

Book Review

Nadeem Ul Haque. *Looking Back: How Pakistan Became an Asian Tiger by 2050.* 2017, Karachi: Kitab (Pvt.) Limited.

The book is about development economics and, at the same time, a work of fiction, which predicts the future of Pakistan as a developed country. Though the book is written and conceived on a strong theoretical basis, that is, ‘complexity analysis,’ it remains a fictional work. Because the book is based on complexity analysis, it would fall under the rubric of ‘speculative fiction’, as it attempts to speculate the future development of Pakistan.

As far as speculative fiction is concerned, it is of two types, namely, dystopian and utopian. The book is indeed a ‘utopian speculative fiction’ as it presents Pakistan as a very developed country, contrary to current conditions where Pakistan is striving hard for its survival. Thus, the book equates to the likes of ‘Orwellian’ works, such as “1984”.

Right at the beginning of the book, the author argues that conventional economic analysis has failed to yield any sound analysis of the economy that can be employed for development economics. He further adds that both macroeconomics and microeconomics are inherently insufficient to lead to any meaningful policy analysis and recommendations. Thus, the author presents complexity analysis as an alternative tool for development economics.

According to the author, complexity analysis is inter-disciplinary system analysis without a behavioural model. It does not use the representative, homogenous, and rational agent model. It asserts heterogeneity, diversity, and bounded rationality. It does this in the presence of patchy information, which leads to economic and social systems through repeated actions. Thus, the system does not seek equilibrium but transitions over temporal and spatial milieu.

Simply put, it argues that “the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts.” In short, qualitative change and context are epistemological precursors to an informed analysis, which the complexity analysis provides best to any economic analysis for development economics. Based on the complexity analysis of Pakistan’s political economy, the author broadly presents ten major problems of Pakistan.

- (1) The first problem is the harm caused by foreign aid. Foreign aid usually arrives with political and economic sanctions, which adversely affect the country.
- (2) Rent-seeking by the country’s elite and concentration of power/capital is assumed to be another reason for Pakistan’s woes.
- (3) The greedy institutes that promote bad governance and block all kinds of reforms are also responsible for the sorry state of affairs.

- (4) On nearly all issues, the state policy is fragmented and is not locally owned by the concerned stakeholders.
- (5) The country suffers from a massive brain drain and is responsible for not providing the best minds for the job at hand.
- (6) Constitutional reform is imperative for the country but is not being carried out.
- (7) The Parliament of Pakistan has gone defunct, and it does not function to develop the country.
- (8) The urban centers of the country are mismanaged on a mass scale.
- (9) The colonial mindset of the decision-making public servants also impedes the development process in the country.
- (10) An unnecessary mercantilist approach towards industry also hampers the country's development.

In the next section of the book, a sketch of developed Pakistan in 2050 is presented. In this part of the book, the author proposes strategies for the prosperity of Pakistan. The book deals with all the bottlenecks it has identified in the previous section and presents a remedy for each problem. Finally, the author explains his vision of how Pakistan has developed in 2050.

The first step occurred in 2019 when the state realised its futility and provided seed money to academics and universities to conduct research, free of technical red tapes. This initiated a home-grown quality research initiative that resulted under the umbrella of Research for Pakistan. This was the first step towards rolling a public-driven research agenda in Pakistan, giving birth to 'crowdsourced agenda.'

This initiative resulted in 2022 in forming networks that would debate public issues and guide the public debate on issues, free of donor influence, promoting enlightenment, common knowledge, democratic debate among the citizenry, and, last but not least, the ownership of change among all stakeholders. By 2025, these networks were being heard by the parliament as well. The reforms from this year till 2030 were significant works of this research initiative. This period of Pakistan's history is called enlightenment by the author.

The author argues that this research initiative and the associated networks started to question the notion of 'development first' and advocates the notion of 'build state for development.' Thus, the country's focus shifted, and all efforts were directed towards building the state first so that development could follow. Thus, all state departments, such as police, internal affairs, and others, were restructured. Government performance is now judged by the security of life and property and the quality and speed of justice.

The author next discusses the constitutional amendments carried out to shape and build the state for development. He presents nine constitutional changes backed by the networks in the country: electoral requirements are amended to do away with the over-representation of elite families in the parliament; the arbitrary powers of the prime minister are curtailed, and the cabinet is made more powerful; the budget is now taken seriously due to constitutional amendments; practical rules for an independent judiciary are now in place; a strong local government system is in place; the civil service, the police, public service delivery agencies, and regulatory bodies are independent now and depoliticised; the four provinces have been abandoned, and now the country consists of

20 states of the equal population; and the census is mandatory now, and it is held regularly through constitutional changes and is tied with resource allocation to states.

Moreover, the author argues that the colonial pyramid of authorities is now dismantled, and 'unified pay scales' have been abandoned and replaced with good pay but without privileges, thus making public service more efficient and localised. The author argues that with colonial practices gone, public service made a more responsive and effective decentralised system of governance, the cities are being managed appropriately now, making them engines of growth and, ultimately, developing the country.

The industries have also been reinvented. The author argues that the sugar, cotton, cement, and banking sectors have been overhauled in the presence of strong regulatory authorities, free of political influences. The local markets are flourishing, and the mercantilist approach has been abandoned.

The author also argues that the country is secular now and not an Islamic state. The Mullah (Islamic Cleric) has been regulated, genuine Islamic scholars are being employed to counter Mullah, and the public debate is backing this effort. The reform, led by networks, has successfully placed a regime where even Mullah is properly licensed and does not oppose modernity.

As a result of all the reforms mentioned above, the author argues that the following results have been achieved, which have made Pakistan the Asian Tiger in 2050. Now Pakistani state works on system development and not on sectoral development. Now the state taxes the inheritance and not everything else. Entrepreneurship is thus emerging in Pakistan and helping the country develop. Now opportunities are being provided to the poor due to strong systems the state has put in place. Now the development is public-centric and not industry-centric, as was the case in the past when the poor were ignored and industry, such as the automobile industry, was favoured. Education is now in demand because people know that it is the only way to prosper in Pakistan, and family ties would not give them better prospects. Due to planned urbanisation and inheritance reforms, females are now included in the mainstream and are meaningfully contributing to the country's development.

While listing down the problems of Pakistan, the author has ignored the problems arising out of civil-military relations in the country. A complete absence of this problem from the 'problem tree' constructed by the author merits a revisiting exercise by contemporary researchers for further complexity analysis and to devise recommendations accordingly. Another issue missing in this analysis is the issue of Kashmir. This issue has been draining finances from Pakistan's coffers for a long now. The public agenda set by people, as presented by the author, has completely ignored this vital issue of Pakistan's politics and defense strategy.

Though the author focuses on cities and agricultural reforms, there is a dire need to include discourses on rural development in the book. This is necessary for the complexity analysis to be holistic and inter-disciplinary, as claimed by the author himself. Last but not least, as narrated by the author, in 2050, the UN appoints a 'Pakistan Transformation Commission' to study Pakistan as a successful case study of development for other developing countries. Strangely, the author, who is in favour of multi-disciplinary studies and complexity analysis, has chosen to put only economists as the members of this commission.

Overall, the book is an excellent read and fascinating as utopian fiction, at par with global literature of this kind. It is strongly recommended for all the readers who have an interest in contemporary issues of Pakistan. The book's readability is excellent, and it can be comprehended by all people, especially those with a background in social sciences.

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