

Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose. *War and Secession: Pakistan, India and the Creation of Bangladesh.* New Delhi: Vistaar Publications. 1990. 338 pp. Price Rs 225.00 (Hardbound).

After thirteen long years of military dictatorship, national elections on the basis of adult franchise were held in Pakistan in December 1970. The Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and the Pakistan Peoples Party, under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, emerged as the two majority political parties in East Pakistan and West Pakistan respectively. The political party commanding a majority in one wing of the country had almost no following in the other. This ended in a political and constitutional deadlock, since this split mandate and political exclusiveness gradually led to the parting of ways and political polarization. Power was not transferred to the majority party (that is, the Awami League) within the legally prescribed time; instead, in the wake of the political/constitutional crisis, a civil war broke out in East Pakistan which soon led to an open war between India and Pakistan in December 1971. This ultimately resulted in the dismemberment of Pakistan, and in the creation of Bangladesh as a sovereign country.

The book under review is a political study of the causes and consequences of this crisis and the war, based on a reconstruction of the real facts, historical events, political processes and developments. It candidly recapitulates the respective roles of the political élites (both of India and Pakistan), their leaders and governments, and assesses their perceptions of the real situation. It is an absorbing narrative of almost thirteen months, from 7 December, 1970, when elections were held in Pakistan, to 17 December, 1971 when the war ended after the Pakistani army's surrender to the Indian army in Dhaka (on December 16, 1971). The authors, who are trained political scientists, give fresh interpretations of these historical events and processes and relate them to the broader regional and global issues, thus assessing the crisis in a broader perspective. This change of perspective enhances our understanding of the problems the authors discuss. Their focus on the problems under discussion is sharp, cogent, enlightening, and circumspect, whether or not the reader agrees with their conclusions. The grasp of the source material is masterly; their narration of fast-moving political events is superbly anchored in their scientific methodology and political philosophy. This method of approaching political problems of regional crises adds richness to the entire analysis.

The main thesis here is that the political crisis of the early 1970s Pakistan was solely a creation of the incapacity and impotence of the ruling élites of Pakistan who could not resolve the political impasse through politically viable institutions and indigenous processes; instead, they looked to the super powers for help. There was no inherent political mechanism to solve the problem of transfer and sharing of political power among the contenders. The struggle for political power in Pakistan after a long period of military rule, thus, became a crucial problem, and the ruling élites, both of East and West Pakistan, failed to reach any settlement. The common masses, who had been

denied their fundamental rights for a long period, had virtually revolted against the military dictatorship. Economic and social inequalities, regional disparities, dominance of capitalist and feudal élites over the entire society, and neglect of the agricultural sector and rural populations had exacerbated the crisis in Pakistan. The hegemony of the West Pakistani élites and their exploitation of East Pakistan as a captured colony also heightened the East Pakistani élites' sense of deprivation. However, the active role of the Indian ruling élites aggravated the crisis by their resorting to direct interference and dismemberment of Pakistan. This was not the first time that the Indian rulers had attacked a small country. The earlier physical occupation by the Indian army of Kashmir, Hyderabad (Deccan), and Junagadh, as well as the hegemonic intentions of the Indian rulers, had pushed Pakistan to join the military pacts sponsored by the United States in the mid 1950s.

The book consists of two parts. The first part (the first six chapters) is an analysis of the efforts the various contenders for power made in Pakistan for a negotiated settlement of the political crisis; that is, the transfer of power to the majority party, which happened to be the Awami League based mainly in East Pakistan. But the efforts failed, leading to the army's crackdown in East Pakistan on March 25, 1971, presumably to safeguard the integrity of the country. This ignited the fires of the civil war and opened the door for Indian intervention in East Pakistan.

The second part (the last seven chapters) of the book discusses the causes and the results of the war between Pakistan and India, the dismemberment of Pakistan, and the creation of Bangladesh as a sovereign state.

The freshness of the interpretations partly derives from the fact that the study is based on new evidence collected from a rich data of primary sources which have become available for the first time. The authors have also utilized interviews with people who were directly connected with the events and had a first-hand knowledge of the formation and implementation of the relevant policies. But the veracity and authenticity of such interviews cannot be scientifically ascertained; since in matters of wars and other serious contentions, human emotions, feelings, and biases tend to influence the statements. The authors have, however, tried hard to keep the discussion objective and impartial. Some interviewees remained anonymous. Their statements must have been taken only with a pinch of salt. Anonymity cannot be a source of evidence in matters of serious research like civil wars.

The authors contend that the political crisis in Pakistan could not be resolved because the political parties and groups harboured mistrust and had misperceptions of each other. Mujib accused Bhutto and the army of collusion to deprive the Awami League of power. Bhutto accused Mujib of collusion with India to break Pakistan. The mutual distrust and suspicion increased with the passage of time. In the struggle for power, political alignments and configurations shifted from moment to moment, from day to day, without any plan or purpose, as, according to the authors, there was no

coordination between the various government agencies and departments in Pakistan. General Yahya Khan was the President, the Chief of the Army, and the Chief Martial Law Administrator. Power came to be over-centralized in one person only. There was a lack of communication among different organs, departments, and sections of the government.

The four participants in the negotiations towards a political settlement and transfer of power to the people's representatives were the Awami League, the Pakistan Peoples Party, the (military) government, and the smaller regional parties. There was acute polarization on several planes: social, political, and regional. This polarization led to the civil war. According to the authors, three factors further sharpened this polarization: first, the participants mistrusted the intentions of their adversaries, which led to misperceptions and misunderstanding of their ideas, intentions, programmes, and policies. Second, the participants' positions were ambiguous and unclear to each other: for example, Mujib's Six Points* created confusion, misunderstanding, and mistrust. Third, "each participant was fearful that its core interests could not be protected under any arrangement in the transfer of power of which it was not a part". (pp. 266-267)).

"The process of polarization", conclude the authors, "was encouraged as well by the inability of the military regime to preserve its neutrality in the negotiations; ultimately it became a contestant with a standing no different from that of the others. With the passing of time, divisive events, both 'natural' and calculated, resulted in popular pressure within the constituency of each group and served to reduce the flexibility of the élite". (p. 267).

The authors assume (pp. 146-149) that India planned to interfere in the internal affairs of Pakistan and invade East Pakistan when about three and a half million Bengali refugees, mainly Hindus, fled to West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura, the three politically volatile states of India. But the refugee problem was exploited by India as an excuse. How real this problem was remains highly controversial. The authors have themselves quoted the remarks of Indian scholar K. Subramaniam about the civil war in Pakistan to the effect that East Pakistan's crisis had presented India with "an opportunity the like of which will never come again". (p. 149).

*In March 1966, Mujib had advanced his 'Six Points':

1. The constitution should provide for a federation based on the Lahore Resolution of the Muslim League (1940).
2. Only defence, foreign affairs, and currency be reserved for the federal government.
3. A federal reserve system must check the flow of resources from one region to another through the same currency, or through two currencies, one for each wing.
4. Fiscal policy will be reserved for the federating units.
5. Foreign exchange earnings of the federating units will be controlled by them, and the aid and the trade with foreign countries will be negotiated by these units.
6. The governments of the federating units will be empowered to maintain a militia or a para-military force for national security. (pp. 19-20).

As the authors also explain, the fact is that India and Pakistan lived ever since their independence, in a state of disquiet and mutual mistrust. Fearful of the Indian might, Pakistan was forced to join the western military pacts to safeguard its territorial integrity. They also developed perceptions of each other's reality by their own cultural, social, political, and economic needs, trends, thought patterns, and biases. The problems and difficulties of one were always exploited by the other for its own advantage. This had conditioned the respective national psychologies.

The book makes an important contribution towards understanding the nature of political crises and local wars, which often erupt in developing areas like South Asia, and which have the potential to develop into regional and global conflicts. How the ruling élites in the developing countries sometimes prove inefficient and incapable of resolving the political and constitutional crises over the heads of the masses, is lucidly explained by the authors in this case study of Pakistan. Democracy does not mean governance and rule of rich élites over the poor masses. Real democracy is popular sharing in the decision-making process at the grass-roots level which must ensure basic needs to all. Economic and political advantages, privileges, powers, and gains are the rights of all. This study shows how real problems of the masses are deliberately shelved by the ruling élites in their lust for power and privilege. Even after the 'liberation' of Bangladesh, prosperity did not come to the Bengali masses. Instead, their economic problems worsened as the Indian élites replaced the West Pakistani élites.

The section on the role of the super powers in this crisis presents a candid and clear analysis of how they perceive and handle regional conflicts from the standpoint of their own interests. The Soviet Union sided with India. The United States played an ambivalent role but, according to the authors, covertly supported India: "... if there was a 'tilt' in the U. S. aid policy upto December 1971, it was toward India rather than Pakistan". (p. 258). As a last resort, the authors claim, if political settlement of the civil war became impossible, "then the United States wanted to help arrange a peaceful separation of the country into two sovereign states". (p. 258). China paid only lip-service. This clearly shows that, in the global context, small countries like Pakistan cannot depend on the super powers for their security. They can survive only on account of their internal vigour, self-reliance, and a viable socio-political and socio-economic order. Political independence without economic independence is an illusion.

The book will be welcomed by the scholars and specialists in the area of international crisis behaviour in general, and by those specializing in the political problems of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in particular. As the general problems (such as regional disparities, class exploitation, dominance of élites in politics and economics, mistrust and misperceptions among political groups and parties, and the use of religion for political purposes, etc.) discussed by the authors still plague the Pakistani polity, the book will be immensely useful to Pakistani politicians, political analysts, theorists, and students of political science and political behaviour. Those professional

politicians who generally lack any clear social philosophy, direction, and purpose, and play havoc with national institutions in their greed for power and pelf, must learn from their past mistakes to avoid similar pitfalls, misperceptions, and misdeeds in the future. In the developing societies, the failure to resolve in a peaceful manner, the internal political and constitutional problems by the aspirants to power, the study shows clearly, often leads to regional crises which overlap and extend to the contiguous areas of neighbouring countries. This destabilizes the whole region and creates the possibility of intervention by a super power. This also means that any problem in any individual country soon acquires international dimensions. No country is an island. East Pakistan (Bangladesh), Afghanistan, Cambodia, and now Kuwait and Iraq are recent examples.

The book gives a comprehensive select bibliography of source material, as well as a detailed list of the participants interviewed by the authors, which include politicians, administrators, government and military officials, political journalists, jurists, and scholars of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the United States, all of whom claimed to have a first-hand knowledge of the crisis in Pakistan's eastern wing.

Ziaul Haque

Pakistan Institute of
Development Economics,
Islamabad.