

## ***Book Review***

### ***Towards Good Governance***

by Tasneem Ahmed Siddiqui

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Tasneem Ahmed Siddiqui, a former public servant, has been a regular contributor to the daily *Dawn* is blessed with a journalistic instinct. Siddiqui has always capitalized on his administrative experience to successfully probe into the true nature of many an evil plaguing Pakistani society. The wide range of issues that constitute the subject matter of his writings show his comprehensive and in-depth study of the nature of the problems faced by the Pakistanis. He does have his courage of conviction and nothing unjust or unlawful could escape his criticism. He believes in calling a spade a spade. His writings speak volumes of his sincere concern for those at the bottom of the social pile.

The present work is a compilation of his articles written between 1992 and 1998. Most of these articles were published in the *Dawn*. Basic theme of these articles is the discussion of the factors that seem to have militated against the evolution of Pakistani society along liberal and democratic lines. It is divided into 7 sections, further subdivided into 23 parts.

#### “Bureaucracy: An Insider’s View”

Herein, he singles out feudal-civil-military triumvirate for its ineptitude which, coupled with its unwillingness to accommodate newly emerging socio-political forces, resulted in the disruption of society. Being a former civil servant of Pakistan, he knows the pitfalls of the system. First he identifies major ills of the society and then comes out with concrete proposals to get rid of them. He

comes heavily upon his erstwhile counterparts for their blithe indifference towards the plight of their marginalized compatriots.

“Intelligentsia and Social Change”

Herein, he inveighs against the intellectuals for merely pointing out the problems faced by the country but not doing anything positive and constructive to dispense with them. He has also lamented the cavalier attitude of the educated class of the country. In this section he has identified several “Missing links” which, he holds, are responsible for our continued under-development.

“Poverty’s Internal Migration and Local self-government”

In this section the author explores the reasons responsible for the mass exodus of people from the villages to the cities. He holds Ayub’s ‘Industrialization Policy’ responsible for it. He criticizes policy makers for lavishly pampering Industry at the expense of agriculture. This policy, in his view, not only resulted in the stagnation of agriculture but also caused rapid urbanization which in its wake brought about many socio-administrative difficulties. He suggests ways and means to help people break through the poverty trope. He also gives suggestions with which to manage the big cities and reform local self-government.

“The Urban Poor: Two Innovative Approaches”

This section suggests the ways means that, if used, can help the residents of *katchi abadis* improve their lot. He discards the common notion of *katchi abadis* being illegal settlements and strongly advocates their access to basic civic necessities.

“Changing the Planning Paradigm”

In this section further emphasizes the participation of the people to help solve many of the problems faced by the dwellers of *katchi abadis*. He also wants the informal sector of the economy to be encouraged. If duly encouraged, this sector could help Pakistan claw its way out of the persistent economic quagmire. He has also dealt with the problems in a Mega city.

“Is A Turn Round Possible”

He emphasises the need for urgent land reforms, which he believes to be the *sine qua non* of getting rid of all types of socio-economic and socio-political maladies. Also he criticizes “Green Revolution” for aggravating economic disparities. In this section once again he comes out with detailed suggestions to improve the lot of the society.

“On a Lighter Vein”

In this section he sarcastically narrates the difficulties confronted by the corrupt. The account of the problems faced by these officials is obviously interesting.

Taking a synoptic view of the book we come across the following issues: Devolution of power, recognition of informal economy, and the state of affairs in *katchi abadis*. In fact these are some of the issues which have received greater attention of the author. His criticism against the inept officials who are so slouch at making money but are insensitive to the plight of the masses is no less repetitive.

However, it should be admitted that the book is not without its share of flaws. Too much repetition of some of the arguments bores the reader. Siddiqui seems to be too much obsessed with the problems of *katchi abadis*. He seems to be presenting only one side of the picture. Though mostly anchored in empirical data, his analysis is not always palatable. However, so far as discerning the ill effects of the industrial and agricultural policies of various regimes is concerned he seems to have got it to the button. In the end it could be concluded that, notwithstanding its minor flaws, the book constitutes an interesting and enlightening reading.

Kashif Mumtaz