

## BOOK REVIEW

### THE UNPLANNED REVOLUTION\*

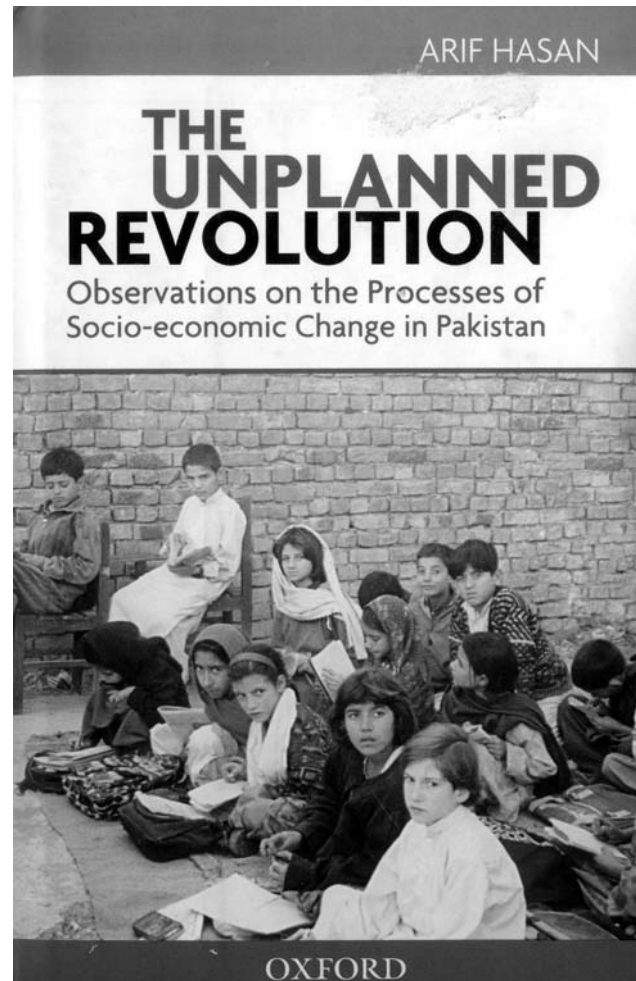
By

*Arif Hasan*

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Reviewed by Dr Noman Ahmed

The societal changes that have taken place in the Pakistani context ever since independence constitute an interesting subject of research and interpretation. Several scholars have approached the topic from various intellectual standpoints. One finds the Pakistani society examined from the perspectives of developmental economics, anthropology, sociology, urban and rural dichotomies, historiography and many other disciplines of learning. The present volume by Arif Hasan is a valuable addition to the body of knowledge that helps both the ordinary souls and researchers to comprehend the nature and intensity of transformations in the Pakistani society. The author is an eminent development practitioner with a very rich experience of the contexts and case studies that he has included in this book. He has scouted the remotest nooks and corners while pursuing the various advisory, consulting and advocacy assignments for different national and international agencies. These experiences afforded him numerous opportunities to keenly observe the sociology, culture and economics of communities across the country. In this work, Arif Hasan has used a mixed methodology of information gathering to structure his arguments. The documentation of change in its multifarious dimensions has been cited from factual records, first person accounts from selected informants in various locations, feedback from the groups of people he met during his professional sojourns across the territories, works of his co-researchers and students, educational institutions where he worked and supervised research work and the interface with innumerable men (and women) who mattered in state craft and societal direction setting. With his avid diagnostic foresight, the author has been able to interlace what is normally



regarded as ordinary and mundane into arguments of extraordinary substances and relevance.

The book is organised around regional case examples to explore the labyrinths of change in Pakistan. These choices have emanated from the authors' direct experiences at various time

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intervals. In the opening account, the general indicators of change are outlined. These dimensions pertain to commonly discussed concepts, often studded with populist references. Thus the otherwise complex narrative of sociological metamorphosis is described with relation to simple variables such as 'go-getting culture' and '*Shia Fiqh*', both of which have sophisticated nomenclature. Whereas the simplicity of narration may be frowned upon by the traditional academics, the general readership may find it easy to assimilate. That said, it is however apparent that some statements merit substantive qualification in order to establish the specific inferences implied by the author. In dealing with Zia era, the author could have been specific in relating the various doctrines and concurrent implications. The section needs more clarity as the sequence of paragraphs does not represent the evolutionary process through which the repercussions took the form which made them conspicuous for the times to come. As this section sets many opening questions, articulation of variables along with the inter-relationship may have given strength to the arguments that emerged.

Northern areas are the first context covered in the book. The works and outreaches of Aga Khan Development Network institutions are meticulously highlighted as a major contributor of social, economic and cultural change. With simple and short case studies in development, the process of changes in social relations is documented. Gradual attitudinal changes towards development and self improvement, catalysed by the AKDN, become visible through the viewpoints of individuals covered in the work. The chapter on women education raises many questions which need more detailed response than what is provided in the text. Gradual emancipation of women folk, their comparative independence about usual decisions of life and the societal attitude towards female education in Northern Areas as a whole are probably questions that have been paraphrased for focused studies by concerned scholars.

The diary like fashion of writing adopted by the author in most sections of the book sketch the scenes and sounds in an effective way. The

anecdotes cited in the text are often produced in a dialogue form to capture the strength of individual characters. In other words, the opinions of stakeholders have been enunciated without intellectual frills or academic jargon to retain the spirit of actual discussion. The readers can draw their respective conclusions from these candid narratives.

The discourse may have become more effective with additions and insertions of some points. It may have been useful to present the making of social and physical geography of the contexts in order to establish the transformational settings of case examples. In the sections on the river in Sindh and the coastline, this description could have added value to the narration. The photographic documentation around key developmental changes is a sorely missing aspect. Besides, the sections in the present structure read in isolation from one another. The introductory lines of each section may have provided a connection with the preceding write-up to maintain continuity. The maps inserted in the book are illegible, to say the least! Contemporary atlas or an electronic repository may have provided with better options. An overall section must have been added to sum up the opening questions, findings and analysis to a research finale. However despite these missing aspects, the book is a must read for those who wish to understand the contemporary society of Pakistan with its expanded fall outs, diversities, contrasts and unpredictabilities.

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A shorter version of this review has also been published in Monthly Herald, April 2010.