

# TEN MURALS OF PAKISTAN ON THE MOVE

by LEONARD S. KENWORTHY

FOR SIX weeks recently I crisscrossed East and West Pakistan, traveling by air, train, auto, jeep, truck, boat, launch, tonga cart, motorcycle, bicycle rickshaw, and foot. The resources of the Pakistan government were at my disposal when I wanted them, but there was no pressure when I wanted to be on my own.

I celebrated the Id festival in Peshawar in the Northwest Frontier Province, near the Afghanistan border, and Independence Day in Lahore, for centuries the educational and cultural center of this part of the world as well as the present capital of the Punjab. During the height of the floods I was in Dacca in East Pakistan and was able to accompany a government official in a launch on a tour of inspection of a district of a million persons, most of them driven from their homes by the water. I spent two and a half days at the Thal project where canals are irrigating one and a half million acres of former desert land and providing homes for thousands of refugees from India. I spent another day in the tents and shacks in the outskirts of Karachi, the capital, where thousands of refugees are huddled together in miserable quarters—and thousands more come each month.

As a result of these and other equally representative experiences, there are hundreds of snapshots in my mind. From them I have assembled

ten montages or murals of present-day Pakistan. These are the 10 major impressions of the seventh largest nation of the world as it completes its seventh year of existence.

The first impression is one of dire poverty with its inevitable offspring: hunger, disease, ignorance, and illiteracy. One may be able to prepare himself intellectually for the poverty of Asia and the Middle East but it is well nigh impossible to ready oneself emotionally. The impact of the abject conditions of a large majority of these 80 million men, women, and children is overpowering. When one realizes that their *average* per capita income is about \$50 per year compared to \$1500 in the United States, one can begin to understand how wretchedly they live.

Nearly 90 per cent of the people of Pakistan reside in villages. In these areas there are fewer than one physician to every 50,000 persons. Well-trained nurses are almost nonexistent and sanitary engineers un-

heard of. Sanitation is almost unknown, with the village "tank" or the river often serving as laundry, bathroom, swimming pool, and drinking water supply. Many people exist on one meal a day, and it is estimated that one-third of the population eats as little as one "good" meal in two days.

Disease is a deadly killer whether it be cholera, malaria, tuberculosis, or dysentery. About half the population suffers from the last trouble, caused usually by bad water. Little wonder, then, that the average length of life is about 30 years, and that fear and superstition are commonplace rather than exceptional.

All these conditions have been intensified by the influx of from seven to eight million refugees from India and an annual increase of three-quarters of a million more mouths to feed.

This mural, however, is not entirely black. Maternity and child health centers are beginning to appear, hospitals are being built, medical schools and training centers established. Large scale attacks on malaria and cholera have been quite successful, and those diseases have almost disappeared in a few parts of Pakistan.

There has been much outside help from the countries in the Colombo Plan, from the Foreign Operations Administration of the United States,

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from the Ford Foundation, and from United Nations organizations such as the World Health Organization.

A second impression in Pakistan is the importance of water. In East Pakistan it is a problem of too much water, with floods this year affecting millions of people, inundating hundreds of villages, and destroying homes and crops. In West Pakistan the problem is one of too little water. To the inhabitants of that part of Pakistan the Indus is as vital as the Nile is to Egypt. Life and death depend upon getting water to the parched or sandy earth. This explains in large part the deep feeling over Kashmir where the major rivers of West Pakistan rise, and the intense emotionalism over the dispute with India over the waters of the Ravi, Sutlej, and Beas. Much of the desert land of West Pakistan is good for cultivation if enough water can be brought to it. Dams are now being built everywhere and irrigated areas are increasing.

This mural, then, is one of deserts and deltas and dams, painted in brown for West Pakistan and green and blue for East Pakistan.

The third impression is of progress in industrialization and agriculture. These are the two areas in which the Pakistan government and private enterprise have forged ahead fastest. One cannot visit a town of any size in either section of the country without seeing factories under construction or recently completed. One of the biggest of these is the Adamjee jute mill not far from Dacca in East Pakistan. Jute is the largest export item in this country, which supplies 75 per cent of the world's needs. Before partition there was not a single jute factory in the entire country; all of them were in what is now India.

Cotton mills, cement plants, match factories, rubber tire establishments, and scores of other small firms have been started. This is the area of Pakistan's greatest progress.

Agriculture has shown less spectacular growth but thousands of acres have been added and considerable progress made in increasing and improving the food supply. In East Pakistan the zamindar system of absentee or wealthy landlords has al-

most disappeared, but it still holds sway in the western parts of this nation just as it did in medieval Europe.

This third mural presents a more pleasant and promising picture than some of the others, and Pakistani are justifiably proud of it.

In the fourth montage may be seen the pictures of Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan in the background. One of the impressions one gains in Pakistan today is the lack of adequate leadership at all levels. Jinnah died soon after partition and Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated, leaving only lesser figures to lead this new nation. Unfortunately for Pakistan, most of her public officials were British or Hindu, and when partition came, nearly all of these people left the country.

Fortunately, many Moslems migrated here from India in 1947 or soon thereafter. The bulk of federal government officials are these refugees from India, even though the two top rungs of officials in the national government are largely occupied by people born in what is now Pakistan.

Everyone hears of graft and corruption and black marketing and the need for adequately trained and publicly motivated leaders. Perhaps the plight of Pakistan can be better un-

derstood if one thinks of India without the strong hand of Nehru, who is a symbol of unity as well as an able leader.

## II

Closely related to this last montage is a fifth picture, depicting the various groups engaged in a tug-of-war for the control of the country. In one corner one can see those who favor a secular state with a strong emphasis upon Islamic beliefs battling against those who want a theocratic government. In another corner is a tug-of-war between the advocates of a strong central government and the champions of strong provincial and state governments.

In the foreground is a third group, with East Pakistani on one side and West Pakistani on the other, pulling and tugging against each other. The East Pakistani or Bengali are the most homogeneous group, comprising 56 per cent of the population, but many of them feel that the country is being run by the west. They charge that most of the men in the army are from the west and that most of the top officials are from the Punjab, Sind, and other sections of West Pakistan.

The language problem is the red flag that arouses bitter reactions in East Pakistan. True, Bengali is now recognized as one of the two official languages, but it was done reluctantly and late—and the Bengalis cannot seem to forgive their western countrymen on this point.

Some progress is being made in welding the two parts of the nation together, and a feeling of national unity is growing. It is being helped by such symbols as Jinnah, the national flag, and common celebrations such as Independence Day. It is being fostered by the exchange of government officials and an unwritten agreement that the prime minister and other high officials shall be alternated between East and West. Radio Pakistan is proving an important medium of exchange as are some of the magazines. The greatest factors are of course the common traditions of Islam and the common enemy—India.

So, in this fifth mural there are men and women pulling against each other but also men and women work-



ing together in the common cause of creating the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The sixth mural might well be a map of the world with different colors for Pakistan's friends and enemies. In the latter category could be listed the U.S.S.R., India, and, to some extent, Afghanistan.

Pakistani are certainly anti-Communist except for a small group of students and a few of the poor who see in Communism a quick solution to their problems. As in other parts of Asia and the Middle East, it is easier for some people to visualize improving their lot by following the Russian pattern than to see themselves aping the United States, which seems so different from their country.

Between India and Pakistan there are many bonds, but a great many people cannot forget the horrible events connected with partition, especially when they or their relatives and friends were involved in the violent outbreaks between Hindus and Moslems or Sikhs and Moslems. This bitterness is magnified by the long dispute over Kashmir and the controversies over the control of the river water of the Indus basin.

At the moment there is little outward enmity towards Afghanistan, but there is always the fear that India or Russia are using her against Pakistan and the fear of a demand for annexation of the area inhabited by Pushto-speaking Pakistani.

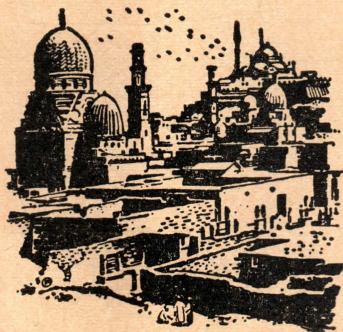
Ask informed Pakistani who their friends are at the moment, and they will almost certainly mention the United States because of the defense pact, the recent flood relief aid, and the work of technicians in Pakistan. Turkey is likely to be mentioned second and Iran third. Much of the feeling of cordiality towards Iran is based on cultural relations and past history.

There has been considerable rivalry between Pakistan and Egypt over leadership in the Moslem world, but the feeling was often expressed to me that Egypt and Iran and possibly other countries would soon be brought into a Middle East pact of some kind. Occasionally I have heard Canada, Australia, and New Zealand mentioned as friends of Pakistan because of their help through the Colombo Plan.

The seventh mural might well be a mass of tired and discouraged faces. One visitor from the west commented that the first few years of Pakistan's history were years of hard work, then a brief period characterized by enthusiasm, and now mostly day-dreaming. This is too harsh a judgment, but there is an element of truth in the comment. The initial period of elation over independence is over, and Pakistan must now settle down to the long hard pull to develop unity and raise standards of living for everyone. The false promises of quick economic gain which the Korean war boom brought need to be replaced with a realistic understanding of the difficulties in creating a new nation.

At the same time that one says the people expected too much too soon, one must add that the people have gotten too little too late. The victory of the United Front in East Pakistan was a warning of dissatisfaction on the part of the people. It should serve as a warning to those in authority that promises must be replaced with performances.

The eighth mural of Pakistan might be a picture of children and adults, of the wooden or slate taktis of elementary school children, and the labs of young people and adults. Starting with 85 per cent or more illiteracy, Pakistan has made some progress in bringing elementary education to a larger mass of people. Hundreds of schools have been built and many teachers trained. New uni-



versities have been established in Karachi, Peshawar, and Rajshahi and several technical schools have been started.

But the pay of teachers is pitifully little and the social prestige accorded them quite low. Education has been a step-sister of economic and political

development and no group of educators has really thought through the type of schools Pakistan needs. The British type of education which trained a few civil servants, largely for lower levels, persists, and the Moslem tradition of a literary and philosophical education is another handicap for a nation trying to produce leaders, technicians, and an educated electorate for a democratic way of life.

The ninth mural in this series should be a colorful and attractive one picturing the creative abilities of the Pakistani. In it would be the colorful hats worn in the various provinces of West Pakistan; the saris and shalwars of the women, with all their grace and beauty and color; the mirror work embroidery of the Sind, pieces of ivory inlay work in wood; painted jugs and jars from many parts of the nation.

Somewhere in this mural there would be portraits of Chughtai and Zainul Abedin working at their easels and some of the Chittagong Hill tract people performing their colorful folk dances. In another corner might be musicians playing the harmonium, table drums, sitars, and other instruments while their friends were singing native folk songs. These are some of the ways in which the creative talents of the Pakistani find expression.

Finally, there would be a mural showing the Koran, some of the alabaster domes of mosques, and various types of Pakistani on their prayer mats facing towards Mecca. One cannot understand Pakistan without at least an elementary knowledge of Islam. When one gets back to the original sources and dismisses the corrupting practices which have appeared in this faith as in other world religions, one sees the basic similarities with Christianity.

No one can spend six weeks such as I have spent in Pakistan without realizing that it started from scratch, that she has innumerable problems, but that she has made progress in these seven years of independence. Her 80 million men, women, and children are our world neighbors, and their country is a potentially important force in the world community of nations.