

According to experts, Imran Khan owes his success in the recent Pakistan elections to his affinity to the army and its generals.



# HEART OF DARKNESS

*The book explains why Pakistan can't be a normal state and also a good neighbour*

By G Parthasarathy

IT IS a rare experience to read informative and interesting accounts analysing countries of national interest, like our South Asian neighbours and China, written by experienced intelligence professionals who have served in and worked on these countries. Frankly, we have thus far read very little written by such experienced professionals and instead been subjected to verbose writings containing more opinions than facts, which are more personalised than academic. What one looks for-

ward to are interesting anecdotes about our neighbours that give us a idea of their aspirations, successes and follies, and of what they think about us.

Tilak Devasher is an intelligence professional who is modest about the vast knowledge he has acquired of developments in Pakistan, not by pontificating or opinionated platitudes but on information gathered through years of dealing with Pakistan —

in the offices of the R&AW in New Delhi and Islamabad. His book, *Pakistan at the Helm*, is eminently readable. He deals with virtually every important political and geopolitical development in Pakistan, from the days of Partition till the recent, rather unceremonious, ouster of Nawaz Sharif. His account lucidly details how the ascendancy of the military became the hegemony of the army in Pakistan through the turbulent years of its dictators — Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan, Zia-ul-Haq



**PAKISTAN AT THE HELM**  
TILAK DEVASHER  
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and Pervez Musharraf. The Zia years led to the growth of “Militant Islam” in Pakistan, and the emergence of radical Islamic outfits as a tool of foreign policy, particularly in dealing with India, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. He concludes with how the army now operates from behind a civilian

façade, to rule the country.

The early years of Jinnah after Independence and his “disparaging attitude” towards colleagues in the Muslim League led to the dismemberment of the country and sowed the seeds of contempt by the elite for genuine democratic rule. The political vacuum that followed was filled initially by the army and bureaucracy, and then by the army. And given the fact that the Muslim League was predominantly a party of rural landowners, the country came into the hands of an alliance of the army and landed aristocracy. Even the Sindhi ‘socialist’ Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto belonged to this landed aristocracy. Not surprisingly, Gen Zia used another Sindhi land-owning aristocrat, the Pir of Pagaro, to

arrest and hang Bhutto.

The book carries interesting accounts of the 1965, 1971 and 1999 Kargil conflicts. It dwells on some little-known aspects of the Chinese role during the 1965 war and focuses on the dual role of Nawaz Sharif of telling India and the world about his innocence, while allowing the army to go ahead with the Kargil intrusion. What emerges is that given the history of India and Pakistan since Independence, and the dominant role of the army in Pakistan’s national life, there is little prospect of Pakistan reconciling to a normal, good neighbourly relationship with India in the near future.

**It deals with every important political & geopolitical development in Pakistan**

*The reviewer is a former diplomat. He served as India’s high commissioner to Pakistan*