

**Ilhan Niaz.** *The Culture of Power and Governance of Pakistan 1947–2008.* Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press. 2010. 320 pages. Pak Rupees 595.00.

“The Culture of Power and Governance of Pakistan 1947–2008” by Ilhan Niaz makes a strong case for the quotation, “the one who does not remember history is bound to live through it”. In the book, the author has tried to trace the current culture of power and governance in Pakistan through the rich history of the subcontinent. He has asked the question that why the State of Pakistan is constantly losing its writ as many incidents, such as the “Laal Masjid” debacle, are challenging the writ of the state. He has also analysed why State of Pakistan is always facing issues in domains of administration, legislation, execution and judiciary. These issues are becoming existential threat to the Pakistani State. The author has blamed the rulers of Pakistan who behave like “Bureaucratic Continental Empires”.

In this book, Niaz has gone through the annals of history to discuss the nature of bureaucratic states that were prevalent in the Asian, African and European continents. Bureaucratic continental empires were directly dependent on the rulers and these rulers treated their states as “personal estates”. Rulers employed massive state machinery like military, spy agencies, and bureaucracy to sustain their rules. All these rulers had to show very stern attitude towards their masses to curb rebellions and secure their “personal estates”. These states could break up into smaller states if rulers did not use coercion or other aggressive and violent measures. Rulers used arbitrary use of power without regard to law and order. Religion was generally used to create basis for ideocracy.

Niaz has argued in the book that the rulers of Pakistan behave like the bureaucratic emperors of the past, without any regard for proper rules, law and order. On the contrary, he has praised the British Colonisers who bestowed their “State of Laws” upon the people of the subcontinent. British emperors established certain institutions like judiciary, legislation, and an excellent civil service, according to the author. They built Indian civil service on the principle of merit and this civil service was mostly free of corruption. They introduced budgeting processes and several steps for a successful fiscal policy in the Indian subcontinent. They also maintained the civil supremacy over military and established the idea that institutions cannot intervene in each other’s defined roles. The author has praised the British colonisers for giving these “civilised institutions” to administer India and how these institutions created conducive environment for law and order. However, it is interesting to note how the author has ignored the divide and rule policy employed by the British government to rule India. He has asserted that the Indian experience of colonisation was less “cruel and tragic” as compared to the experiences of other colonised world. This assumption may have served the author’s purpose to prove his point but he has conveniently ignored many other important points. For instance, the British government introduced many laws of social and religious nature after which pluralistic outlook of India was damaged beyond repair and with serious repercussions for future.

The author has argued that after independence rulers of Pakistan gradually adopted highly arbitrary methods in the running of this country and the state became the personal estate of rulers. He has quoted an example where a convention was presented in the constituent assembly in 1947 that equated Jinnah’s personality, popularity and authority with the government. This convention was the first instance in Pakistan that made a

person synonymous with the government. The author has also drawn a comparison between pre- and post-partition civil services. According to him, the civil service was highly efficient, effective and incorruptible in the pre-partition era but after the partition, there was a high influence of politics in administrative matters. Federal Public Service Commission and other provincial commissions became highly politicised. He has argued that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto totally demoralised civil service in the name of democratisation and equality. Steps like seniority-based upward mobility, standardised pay scales further deteriorated already demoralised civil service. Since then, every successive government has taken highly arbitrary steps that have politicised the civil service beyond repair.

The author has also discussed the role of army in the management of governance. Earlier, in the pre-partition era military was not involved in the executive part of the country but after partition army was inducted into federal cabinet and ministries like defense were handed over to military to create their monopoly. The author is of the opinion that military is much more united as compared to civil institutions and hence this institution has been more influential in the state's decisions. He has given the notion that military has been less interested in political meddling and civilian leaders are responsible for dragging them into politics. It is interesting to note, however, that today army has built various mega projects that influence the political economy of Pakistan. Moreover, the army has also dominated many important civilian posts in various institutions.

The book has also discussed the historical role of judiciary in Pakistan. The author has described the process of how executive power has influenced the legislative and juridical part of law and has compared the efficiency of justice system of British era with that of post-partition Pakistan. He has argued that the British government maintained a speedy justice system whereas under the current justice system in Pakistan, it can take more than five years to solve a single case. Judiciary has also adopted the doctrine of necessity from time to time, which validated the army rule and jeopardised the future of democracy in Pakistan. According to the author, the justice system has worked arbitrarily in Pakistan where the justice is highly dependent on personal decision of the rulers instead of rule of law. Institutions, which ensure the rule of law such as police, are perceived to be most corrupt institutions of country.

Commenting on the fiscal administration in the contemporary Pakistan, Niaz argues that Pakistan has a highly centralised system of fiscal decision-making and even in times of devolution, the fiscal plans have had highly centralising tendencies. He is of the opinion that the provinces have never demonstrated any willingness to take responsibility of their subjects. The book has also highlighted prominent leakages in the tax collection system, which is costing Pakistan dearly. According to an estimate given in the book, about 10-12 percent in tax-GDP ratio is being lost because of corruption in the taxation system.

Moreover, the author has also lamented that fact that the strong colonial institutions have been discarded only because they were given by the British government. There have been a lot of efforts to handle the growing governance crisis in Pakistan but mostly the efforts have been highly arbitrary and without any substance. Today, most of Pakistanis believe that government institutions are highly corrupt and inefficient and this is the reason that they do not go to any state institution for help. This dysfunction is the most prominent phenomenon which cuts across rise and fall of Pakistan's administrative institutions.

This whole situation may be summed up by arguing that all Pakistani rulers, be they bureaucrats, politicians or soldiers, share one common prolonged inability to understand the structural and operative autonomy of all institutions. This inability has resulted into dysfunctional institutions which undermine the ethos, professional integrity and esprit de corps of the state apparatus.

Overall, “The Culture of Power and Governance of Pakistan 1947–2008” is a good read for students, policy-makers, academicians and laymen who are interested in history, politics and economics. Nonetheless, Ilhan Niaz’s whole thesis can be contested on some points. For instance, he has not talked about the role of capitalism in building of states where he has argued that bureaucratic empires perish because of weak rulers. Many political philosophers believe that capitalism did not exist in its current form in previous centuries, which is the reason that there was no conception of current state setup in those days. Author has not taken into account the role of capital and changes in mode of production and its impact on nature of state. Further, the author has stated that there was no law in the bureaucratic empires and the arbitrary rule of law is a creation of the eighteenth century Europe, he has perhaps not paid attention to the laws like Torah law, Cannon Law and ecclesiastical law. And most importantly, the author’s argument is deeply flawed in understanding the purpose of British Empire in India. British Empire used the laws of capitalism to maximise the outflow of raw material and capital from India. It was this resource extraction which actually built the structure of the British rule of law and governance. Not all the investments were there to civilise the “uncivilised” but to extract maximum out of the subcontinent. All these issues are not addressed in this book and it is hoped that future work will include all these relevant crucial questions.

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