
BOOK REVIEWS

GOD AGAINST THE GODS

Jonathan Kirsch

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Jonathan Kirsch is a member of the National Book Critics Circle, PEN Center USA West, and a book columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*. He lectures widely on biblical, literary and legal topics and is an author of a number of books.

In the work under review the author explores the struggle between monotheism and polytheism in the ancient world from Prophet Abraham onwards. According to him religious liberty and diversity were core values of classical paganism, and it was monotheism that introduced the terrors of true belief, including holy war, martyrdom, inquisitions, and crusades.

He has interpreted 11 September, 2001 attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon in terms of a “3000-year-old conflict between monotheism and polytheism.” Currently he blames the Islamic world for the bloodiest acts of violence in the name of God. Besides the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, he refers to the dynamiting of ancient Buddhist statuary in Afghanistan, the sentencing of Nigerian women to stoning for the sin of adultery, Iranian journalists to death for the sin of blasphemy, and suicide bombings by Palestinians who seek martyrdom in *jihad* (holy war). He, however, ignores the socio-economic and political causes for such acts.

Kirsch brings out the fact that the roots of religious terrorism are not found originally or exclusively in Islam, but begin in the pages of the Bible. He goes back to the earliest biblical skirmishes when Yahweh (i.e. God in the original theology of the Israelites) decreed a holy war against any one who refuses to acknowledge him as the only God. Proceeding further from *Torah* to the recorded history, he refers to the national wars of liberation fought by the Maccabees against the pagan king of Syria and later of the Zealots against the pagan emperor of Rome. He claims that these wars give the first account of men and women willing to martyr themselves in the name of God. Later, during the first century, the banner of holy war was taken up by the early Christians when they brought the news and the message of the Jesus Christ to imperial Rome where “the decisive battle” between monotheism and polytheism was fought.

During the fourth century, the Roman emperor Constantine led a revolution in the name of monotheism and soon thereafter the emperor Julian sought to work a counter-revolution for polytheism. The world, according to the author, at that time, faced a choice between two futures – monotheism or polytheism. Julian died soon and with him his pagan counter-revolution ended.

Consequently, Christian tradition salutes Constantine as “the Great” and condemns Julian as “the Apostate.” The author gives a hypothetical statement when he says that if Julian had succeeded in his mission, the spirit of respect and tolerance would have come back into Roman government and into the roots of Western civilization.

The word “paganism” never existed in Rome before the birth of Christ. “It is not far from the truth to say that before Christianity invented it, there was no Roman religion, but only worship, expressed in a hundred-and-one different ways.” (John Holland Smith, *The Death of Classical Paganism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1976) p.6.)

While comparing the ideologies of monotheism and polytheism, he says that Judaism, Christianity and Islam agree that “only a single deity is worthy of worship for the simple reason that only a single deity exists.” The deity variously called “Yahweh” or “Lord” or Allah” is thought to be one and the same God. On the contrary, pagans embrace the idea that some gods are more powerful than other gods and phrases like “Supreme God” and “Highest God” fit into the theology of polytheism.

“For though there be gods many and lords many”, explains Paul, “but to us there is but one God” (1 Cor. 8:5-6) According to Christianity and Judaism, the god of monotheism is “the living God”, “the everlasting King” (Jeremiah 10:10) and “the Only True God” (John: 17:3). In the words of Jeremiah all other gods are “no gods” (Jeremiah 2:11) and to Apostle Paul they are “devils” (1 Cor. 10:21). According to biblical monotheism to worship wrong god is “not only a sin but a crime, and a crime that is punishable by death” (author, p.10). Thus monotheism cruelly punishes the sin of “heresy” but polytheism does not recognize it as a sin at all. The polytheist, the author argues, can live in harmony with the monotheist but not vice versa. Polytheists are tolerant of other religions but monotheists are not.

He regrets that we rarely consider the dark side of monotheism and the bright side of polytheism in our churches, synagogues and mosques. “It is not possible that only one road leads to so sublime a mystery.” (Cited in Pierre Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*, trans. B.A. Archer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 1990, p. 58.)

He condemns the existence of “extreme strictness” in religious belief and practice and the worst excesses of the Crusades and the Inquisition inflicted by the Christians on Jews and Muslims, all of whom believed in the same God. He feels that all the excesses of religious extremism in the modern world are the latest manifestation of a dangerous tradition that began in the distant past. When the Taliban dynamited the Buddhist statuary, when Arab suicide bombers carry out “martyr operations” in Israel, and when a Jewish physician opens fire on Muslims at prayer at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, they are “inspired by a tragic misreading and misapplication of ancient texts.” Religious terrorism is

carried out by true believers in one or another variety of monotheism against their fellow monotheists.

He acknowledges the “deeply empathetic teaching” of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The majority of Jews, Christians and Muslims embrace the values of respect, toleration and compassion that are found in their sacred texts. Fundamentalism, fanaticism and religious terrorism are found only on the “ragged fringes” of all three faiths. The “blessings of Judaism, Christianity and Islam far outweigh ... the curse of religious fanaticism.” But, at the same time, he asserts that we make a mistake when we dismiss the pagan tradition as something “crude and demonic”. He claims “the values that the Western world embraces and celebrates – cultural diversity and religious liberty – are pagan values.” Some of us may differ with him and argue that these values are also incorporated in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. ■

Dr Noor ul Haq

Research Fellow, IPRI

CHINA-SOUTH ASIA: ISSUES, EQUATIONS, POLITICS

Swaran Singh

New Delhi: Lancer's Book,
2003, Pages 424

South Asia acquires greater significance in China's foreign policy due to its geographical proximity and the links existing since ancient times. China-South Asia equation involves a number of complicated issues that draw the attention of researchers and analysts, both inside as well as outside the region. Swaran Singh has addressed a number of such issues in his book *China-South Asia: Issues, Equations, Policies*. The author is a well-known scholar and an Associate Professor at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and a fellow at several prestigious institutions in India as well as in some foreign countries. He has written several monographs, chapters, research papers and newspaper articles on China's foreign policy.

The book consists of three parts, which are divided into 15 chapters. Part one, from chapter one to four, sets the context and deals with the basic issues existing in these relations. Part two, from chapter five to eleven, deals with what the author terms as “Equations”. This part focuses on China's relations with the seven South Asian countries separately. Part three, from chapter twelve to fifteen, is captioned “Politics” and discusses the issues from a theoretical point of view.

Singh goes deep into history to trace the links between the people of the two regions and finds that these links were based on goodwill and trade. In

the contemporary times, Indian leaders, namely M.K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were sympathetic towards the Chinese struggle against Japanese aggression. This led to India's early recognition of China and the establishment of diplomatic relations between them.

Tibet remained a critical issue in the evolution of the overall profile of China-South Asia equations in general and in Sino-Indian relations in particular. During the 1950s China moved into Tibet, which provided an excuse to the Western powers to criticize it for violation of human rights. India joined hands with the West on the Tibetan issue and latter granted asylum to the Dalai Lama and his followers. This became one of the major factors of Sino-Indian rivalry. The author supports the Dalai Lama's proposal for declaring Tibet as 'Zone of peace', which is unacceptable to China. Recently during his visit to China in June 2003, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee agreed to desist from anti-China activities on Indian soil. However, Tibet continues to generate mutual suspicions rather than mutual confidence in Sino-Indian relations.

The Kashmir issue also touches upon the triangular relations between China, India and Pakistan. In the early years, China adopted a neutral posture on the Kashmir dispute favouring a solution based on mutual consultations between India and Pakistan. But, following its border conflict with India in 1962, Beijing started supporting Pakistan's position on Kashmir. Since the beginning of reforms in China in the early 1980s, Beijing reverted to a neutral stance on Kashmir, although Beijing and New Delhi have major differences on this issue. India does not accept the China-Pakistan border agreement signed in 1963. Singh believes that the Kashmir dispute is so complicated that any solution is hardly possible in near future.

Indian Ocean is strategically very important for China in context of its emerging role as a big power. The author elaborates on China's interests, the determinants and motives of its Indian Ocean policy. Its interest in the Indian Ocean is quite understandable as the major portion of its foreign trade (85%) is conducted through sea. But its growing interaction with the littoral states and their multilateral forums along with its sporadic appearance in Indian Ocean are being carefully watched by the other powers. The writer is of the view that China's ambitions must be understood in terms of its increasing compulsions and capabilities.

The author has very ably elaborated on the various aspects of Sino-Indian relationship that have impacted on China's South Asian policy. In the beginning, both China and India were fairly close to each other. They took pride in their friendship and even embellished it with the slogan *Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai* (Indians and Chinese are brothers). However, in late 1950s major differences developed in their relationship over their lengthy border which was not demarcated. Indian support to the Tibetan uprising and the provision of asylum to the Dalai Lama severely affected their relations. This eventually led to a short but crucial clash between Indian and Chinese forces along the border in 1962,

which, in turn, blocked their relations for almost two decades. The war greatly affected intra-states relations within the region, leading to intense Sino-Indian rivalry and opening a China option for Pakistan. The author is critical of China's policies and holds Beijing responsible for the outbreak of the war.

The developments during the 1970s initiated a process of normalization between China and India. Since then there has been steady improvement in the gamut of their relations including the defence sector. The expanding and frequent interaction between civil and military policy-making officials has since brought about greater mutual understanding on various issues. Till the early 1970s the two appeared to be on dramatically opposite sides due to their ideological and political orientation, but over the years they have begun to emphasise on their agreements and managed to evolve a common approach on matters like the nuclear issue, disarmament, development and human rights.

The author states that the Sino-Indian border is more peaceful than that of India and Pakistan and the Line of Control, which witnesses frequent shelling. Peace on the Sino-Indian border, according to the author is the outcome of their border agreements signed in 1993 and 1996. The agreements resulted from concrete developments that lead to stable relations. Both held several rounds of successful talks on the border issue and substantial progress was seen on this issue. Indeed, this process supported the on-going process of normalization. This was further strengthened by their increased volume of trade, most of which was carried out through their border. Singh thinks that issues like border and the Pakistan factor could cause friction and undermine their ongoing process of injecting more and more CBMs. But, at the same time Singh is quite optimistic about future prospects.

Pakistan remains an irritant in Sino-Indian relations. Beijing's alleged support to Pakistan particularly in the nuclear field and missile programme have irritated New Delhi. The author argues that China's indulgence in promoting Pakistan's nuclear and missile programme was believed to be the single most important factor that pushed India into weaponizing its nuclear option. This however is not true. The fact is that Pakistan initiated its nuclear programme only after India had already acquired this technology. Indeed it was India, which pushed Pakistan into the nuclear race, and not China's support. On the nuclear issue and China's alleged support to Pakistan, Singh seems to have adopted the official Indian stance and criticized Beijing for its support to Pakistan. This is further reflected during his discussion on the nuclearization of South Asia in May 1998. The author criticizes China for its reaction at Indian nuclear tests, though Beijing was quite moderate in its reaction despite the fact that the Indian had leaders stated that the threat from Beijing was the prime reason for the tests. In the post-Pokhran II period, Sino-Indian relations started improving. Singh appreciated China's neutral posture on the Kargil crisis and interpreted it as Beijing's recognition of India as a big neighbour, which could not be ignored any longer and needed to be dealt with directly rather than indirectly. Sino-

Indian relations have now assumed a new dimension based on pragmatism, mutual cooperation and peaceful coexistence. Singh terms it as the revival of *Panchsheel*. He is optimistic about the future, but at the same time stresses that it would take some time to resolve their outstanding issues.

The special nature of China's relations with Pakistan, according to the author, forms the most critical part of China's South Asian policy initiative. He examines the genesis, growth and the existing framework of the 'special friendship' a term he frequently uses in the text. While exploring the reasons for this unique nature of relations the writer finds that China, unlike Pakistan's western allies, remained committed to Pakistan and helped not only during the time of crisis but also assisted it in various developmental projects. China has also transferred technology and provided considerable assistance in defence related issues that boosted Pakistan's confidence against India.

The author touches upon Sino-Pakistan defence cooperation along with details of the major projects, which Pakistan has launched with the help of China. These include the Heavy Mechanical Complex (HMC), Heavy Foundry, and Aeronautical Complex near Kamra. Other fields in which China has assisted Pakistan are building aircraft like the F-7 Fighter and Karakoram-8 trainer/aircraft. China's cooperation also deals with the defence services, with both the states focusing attention on missiles and nuclear cooperation. The author concludes that Sino-Pakistan military cooperation would continue if it were seen in the context of their mutual relations. But at the same time he believes that the last few years have witnessed constraints in China's support to Pakistan in defence. This may be due to China's improved relations with India.

The discussion in the book under review is followed by a discussion on China's relations with other smaller regional countries, beginning with Nepal. Due to Nepal's close relations with China, India has not been able to assert its influence despite the fact that in 1950 Nepal had signed a Peace and Friendship Agreement with India. China played an important role in preserving Nepal's identity as a sovereign state. In return, Nepal prevents any hostile activities against China from its soil, maintains its neutrality in Sino-Indian conflict, contains Indian influence in Nepal's internal affairs and decision-making and strengthened Tibet interdependence with Nepal. But, according to Singh, Nepal benefited from Sino-Indian conflict and played one against the other to achieve optimum concessions for its national development.

The author describes China's relations with Sri Lanka as Beijing's design for seeking influence through engagement as well as to insulate it from falling prey to anti-China political forces. The writer considers Sri Lanka's strategic location at the centre of the Indian Ocean sea-lanes of communications and China's troubled relations with India as the prime reasons for influencing Beijing's policy towards Colombo. In reality they have no common border and are separated by a long distance. Sri Lanka stuck to One China policy, supported China for its seat in the UN and on human rights issue.

Both gained from each other. However, since late 1970s when China embarked upon pragmatism, their ties became more equal and businesslike. Since then Beijing has been trying to project itself as a benign state.

The nature of China's relations with Bhutan is different compared to its relations with other South Asian countries. New Delhi did not allow Beijing to assert its sphere of influence in this mountainous country. Indian influence in Bhutan started since early days when in 1949 India signed an agreement with Bhutan, which allowed India to control the external affairs of Bhutan; foreign policy and defence. China's operation in Tibet also enhanced Bhutan's skepticism pushing it under the Indian control. Both the countries have not yet established formal diplomatic relations. Beijing did not accept India's special relations with Bhutan but could not wean the latter away from Indian influence.

Bangladesh emerged on the South Asian scene as an independent country in 1971. In the beginning China blocked Bangladesh's entry into the UN on behalf of Pakistan. However, their relations started improving in the early 1980s. In the author's opinion, since China had shed lots of its revolutionary zeal and had become a pragmatic power and Bangladesh also acquired confidence of its identity, these two factors led them closer to each other. This process was facilitated with the Sino-Indian rapprochement. Beijing has greatly facilitated Dhaka's assertions in the recent years. The over all nature of China's relations with Bangladesh are positive and predicted bright future.

The strategic location of the Maldives perhaps remained one of the critical attractions as China's interest in Indian Ocean. The credit for good and stable relationships between China- the Maldives goes to Chinese farsighted policies. However Mr. Singh considers this as part of China's expansion in Asia Pacific region. The Indian factor was another important reason in determining Beijing-Male relations.

The third part of the book focused on theoretical perspectives. The author dealt with major themes of the determinants of China's South Asian policy, which finally led towards its neutrality. Both China and South Asia had several similarities and differences, which became the bases of their mutual understanding and skepticism of each other. The similarities included their colonial subjugation, anti-colonial sentiments, their common pro-liberation challenges of nation building and their limitations of developing third world countries. This led to their closer relationships. While their negative interface during their colonial period and divergent ideologies and political systems created skepticism in this equation. With the passage of time, they acquired confidence of their identities and appeared with more mature and balanced approaches in congruence with their national interests. According to the author, the most important factor in this regard was China's adoption of pragmatism and neutrality particularly towards Indo-Pakistan conflicts that culminated during the Kargil crisis. The author termed it a turning point in making a visible shift in China's South Asian policy. He even agreed to a school of thought that

claimed that with Pakistan's fundamentalist forces deeply entrenched China may move from neutrality to an active pro-Indian engagement. This may not actually happen, but changes in Beijing's policy are quite evident. This account ended with the conclusion that in future, China's relations with South Asia would further strengthen.

While reading this book one can find at certain stages that the author preferred to look at the issues from Indian perspective that sharply differed with the point of view of the other countries. However this pro-Indian tilt is quite understandable since the author is an Indian national and has worked in an official capacity. Aside from this factor, the book is the outcome of Singh's assiduous research on the subject. It is a comprehensive account written in simple and straightforward way. Those who are not well acquainted with the issues prevalent in China's relations with the South Asian countries can benefit from this book. The text is well documented and the author has resorted on both primary as well as secondary sources. The book is a valuable addition to the existing knowledge and would be useful for the analysts, researches students and general reader. ■

Ghulam Ali

Assistant Research Officer

THE WTO AND THE MULTILATERAL TRADING SYSTEM

Bhagirath Lal Das

Third World Network, Penang, 2003, Pages 249.

Bhagirath Lal Das in his book *The WTO and the Multilateral Trading System* provides useful insight into the working of the WTO and its weaknesses so that the poor countries are made aware about how they should face the new challenges. The writer has successfully explained the inherent weaknesses of the WTO system and given various recommendations in this regard. The book provides the points of view of both the Developed Countries (DC's) and the Least Developed Countries (LDC's). The writer is of the view that the interests of all parties must be safeguarded for the smooth functioning of the system. The book covers the past and present of the regime and focuses on the future of the multilateral trading system, which depends on how WTO rules are implemented and deficiencies in the system addressed. The writer thinks that different actors like NGOs; UNCTAD etc can play a role for the success of the multilateral trading system. The WTO was established on January 1, 1995 and its working over the year can be assessed. The basic issues of WTO are related to implementation of its rules and regulations and their subsequent implications

and in the case of the LDC's how the DC's implement these rules and regulations.

The book highlights the main features of WTO, i.e. most favoured nation treatment principle, national treatment and transparency. It also covers issues relating to goods, services and ideas. The WTO agreement would be implemented along three tracks, i.e. formulation of laws and procedures and establishment of institutions, elimination of certain specified trade measures within a prescribed time frame, where it would be notified to the WTO from time to time. The LDC's are required to take three types of action for its implementation i.e. compulsory actions (e.g. legislation on the protection of International Property Rights (IPR's) as required by TRIPs agreement), discretionary actions (as those required in the area of safeguards, subsidies and anti-dumping) and elimination of measures. Notification is necessary to achieve transparency as required by the WTO multilateral trading system.

The writer is critical of the WTO regime from various angles. According to him there is a mismatch between the objectives and the instruments. The objectives might be "lofty" but the instruments implemented are either inappropriate or inadequate. The objective of the system as given in the preamble to the GATT and the WTO agreement stipulates that member states could contribute to achieving these objectives "by entering into reciprocal and mutually advantageous arrangements directed to the substantial reduction of tariffs and other barriers to trade and to the elimination of discriminatory treatment in international commerce (trade relations)." The writer has criticized the "instrument of reciprocity" as a hurdle to achieve its objectives and calls it a "built-in mechanism" in the system that would increase disparity among its members.

The writer believes that not only the basic weakness of the WTO--"the weakness of its fundamental base"--but also its "processes in practice" create further problems which are hurdles in achieving the objectives of the WTO, i.e. elimination of poverty, free and fair trade etc. This lacuna in the GATT system was, however, recognized and provisions for special and differential treatment for the LDC's were included in the WTO. The deficiencies can be addressed by including provisions of special and differential treatment e.g. in custom duties and other barriers to trade. However, according to the writer these actions in support of LDC's are fewer and inadequate as taken by the DC's. The writer stresses the importance of special and differential treatment and believes that it should be an "inherent element" of the system in order to achieve its objectives.

The writer has given many suggestions in this regard. He is of the view that in the present structure of the WTO following improvements can take place to give the LDC's their legitimate share, e.g. integration of S&D provisions, improvement in implementation, decision making process and a more representative negotiating structure for the LDC's addressing the current inadequacies. Other suggestions include expansion of export opportunities,

development of production and infrastructure, relaxation of national treatment principal, appropriate export prices etc.

Another important aspect the author has discussed is what are the future prospects of WTO and the role of different actors in facilitating the working of the WTO, i.e. LDC's, DC's, NGO's, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) etc. The writer feels that the DC's should have an "enlightened self-interest" in the rapid growth of the developing countries because of the prospects of new markets. According to him the present WTO rules hinder the development of the LDC's. Therefore, the DC's should improve these rules and regulations so as to facilitate the development of the LDC's. He suggests that the DC's should acquire a percentage of government procurements from developing countries. However, the "initial burden" seems to fall on developed countries. The author says that the DC's can fight protectionism with a strong systematic institutional mechanism where ad hoc policies would not be effective. The protectionist lobbies are very strong in U.S.A. In this regard the writer has given an example of the opposition to business process outsourcing in New Jersey. Developed countries have a stake in fighting protectionism at both levels.

Regarding the role of the LDC's, the author says the LDC's should realize that their strength lies in their majority in WTO, their growing markets and as a base for future scientific research. They can improve their strength and role in various ways, e.g. through an analytical study of the subject for which a national commission can help the concerned governments. Such a commission could analyze the pros and cons of the matter and recommend a clear, well worked out stance keeping in view the national interests. A country can then build coalitions with other countries on its stance, which is an important tool in multilateral negotiations. The LDC's should carefully examine in terms of rights and obligations, the result of negotiations and see whether it is in "consonance" with its development. "It is important to know that the 'why' of an agreement is 'economics and politics' and the 'how' of an agreement is law."

The author believes that the WTO Secretariat can play an important role by adopting a neutral and impartial stance. It should refrain from pursuing a 'particular line' on a subject and must follow a broad based recruitment policy. The UNCTAD can also contribute with its studies and analyses, as it comes up with useful ideas during the Uruguay round in the area of services. Its inter-governmental machinery can help in building consensus on important issues.

The author believes that the NGOs can also play an important role in raising awareness in the public and advise governments on various issues in trade negotiations to adopt a balanced approach. As Oxfam and MSF (Medecines Sans Frontieres) have worked on the issue of availability of essential medicines in Africa (as constraints imposed by TRIPS) and advocacy by Oxfam and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) on the issue of

agriculture subsidies. The future of WTO also depends on the way different actors play their important roles.

The writer has put forward following important questions. Can the multilateral system be reformed? What are the future prospects for WTO? The bilateral and regional arrangements are seen as major impediments to it. It might detract or lessen the importance of the multilateral system. The writer says that there is already discontent in many sections of the population in Mexico under NAFTA and in Africa under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The author believes that it does not ensure a good outcome in the long run.

Some developing countries like Brazil, China and India might perceive benefits in regional arrangements but the author feels that these opportunities might be curtailed if seen as a threat to their domestic production. The writer believes that a developing country cannot get a better deal in a bilateral arrangement as compared to a multilateral one. There is more criticism and discontent in a bilateral arrangement if LDC's are put in a disadvantageous position than would be the case in a multilateral arrangement/framework. It will amount to "expanding ill will."

The writer is of the view that as "economic disparity" or inequality can cause instability within a country, the increasing disparity between DC's and LDC's would cause instability of the international system. The writer opines, "International economic relations and linkages can play a significant role in fostering peace and stability in the world. And the multilateral trading system can be a useful instrument for deepening these relations and strengthening the linkages."

Though the writer believes that the WTO system provides challenges, its main strength lies in its decision-making process, i.e. the principle of one country one vote, which LDC's can use to their advantage. Though DC's see it as a threat, LDC's consider it as an impractical weapon. However, the decision can only be taken if there is consensus. According to the author it should rather motivate the mighty and strengthen the weak and the LDC's should defend themselves. The need is that LDC's and DC's should work for the betterment of humanity.

One unique feature of this book is that it is published by an NGO i.e. TWN (Third World Network). It, therefore, gives due share to the problems of LDC's and DC's as well as highlight the importance of NGOs in influencing public opinion and influencing governmental stance. For the last five years, NGOs are making an important contribution for preparing LDC's for trade negotiations and pointing out the inadequacies and imbalances in the trading system. NGOs like TWN and Southern and Eastern African Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI) contributions are important in this regard.

The book ends on an idealistic tone. It states, “The compulsions arising from the emerging tensions in the world will make it imperative for all countries, big and small, strong and weak, to work in unison for their common good. The multilateral trading system can be a good area in which to start.”

Though we may or may not agree with the views of the author, one cannot negate the need to work for the common future of humanity. ■

Nuzhat Khanum

Assistant Research Officer, IPRI

ASIAN DEMOCRACY IN WORLD HISTORY

By Alan T. Wood,

Routledge, NY, 2004, pages: 121.

Democracy, as it is practiced differently in different societies has intrigued political thinkers for quite some time. Alan T. Wood has decided to take a comparative and analytical approach to study democracy in his book “*Asian Democracy in World History*”, which is one of the books in the series of “Themes of the World History”. The book is divided into seven chapters with the crux lying in the four central chapters where the experiences of democratic governance are compared to the East Asian and Asian states. In the basic conceptual framework, he has taken six prerequisites for democracy given by Robert M. Dahl. These prerequisites constitute the basic theme of this book. They are elected officials, free, fair and frequent elections, freedom of expression, and alternative source of information, associational autonomy and inclusive citizenship. The explanation of these variables is given to ensure that the parameters of the study are clearly drawn. The writer has presented the basic objectives of the study and given a set of questions in the beginning that will make it easier for the reader to comprehend how the different states under study are taken into consideration. This has made the concept and the layout of the study more comprehensible. The research citations have been deliberately made easier by the author and at the end of each chapter suggested readings for each state are given. The basic delineation among the Asian states is that of the post war democracies, which include India, Japan and the Philippines. The second category is of the later democracies in East Asia including South Korea, Taiwan and prospective China. The third category is of the lateral democracies in South Asia that comprise Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. The fourth classification is of fragile democracies including Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The times have changed from the traditional rules of despots and imperialists, so the present time, despite its diversity and confusion, is still more conducive for democracy. The freedom of expression has been enhanced manifold by the rise in information through media and as such the awareness

level has also been established. The events during the twentieth century have shown that democracies have a lesser inclination towards war.

Democracy in its essence is about finding a decent balance between excessive freedom, which can lead to anarchy, and extensive control, which can lead to tyranny. So democracy has to be a combination of participation and freedom, developing a political culture with the state assisting in the legislation to implement the policies promulgated by the representatives of the people. The basic idea is to study democracy, accepting the uniqueness and the differences among the various cultures yet keeping the basic principle of free will in perspective. The generalisation of democracy by taking the experience of one state and applying it to another cannot be the best approach towards studying democracy. There cannot be agreed universal definitions and criteria for all the states. There is also a need to study the social structures of various societies and how the public attitudes and morals differ because of influences like religion and race. These differences lead to different cultures and traditions but this cannot imply that these different morals, beliefs and aspirations are essentially anti-democratic. The various interpretations of democracy by different societies must be studied objectively.

The author has started by explaining the political philosophies and the origins of concepts like 'polis' and 'cosmopolis', which show the aspirations of the civilisations at the beginning of their journey towards political socialisation and the dignity of man. To reach these objectives there is need to establish a healthy working relationship among the elected representatives and the military and the police. There should be a democratic culture in the state and no foreign intervention in the affairs of the state. The author observes that the states having cultural and ethnic homogeneity have a better chance of democracy developing in them. While explaining the idea of democracy, the author has given a brief and interesting history of the evolution of man and the developmental stages, which show that to socialise and modernise had always been his innate behaviour. While explaining the political socialisation in the next step, the author has given examples of the Greek, Roman and Italian civilisations.

In the next analysis the author has focused on the European experience and explains how the six prerequisites of democratic development were able to assist in the formation of democratic governments there. Similarly he moves on to the other countries of Asia, which is the basic subject of the study and tries to trace the availability or the non-availability of the prerequisites in these states. Japan had a freer press, which for instance assisted in the freedom of expression. The author thinks that the scholars who believe that capitalism is conducive for democracy consider Taiwan as a textbook case. A functioning democratic polity can develop from multiple paths, even from authoritarian political traditions, if there is a conscious move towards building a democratic culture. On the contrary, as a result of an undemocratic culture in states like China, the already diminishing prerequisites are at risk of depletion. In South

Asia there are also some positive signs, for example, the secondary and higher education system can be an example for countries like the United States to follow, which is experiencing degradation in its primary education system. Similarly the author hints that religion can be a hindrance in some cases. Democracy failed in some places because it could not generate the unity of purpose. The author also explains that he did not include the rest of South-East Asian and Central Asian states, because in his perception these states have not experienced a move towards democracy. While explaining the fragility of democracy in the South Asian states like Pakistan the author has tried to compress the eventful politics since independence in a mere four pages which leaves a lot to be desired in the manner of an analytical survey of politics in Pakistan. Although the author has clearly explained in the beginning that only the matters related to politics will be contemplated upon in his discourse, it seems that he has missed out on the attitudes of the people and their idiosyncrasies while explaining some of the states like China, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

This book is quite different from many other discourses on politics, in that it actually lays down the objectives, parameters, dimensions and philosophies that will be a part of the conceptual framework. This enables the reader to anticipate whatever book says and does not cause any confusion about the way the book will address its main topic. Considering the educational and informative value of this book, it not only provides an introduction to the earliest ideas regarding the governance of the nation states, but also shows how these ideas passed through a transformation and how they were actually practiced in different societies. The author ends on an optimistic note when he believes that the coming generations will probably excel in achieving the objectives of democracy. ■

Ahmed Ijaz Malik
Assistant Research Officer, IPRI

ISLAMIST NETWORKS: THE AFGHAN-PAKISTAN CONNECTION

Mariam Abou Zahab and Olivier Roy
Published in 2002, Paris, pages: 88, Price: \$ 49.50

Mariam Abou Zahab, a specialist on Pakistan, is a researcher affiliated with the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales (CERI) and a lecturer at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO), both in Paris. Olivier Roy is a known writer on Islam and politics. He is a professor at EHESS, the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences in Paris. He has to his credit books like *The Failure of Political Islam*, *The New Central Asia*, and (with

Mariam Abou Zahab) *Islamist Networks: The Afghan-Pakistan Connection* (Columbia, 2004).

Islamist Networks: The Afghan-Pakistan Connection is an effort to provide an incisive analysis of the new transnational movements and globalized responses that have developed in the past two decades or so in Afghanistan, Central Asia and Pakistan. The book is replete with data and facts. The authors discuss the growth of interlinked radical Islamist networks since almost a quarter century, which provided fertile ground to Al-Qaeda to emerge and operate. Taking into account the contradictory histories and ideological differences, the authors claim that the political contingencies had enabled these radical Islamist movements to coordinate with the aim of attacking the United States, their common adversary.

The book under review is divided into six chapters and every chapter helps in understanding of the issue. The first chapter introduces the issue to the reader while the second chapter gives a brief history and functioning of the political parties in the ex-Soviet states. The third chapter discusses the transition of Afghanistan from political parties to Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The religious groups in Pakistan and their role in Afghanistan and Kashmir are analysed in the fourth chapter. In the fifth chapter, the authors articulate the connection between Islamic extremists and Pakistan. This chapter is slightly controversial as it discusses what they perceive as the role of Pakistan military intelligence services in radicalising the Islamic movements. Insufficient references on this issue undermine its credibility. In the sixth and final chapter the authors analyse President Pervez Musharraf's policies against terrorism and comment that Pakistan continues to be the centre point for mobilising Islamic radicalism. However, the ongoing operation against Islamic radicals in Wana by Pakistan army negates this argument.

Though some of its contents are debatable, the book on the whole provides an understanding of the issue. The writing style is convincing and easy to understand as the authors even explain the terms they have used and give a comprehensive background of the events they have mentioned. However, their effort to provide detailed information about the Muslim radical groups at times seems appears unnecessary. *They also relate the relationship between Muslim theology and politics while arguing that the passage to "Jihadism" is linked to a strategic and political context, and with the designation of a particular state as the pre-eminent adversary of the Muslims.*

This book can be termed as an extension of the authors' earlier work on political Islam. The analysis of the development of immigrant groups in the west is the highlight of the book. They argue that the revival of Islam among Muslim populations is often wrongly perceived as a repercussion against westernization rather than as one of its consequences. Neo-fundamentalism has been gaining momentum among the Muslim youth particularly among the second and third generation migrants in the West. Actually this phenomenon is

feeding new forms of radicalism, ranging from support for Al-Qaeda to the absolute rejection of amalgamation into Western society and culture.

Olivier Roy argues that Islamic revival, or *re-Islamization*, results from the efforts of westernized Muslims to assert their identity in a non-Muslim society. A gulf has emerged between conventional Islamist movements in the Muslim world including Hamas of Palestine and Hezbollah of Lebanon and the **deracinated** militants who strive to establish an Ummah, or Muslim community, not entrenched in any particular society or territory. Roy provides a detailed comparison of these transnational movements, whether peaceful like the Tablighi Jama'at and the Islamic brotherhoods, or violent like Al Qaeda. He shows how without vagueness neo-fundamentalism acknowledges the loss of pristine cultures, and constructing instead a universal religious identity that transcends the very notion of culture. They consider the Pakistani Jamaat-I-Islami (JI) and the Tajik Party of Islamic Renaissance (PIR) as parties consisting largely of intellectuals with a modern education, who are related to the ideologies, militant and modern framework of the Muslim brotherhood and follow the footsteps of Maulana Maudoodi (a Pakistani Islamic scholar). They also mention that the Pakistani religious-political organization Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) and its imitators are linked to an older religious tradition of conservatism, which was radicalized following the Afghan war.

Overall the book *Islamist Networks: The Afghan-Pakistan Connection* is a scholarly and worth reading addition to the on this issue. The authors substantiate their arguments with copious references, which makes the book most credible. ■

Asma Shakir Khawaja

Assistant Research Officer, IPRI