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BOOK REVIEW

Book Name: On “Balochistan: A Conflict of Narratives”

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The book titled "Balochistan: A Conflict of Narratives" is written by Fida Hussain Malik and published by Light-Stone Publishers in 2020. The author is a Pakistani two-star general, presently serving as Director of the General Defense Complex in Islamabad. He has served as chief instructor in the School of Infantry and Tactics in Quetta and as a brigadier general for operations and plans in Head Quarters Southern Command in Quetta.

Balochistan has remained a center of debate since its accession to Pakistan on March 27, 1948. Although a lot of literature is available on Balochistan issues, one can see two different extremes of opinion in most of the discourse. If we see through the nationalist’s lens, they start their discourse by blaming the federal government and end by blaming them for every problem in Balochistan, most of the time manipulating the historical and geographical realities. Looking through the eyes of pro-federation supporters, these nationalists are blamed for having ties with hostile foreign powers, and the tribal system is primarily blamed for all of

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Balochistan's problems. Unfortunately, very little literature is available that represents both opinions with a balanced approach. Both parties seem more interested in playing the blame game and winning arguments than coming up with some serious solutions that may put an end to the burning issue.

This book is an attempt to understand both sides. The author has tried to maintain a balance in analyzing the Baloch issue by giving due consideration to both narratives most of the time, if not all the time. Unlike supporting one opinion blindly, the writer in this book in many places leaves it to the audience to further think about the notion of narratives.

Mir Hasil Khan Bizenjo, Sardar Akhtar Jan Mengal, Ex-Governor Balochistan Owais Ahmed Ghani, Zubaida Jalal, Ex-Minister for Defense Production, Ex-Corps Commander Quetta, Lt Gen Alam Khattak, and Sanaullah Baloch, a former member of Pakistan's National Assembly and Senate, were among those interviewed by the author. which makes for a good balance indeed.

The author argues that the current wave of Baloch nationalism is provoked by the feeling that there is systematic interference and intervention in the Baloch way of life. He argues that despite having the same ideology, Baloch leaders have not succeeded in having a single party. The Baloch stood united against external threats, but not against internal exploitation by their leaders. One may agree that yes, some of the Baloch nationalist leaders are living comfortably in European countries. The author used the term "resistance" to describe the 1948 clashes between the Pakistan army and prince Abdul Karim, Khan of Kalat's younger brother while many call it the first insurgency instead of resistance.

In addition to highlighting the role of foreign hostile actors in Balochistan, the author has discussed and criticized the state's neglect as one of the major causes of the province's current problems in this book. The author believes that the federation has largely shown disrespect for the economic inequality of the people of Balochistan. The ruling regimes spent most of their energies on minor political interests while neglecting people's social and economic grievances. The author argues that the people of

Balochistan are living under the lowest indicators of progress in many of the basic fields of life. He has also shared some statistical data from different sources, including the official website of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, to highlight that.

The author has also highlighted many aspects of the southern coastal city of Gwadar in his book. Though the Gwadar Port project came under criticism at the hands of some Baloch. They claim that this will disturb the demography of the province, turning the Baloch into a minority in the province. The author argues that migration from relatively impoverished regions towards the wealthier region has occurred regularly throughout history and that it is a natural phenomenon in the light of globalization and modernization. To benefit from trade opportunities in Karachi and the big cities of Punjab and Sindh, many Baloch's have migrated over there. He further argues that 23 percent of the total Baloch population in Pakistan already lives outside of the province, especially in Sindh and Punjab.

The author's way forward suggests a reconciliation drive by conducting a grand national dialogue with participants invited from all segments of the society. The author suggests that the legitimate grievances of the Baloch people must be addressed without the use of force. The government must invest in developing human resources to enable people to participate in the economic development of the province. Furthermore, Baloch representation in the federal bureaucracy must be enhanced. The author further suggests that a free electoral process should be allowed to take place in which all parties, including the nationalist parties, have fair opportunities for participation