how this doesn't exist in a vacuum, but in a vast ocean of geopolitics. Another take away from the book is how smaller nations with strategic advantages like the Maldives cleverly balance the big powers maintaining their autonomy, but in turn pay a heavy domestic price by retarding liberal multiparty democratic system. The book is highly relevant considering the continuing state of flux in the Maldives especially with a major protagonist of the book, former President Nasheed, having recently received an asylum in the UK.

*Commander MH Rajesh*

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