

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Sanjay Kak, ed., *Until My Freedom Has Come*** (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2011), 303 pages.

**Basharat Peer, *Curfewed Night*** (New Delhi: Random House India, 6<sup>th</sup> Impression, 2011), 239 pages.

The two books under review are a unique study of the Indian held Kashmir, bringing voices of the Kashmiri generation which has lived through the worst of the atrocities at the hands of the Indian occupying forces. Together they lend the most authentic voice and perspective on Kashmir, that is free from any 'sponsored' or nationalistic narrative to a living tale of human suffering which far transcends any claims over territory, water, ideology and statehood. These are the voices of Kashmiris; especially the young generation which neither views Kashmir as a Mujahedeen's turf, nor do they accept India's forced claims and brutal occupation. This is the generation which lives through endless curfewed nights, consults the Hartal calendar instead of the Gregorian, which has to wear identity tags in its own homeland, has been forced to give up its playfields, schools, fruit orchards, and wooded slopes, to make space for either the military camps or the creeping unmarked graveyards of nameless militants. These youth have learnt to silently accept where their class fellows and playmates have disappeared. They use a different vocabulary and play different games from ordinary youth of another land. Stones in hand on the ready they face the bullets of automatic rifles.

Although it is unjust to review the two books together as each merits separate treatment since Peer's book is a personal narrative and Kak's is an anthology of essays penned by young writers, columnists, sociologists, cartoonists and the new genre of social media activists and bloggers. Their common thread is the narration of suffering that has become structural to their existence. Basharat Peer, growing up as a Kashmiri youth at the height of Kashmiri freedom struggle is now an internationally acclaimed author and Sanjay Kak is a renowned social activist and documentary film maker.

*Until my freedom*, despite being an anthology has a very strong continuity of theme. Here the young bloggers and tweeters have managed to reach out to the outer world, many a times at the cost of their lives.. This narrative transcends the dominant discourse on Kashmir. It is about understanding Kashmir, not solving the problem. It has been necessitated as Kashmir gets only marginal or passing reference in the (Indian) national electronic and print media. The true meaning of occupation for an average Kashmiri is the constant control over their public and private lives to assert India's power over Kashmir's body.

India's contrived enemy in Kashmir is the plausible "Muslim "other" — its historical nemesis, who remains marked irrespective of his/her other identities. "Being a Muslim" in Nehru's secular, democratic India "is bad enough, but being a Kashmiri Muslim, with the word 'Kashmir' on the passports, makes them doubly illegitimate. The occupying army views them as "potential Pakistani terrorists, who deserve to be eliminated, incarcerated or insulted on the flimsiest excuse." Do Kashmiris find any empathy among the Indian Muslims? Unfortunately not, as for them Kashmir is a minority problem and most importantly, any moral or physical support can entail the state back lash. In the meantime, India continues to seek endorsement through the ploy of elections and such other shows.

The shift in Kashmiri resistance is highly noticeable. It has now transcended the physical confines and come into the open media space of YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and blogs. The slogan, Hum kya chahate hain? Azadi is the unanimous voice of Kashmiris standing up to the draconian laws and completely disillusioned by the "Kashmiri" leaders as well as the Pakistani lashkars. Each summer the Valley chants pro Azadi slogans. "khoon ka badla June mein lainge," has become synonymous with the summer uprisings that India does not know how to suppress.

*Curfewed Night* despite being a personal narrative is the voice of every Kashmiri who has grown under the shadow of occupation and militancy.

Peer's narration resonates Kak's description of how this protracted conflict has destroyed the lives of average Kashmiris. In the rest of India, too, they are treated as not "Indian enough." They are under constant surveillance and a general sense of being the "other," enhances their sense of alienation and displacement. Returning to his homeland after more than a decade, he found it a land of "brutalized, exhausted and uncertain people," where conflict might leave the streets but it might not leave the soul. The state centric solution and management of Kashmir conflict lies across the Line of Control, which runs through the hearts, minds and souls of every Kashmiri, Indian and Pakistani. It is an affirmation of what both the countries stand for, but the waves and handshakes by the people crossing the LoC by the Sri Nagar – Muzaffarabad bus service, do manage to erase these lines of control, even if temporarily.

Any student or researcher on Kashmir must read these books, as they provide a narrative which is different from the state centric, strategic discourse or lens through which Kashmir has always been viewed. From being an unfinished agenda of the partition, *atoot aang* or jugular vein to potential nuclear flashpoint and lastly terrorist safe haven, Kashmir is about Kashmiris, their lives, their collective loss and their right to self determination, sanctified by the United Nations. It is not a right of secession but a right of consent and every Kashmiri is logically driven to it, guided by memory, history, democracy

and humanity. ■

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**Safdar Sial, Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Conflict and Insecurity in Balochistan***  
(Islamabad: Narratives, 2012), 190 pages.

The book *Conflict and Insecurity in Balochistan* is the latest in the literature published in recent years on the conflict in Balochistan. This study goes into the long standing economic and political grievances of the province and suggests interventions at the state and societal levels to ameliorate the situation and pacify the insurgent elements.

The volume covers a large canvas, combining several themes under five chapters the first of which is devoted to the geographical location of Balochistan as a hub of inter-regional transport and trade. Its abundant natural resources and the tussle over their ownership, control and development is an important factor of the conflict. The weak political culture is discussed in which government decisions are taken and policies formulated by a small elite while powerful *Nawabs/Sardars* play a prominent role in politics. The account adds nothing new to this long lamented story of growing economic inequalities and disempowerment which have triggered the conflict that has now become a problem of strategic dimensions. Another aspect that is identified is the emergence of a middle class which is persistently pushing for change giving rise to a class conflict in the province.

The second chapter dwells on the different actors fomenting the nationalist insurgency. Among them are religious/sectarian extremists, smugglers and crime syndicates as well as political parties. Their ideologies, objectives and aims are highlighted to show the lack of mutual harmony among them. The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), Baloch Republican Army (BRA), Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) and Balochistan Liberation United Front (BLUF) have each their separate secessionist agendas. They no longer subscribe to the moderate nationalist view of attaining political autonomy within the federation as some other groups like the Baloch Musallah Difa Organization (BMDO) and Lashkare-e-Balochistan do. In fact the latter seeks to counter the growing ambitions of the BLA and the BLF. This ambiguity and lack of clarity in their programmes have turned the general public and students into a frustrated lot. The strategic and counter-insurgency experts classify the current Baloch insurgency as low-level guerrilla warfare or low-intensity internal armed conflict funded and supported by the Baloch diaspora and regional countries particularly India.

The study explains that there are two prevailing views regarding the nature and level of the current insurgency in Balochistan. One view is that it is violent anarchism rather than classical insurgency; the other view categorizes the insurgency as a legitimate cause of the disenchanting Baloch segments that may become a mass movement of the young educated middle class. Holders of the first view also point to the absence of 1 charismatic leadership and infighting among the insurgent groups. Due to the weak political culture political parties have no hold on the situation and cannot play an effective role in pacification of the insurgency. The nature of their politics can be seen in the fact that nearly all parties have retained the main Sardars as their party heads. The role of the civil society organizations in Balochistan and its impact on the conflict is generally seen as negligible though some may point to the positive side of economic development.

Chapter three sheds light on the historical and regional context of the conflict and the role of exogenous elements and presents some likely scenarios for the future of Balochistan. The conflict is traced back to 1948 when the nationalist cause first raised its head against the state and to factors such as underrepresentation of the Baloch at the national level; politico-fiscal autonomy, development issues and the hybrid nature of Baloch nationalism. The Balochistan province is located at the junction of competing and conflicting strategic interests of local, regional and international powers involving the US, China, India, Iran and Afghanistan. The rebirth of a new great game in Afghanistan, border issues and the US-led war on terror have made Balochistan all the more important. Among the interesting scenarios for the future of the conflict it is projected that the situation as it prevails today is likely to continue with some variations in the level of insecurity and intensity of violence while the hybrid Baloch political discourse would continue to oscillate between parliamentary politics and separatist tendencies.

Chapter four presents a critical appreciation of the attempts made at the federal and provincial levels to address concerns of Balochistan, specifically the Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan package, the 7<sup>th</sup> NFC Award and the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment. Yet the process of conflict resolution or management would have remained unfulfilled unless and until all players of the conflict were taken into confidence particularly the disgruntled Baloch youth. Respectable Baloch elders like Sardar Attaullah Mengal and Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri can facilitate a serious dialogue between the state and Baloch rebels.

The last chapter suggests to the federal government to initiate demilitarization of the province; ensure implementation of the 7<sup>th</sup> NFC Award, the Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan package and the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment; train the security forces and law enforcement agencies; release the missing and illegally detained people; stop infiltration from Iran and Afghanistan and; increase job quota for the Baloch in all the

sectors. At the provincial level the author suggests the provincial government to work out a roadmap and guidelines for executing development projects in Balochistan; attract foreign investment and; promote fisheries-related industries, livestock management and marble industry. Likewise, the political parties are asked to initiate political debate in and outside the parliament. The security forces are urged to avoid extrajudicial killings and illegal detentions. The international agencies are recommended to launch small and medium scale development projects in the fields of formal and informal education, health care etc; and strengthen participatory democracy, political culture and good governance. ■

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**Jonathan Lyons, *Islam through Western Eyes: From the Crusades to the War on Terrorism***

(New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 260 pages.

East-West rapprochement has always remained a topic of intellectual debate since centuries. But it is the inability of the West to understand the true nature of the Muslim societies and time and again they (Westerners) have held the view that it's the Muslims who are a stumbling block. "Impelled by one thousand years of anti-Muslim ideas and images, the West has failed to engage in any meaningful or productive way with the world of Islam," says Lyons, a foreign correspondent for *Reuters* and scholar of Islamic civilization. His research focuses on the shifting boundaries between East and West, and his publications include *The House of Wisdom: How the Arabs Transformed Western Civilization* and *Answering Only to God: Faith and Freedom in Twenty-First Century Iran*. He argues that the so-called anti-Muslim discourse which was "formulated in the medieval halls of the "Roman Curia" and courts of the "European Crusaders" and perfected in the newsrooms of *Fox News* and *CNN*, determines what can and cannot be said about Muslims and their religion.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and their aftermath are just the latest reminder of the West's complete and enduring failure to engage in any meaningful and productive way with the world of Islam. For almost ten centuries, attempts at understanding have been held hostage to a grand, totalizing Western narrative that shapes what can and, more important, what cannot be said and thought about Islam and the Muslims (1).

Religious onslaughts on Islam and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) have become common these days in the West. They, every now and then, come up with blasphemous caricatures of the Prophet (PBUH) and most recently a film by some extremists in the US about the Holy Prophet has provoked a storm of protest in the Muslim world. These actions are just part

of the grand strategy to malign Islam as a religion and create anti-Muslim feelings in the non-Muslim world. Such efforts are in no way justified on any grounds including the so-called freedom of expression as it is rather the freedom given to any person in the West to clog the way in any rapprochement between the East and West. Islam as a religion is the religion of “peace” as the very meaning signifies. Islam is nothing else but peace.

In *Islam through Western Eyes*, comprising seven chapters, Jonathan Lyons unpacks Western habits of thinking and writing about Islam, conducting a careful analysis of the West’s grand collective narrative across one thousand years of history. He observes the discourse’s corrosive effects on the social sciences, including sociology, politics, philosophy, theology, international relations, security studies, and human rights scholarship. He follows its influence on research, speeches, political strategy, and government policy, preventing the West from responding effectively to its most significant twenty-first-century challenges: the rise of Islamic power, the emergence of religious violence, and the growing tension between established social values and multicultural rights among Muslim immigrant populations. Lyons addresses issues of deep concern to Western readers - Islam and modernity, Islam and violence, and Islam and women - and proposes new ways of thinking about the Western relationship to the Islamic world.

Lyons, an scholar of Islamic civilization, explains how the dominant Western view of Muslims as irrational and incorrigible fanatics, obsessed by sex and violence, was forged at the time of the “First Crusade” and has been remarkably consistent and unchanging since then, promoted throughout the centuries largely by self-appointed “experts” who had little experience interacting with actual Muslims. The book presents a well-researched and referenced case that “the West’s ‘conversation’ with Islam has always been a one-sided affair, essentially a dialogue with itself, revealing much about the subject but little or nothing about the object in question.”

It’s a timely and important book especially during the time when Islam is being discussed all around the world in the context of “Global War on Terror.” The subject matter is not only necessary but also informative making us understand the true nature of understanding and misunderstanding between the Muslims and non-Muslims. ■

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