Pakistan's Polycrisis

By Aqdas Afzal

The writer completed his doctorate in economics on a Fulbright scholarship.

The recent, turbulent political and economic events are manifestations of Pakistan's once-in-a-generation polycrisis — multiple crises overlapped, reinforcing each other and almost snowballing out of control. If such crises are left unchecked, they can bring about a violent system implosion. It is not surprising that all stakeholders are now trying to get a handle on this upheaval.

Still, it is extremely important to dissect recent events in order to understand why they took place and what can be done to prevent such catastrophes in the future.

In September 2021, with the compact still intact between different power centres, Pakistan's official foreign exchange reserves crossed $20 billion, which was an all-time high. But then, two drivers almost simultaneously caused the country's foreign exchange reserves to plummet precipitously all the way down to less than $3bn in February this year.

The first driver was a political tussle that had first surfaced around October 2021. This tussle then subsequently morphed into a full-blown political and constitutional crisis by late March 2022. So much so, that the new government found its hands tied as it was kept under severe political pressure by elements that were still sympathetic to the previous government.

The second driver was economic. As the world came out of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2022, prices started rising rapidly in the Global North. Hostilities between Russia and Ukraine in February 2022 led to 40-year-high inflation globally, putting massive stress on the Pakistani economy, which was already struggling with high inflation and the lack of job creation.

Policymakers must address genuine economic concerns as the current stagflation has made life difficult for the vast majority of the people.

The combined impact of these two drivers — political and economic — played out by taking Pakistan's economy close to a default. Simply put, as global oil prices skyrocketed, Pakistan's policymakers did not take optimal economic decisions; partly because they were too focused on riding out the political storm and partly because optimal decisions — such as passing on higher oil prices or letting market forces determine the exchange rate — entailed political costs that the new government was not willing to pay.

Some politicos also added fuel to the fire by manufacturing chaos, insisting that default was imminent, hoping that this would force the system towards general elections. The deliberate strategy they employed resulted in creating needless panic that delayed stabilisation by forcing people to acquire more and more foreign exchange, thereby further stoking inflation in the country.

Though the economy's external position has somewhat stabilised, this stabilisation has come at a very steep cost of almost no economic growth during this fiscal year — a meagre 0.29 %.

Alarmingly, last year's super floods in the country and the highest-ever inflation — a whopping 38pc — have pushed an estimated 20 million additional people below the poverty line. Estimates also show that the lack of economic growth will increase the number of unemployed people in Pakistan to more than 10m.

As the dust settles, these recent events carry a number of policy lessons.

First, these appalling economic indicators underscore an urgent need to get a grip on Pakistan's economic slide, especially as almost 2m young people, who enter the job market every year, either face unemployment or are underemployed and are forced to take up jobs that are inadequate in relation to their training and economic needs. According to the Asian Development Bank, given Pakistan's employment elasticity at 0.5pc, it would take economic growth of at least 7pc to create a sufficient number of jobs.

Policymakers must address these genuine economic concerns as the current stagflation has made life especially difficult for the vast majority of the people. Failing to address these concerns will likely lead to a much more severe — existential almost — polycrisis in the near future.

Second, the ability of some elements to manufacture chaos also highlights the crucial role that technology, especially social media, played in the recent crisis. Niloufer Siddiqui, a political science professor, argues that the traditional Pakistani politics of electables and patronage is changing and that political parties are increasingly wooing young voters through new narratives on social media.

Some of these manufactured narratives, sadly, are beyond the pale, as vitriol has ended up damaging the national spirit. Young people, in particular, are losing faith in the political leadership's ability to steer Pakistan out of its present set of difficulties. Other countries also go through upheavals, but the people fight back. In the case of Pakistan, even when the economy has generated a current account surplus for two consecutive months, the Pakistani rupee is still sliding against the US dollar.

Policymakers need to find ways of employing technology to communicate facts and counter hate speech in order to prevent the youth from losing hope. The significance of better communication for the youth cannot be stressed enough, as Pakistan is a very young country with a median age of only about 23 years. Better communication is also very important, as the advent of generative artificial intelligence is now making the spread of deepfakes very easy.

Last, and perhaps most importantly, Pakistan's perennial political problem needs to be confronted. Every few years, political space in the country seems to become too narrow for some political parties. Such purges are extremely damaging for the political system in the long term, because vibrant political parties, as Samuel Huntington argued in 1968, serve as primary safeguards against social violence.

Policymakers must do their utmost to ensure that the political space stays wide open so that political parties are given the opportunity to evolve or wither away democratically. Pakistan must not take an authoritarian turn, as this would erase the tangible gains this political system has made in the direction of democracy.

This polycrisis may be abating, but this is not its swansong as the core drivers remain intact. There is a very high probability that future crises will be more severe. In other words, those people who are celebrating because they are convinced this crisis has ended, could be in for a rude awakening.

Courtesy – The Dawn, 09 Jun 2023

Indian Democracy's Unfulfilled Promises

By Sanjay Sahay

Author is former Police Officer of Karnataka. Now he is Founder & Director of TechConPro Pvt Ltd., Bengaluru.

Indian citizen's tryst with democracy has been a litany of unfulfilled promises of endless types; shapes, sizes and dimensions, durations – short, medium or long, constitutional guarantees to poll manifestoes to the current day guarantees. The genre is endless, the personas are wide and varied, the situations demanding to the easy, even cajoling and the achievement timelines generally not on the agenda. Democracy so to say is a hope and promise, that elevates life even if does not happen, or if it happens even minimally. Even some dignity might at times suffice. The promise and its time duration imbroglio has been endemic to our democracy.
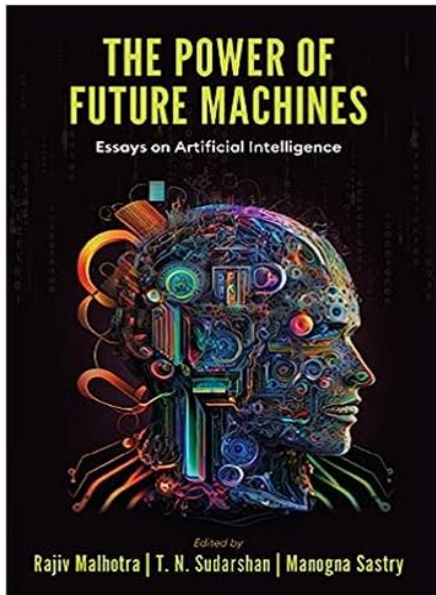
There are promises which our political executive and the permanent bureaucracy, might not have even given a thought. The aim of universalisation of education has an inbuilt of a quality of education promise, which is sufficient enough to get him a job or stand on his own feet, and make it known to the world by the expertise and competence that he carries grey matter above his shoulders. If education as tool for overall transformation does not happen, then what is the purpose of the education being imparted; to add to frustration. The promise of good health through a slew of schemes and above all the non-existent quality health infra in large parts of the country. Is it even treated as Indian democracy's eternal unfulfilled promise? All stakeholders enjoy but for the hapless citizen.

The ruling dispensation is not an issue, it is endemic to them all, is the issue. And we keep changing parties to rule us. To cover legally mandated promises, new promises are thrown up to cover that gap. Either it is patchy, or it does not happen at all. Added to that the main issue remains the same and there are no timelines too. Schemes have a start date and not end date based on goal / target achieved. Is the unemployment dole connected with the timeline for employment? Where is the accountability? Or does it hang in mid-air. Leave aside everything else, how far have we reached in our direction to provide responsive governments in last 75 years. The tragic state today is that anyone can promise anything and get away with it. Certainly, he will make good with your vote in the process.

Are promises just tools to entice the voters? Poll manifestoes have no legal value. When governments are created out of poll manifestoes, it is strange that manifesto does not have a legal mandate. Promises fly thick and fast during the election season. No blueprints and no planning. The emanating financial liability is no one's baby. Who would be held accountable for lack of financial prudence? If the whole concept of cash hitting your bank account is welfare, then what does the monumental government machinery do? It can be done by a software and much more efficiently. The basic question is; are these promises even aligned to each other? Are they able to differentiate between promises and freebies? What happens to the unfulfilled promises? Is it thrown in the dustbin of democracy never to resurrect? Good, bad or ugly, detrimental, regressive, financial viability being whatever, the taxpayer has to foot the bill. Only the voter and taxpayer have to carry the cross of Indian democracy.

INDIA CAN SAFELY BE TERMED AS A BENEFICIARY DEMOCRACY, AS DISTANT AS IT COULD BE FROM A WELFARE STATE.

BOOK REVIEW

Book: *The Power of Future Machines*

Editor(s): Rajiv Malhotra, TN Sudarshan, Manogna Sastry

Publisher: Occam (An Imprint of BluOne Ink)

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Price: Rs. 393/-

The Power of Future Machines is a collection of essays by experts exploring the future impact of Artificial Intelligence in various fields of human endeavour. Building upon the dialectical and analytical framework provided in the book Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Power: 5 Battlegrounds, experts from military, geopolitics, strategic affairs, physics, policy, and others engage and describe for a wider audience the potential impact of AI.

Given their specific vantage points and deriving from their areas of expertise, this anthology makes for a fascinating read. The essays discuss how AI will affect policy making, both in narrow areas of expertise as well as its effect on humanity at large.

Aimed at policy makers, experts and a broader audience, these varied perspectives on AI add something vital to the current skewed AI discourse.

The book includes nine chapters with topics like "The Winner of the Fourth Industrial Revolution Takes It All, India's Role in the Battle for World Dominion", "The Impact of AI on Freedom of Speech, Examining the Problem of Bias in Content Moderation", "Artificial Intelligence for National Security" and "AI-MING for a Theory of Everything."

Brief On Authors

Rajiv Malhotra

Rajiv Malhotra is a researcher and public intellectual on civilizational studies, world religions, and cross-cultural encounters. He was trained initially as a physicist, and then as a computer scientist specializing in Artificial Intelligence in the 1970s. After a successful corporate career in the USA, he became an entrepreneur and founded and ran several IT companies across twenty countries. Since the early 1990s, as the founder of his non-profit Infinity Foundation (Princeton, USA), he has been researching civilizations from a historical, social sciences, and mind sciences perspective.

Manogna Sastry

Manogna Sastry is a Master of Science from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, with a strong background in theoreti-cal physics and mathematics. Her research interests span major domains including astrophysics, Indology, civilizational studies, consciousness studies, work Sri Aurobindo, sustainability and education.

Sastry, says that it took more than 2 years to complete this book.

T. N. Sudarshan

T. N. (Therani Nadathur) Sudarshan considers himself to be an eclectic amalgamation of dharmic modernity. He is schooled in the western methods and techniques of Sciences and Engineering, and is a Computer Scientist by profession, engaging primarily in the fields of Artificial Intelligence and related technologies.

Sudarshan, who is a computer scientist and specialised in AI, as well as related technologies, states that about 100 authors, from India as well as abroad, shared their views through the essays included in the book.

Brief Introduction

The book, The Power of Future Machines, is a thought-provoking exploration of the impact of technology on humanity and society.

It is a collection of essays, which explores the possibilities and potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and its impact on society. The book features contributions from leading experts in the field.

The book is divided into nine chapters, each covering a different aspect of the topic.

It explores the potential of AI to revolutionize various industries, from healthcare to finance, discusses the benefits of AI, such as increased efficiency and accuracy, and its potential to improve the quality of life for people around the world.

It delves into the potential risks and challenges posed by AI. The essays explore the ethical and societal implications of AI, such as the potential for job displacement, the impact on privacy and security, and the risk of AI systems becoming too powerful and beyond human control.

It offers insights into how society can best prepare for the future of AI, discusses the importance of collaboration between industry, government, and academia, the need for ethical guidelines and regulations, and the potential for AI to be used for social good.

"The Power of Future Machines" provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of AI and its potential to shape the future of society. The book offers a balanced perspective on the benefits and risks of AI and provides valuable insights into how society can best prepare for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Chapter 1 - Analysing the Battlegrounds of Artificial Intelligence Conversation With Rajiv Malhotra

In chapter 1, Malhotra examines the history of technology and how it has evolved over time. He argues that while technology has brought many benefits to humanity, it has also caused significant harm. He discusses how the industrial revolution led to environmental degradation and the exploitation of workers.

He explores the current state of technology and its impact on society, discusses the rise of artificial intelligence, robotics, and automation and how they are changing the nature of work and the economy. He also examines the ethical implications of these technologies and raises important questions about who will benefit from them and who will be left behind.

Malhotra looks to the future and explores the potential impact of emerging technologies such as quantum computing, nanotechnology, and biotechnology. He argues that these technologies have the potential to transform society in profound ways, but that we must be careful to ensure that they are developed and used in ethical and responsible ways.

Chapter 2 - The Winner of the 4th Industrial Revolution Takes It All- India's Road In Battle For World Domination By Valina Tchakarova.

Key points from the chapter:

- AI has the potential to disrupt existing industries and create new ones.
- Countries that are able to successfully adopt AI will have a significant advantage in the global economy.
- India has the potential to be a major player in the AI revolution.
- India should invest in AI research and development and develop a national AI strategy.

The chapter discusses the potential impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the global economy and power dynamics. Tchakarova argues that AI has the potential to disrupt existing industries and create new ones, and that countries that are able to successfully adopt AI will have a significant advantage in the global economy.

She begins by discussing the history of AI and the different waves of AI development, then discusses the potential impact of AI on the global economy. She argues that AI has the potential to automate many tasks that are currently done by humans, and that this could lead to widespread job losses. AI could create new jobs in areas such as data science, software development, and engineering.

She then discusses the potential impact of AI on global power dynamics, argues that countries that are able to successfully adopt AI will have a significant advantage in the global economy, cites the example of China, which has made a major investment in AI and is now considered to be a world leader in AI research and development.

India has the potential to be a major player in the AI revolution. She cites India's large population, its strong engineering and IT sector, and its government's commitment to AI as factors that could help India to succeed in the AI race.

She concludes with a call for India to invest in AI research and development and to develop a national AI strategy. She argues that India has the potential to be a major player in the AI revolution, and that by investing in AI, India can help to ensure its future economic and geopolitical success.

Chapter 3 - The Courage to Invent The Future Can We Avoid Sleepwalking Into A New Age Of Artificial Intelligence Enabled By Imperialism, Colonization And Balkanization By Ruchir Sharma.

Ruchir Sharma argues that the development of artificial intelligence (AI) is a major historical turning point. AI has the potential to revolutionize our world, but that it also poses a number of risks. We need to be careful about how we develop and use AI, or we could end up sleepwalking into a new age of imperialism, colonization, and balkanization.

He begins by discussing the history of AI, argues that AI has its roots in the Enlightenment project, which was a European project to create a new world order based on reason and science. Enlightenment project was also a project of imperialism, colonization, and balkanization. He argues that the Enlightenment project was based on the belief that Western values and ideas were superior to all others, and that this belief led to the colonization of the non-Western world.

He argues that AI could be used to create new forms of imperialism, colonization, and balkanization. AI could be used to create new forms of surveillance and control, and that it could be used to create new forms of warfare. AI could be used to create new forms of inequality, as AI systems could be used to automate jobs and displace workers.

We need to be careful about how we develop and use AI. He argues that we need to develop AI in a way that is ethical and responsible, and that we need to develop AI in a way that is inclusive and that reflects the values of all people. We need to have the courage to invent a new future, a future that is free from imperialism, colonization, and balkanization.

Part 2 of this book review will be published in next issue.

Book Review By Brig Hemant Mahajan, YSM

Author is M Sc, M Phil in Defence Studies. He joined IMA Dehradun in July 1973 and passed out as a Commissioned Officer on 15 June 1975. He commanded his battalion 7 MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY in Operation Rakshak in the most difficult areas of Poonch and Rajouri.

How Regional Language Revival Can Promote Cultural Diversity In Today's Digital Age

By Vrinda S Chauhan

Author is founder of Paper Wiff

India is a land of diverse languages, cultures, traditions, and customs. And such is that diversity that across every 100 km, one can witness a change in food, language, and culture. To put things into perspective, India is home to nearly 400 different languages which are spoken in different parts of the country. Hence in today's digital age, where the internet has made communication easier, the revival of vernacular languages can play a significant role in preserving and promoting our rich cultural heritage, which is gradually being lost due to the dominance of English and the increasing homogenization of our society.

Why do regional languages play such an essential role in preserving the country's cultural diversity?

It's because local dialects tend to easily connect people with their roots and heritage and allow them to easily express their thoughts and feelings. They are an integral part of a country's identity and culture. Moreover, the use of regional languages helps bridge the gap between different communities and bring people closer, as it creates a sense of shared identity and belonging.

However, in the current social system, the English language is usually given undue importance and is often considered a marker of social status and intellectual superiority. This development has been further fueled by the growth of the corporate sector and the rapid urbanization of India. Since the 90's there's been a wave of migration from rural areas to urban centers. And in search of better economic growth, most of these migrants have had to change their way of communication to suit the corporate requirement, which often tends to prefer polished English-speaking candidates. This has resulted in the neglect of regional languages, leading to their decline and possible disappearance. And the downside of this is not only a loss of cultural identity among people but also the widening of the communication gap.

Therefore, for promoting cultural diversity, regional languages need to be preserved and nurtured in the right manner. We need to make sure that when somebody speaks in their regional language, they don't sound alien or awkward. This can be achieved through simple initiatives like making content on e-commerce websites available in vernacular languages, designing boards and flyers in regional languages, and most importantly normalizing speaking in local dialects while communicating in formal setups.

However, one of the most significant challenges faced in doing so is the lack of adequate digital infrastructure. And despite the rapid progress made in the last decade, many people in India still do not have access to the internet or digital devices, and even if they do,

they are not comfortable using them in English or Hindi. Therefore, it is essential to promote the use of regional languages in the digital space and make them accessible to everyone.

To achieve the same the government of India has taken up several initiatives such as the 'Digital India' campaign. Launched in 2015, it aims to provide digital literacy to every Indian and make all government services available online. The campaign has led to the creation of several mobile applications in regional languages, and it has made the internet accessible to many who did or do not know English. The government has also launched the 'BharatNet' project, which aims to connect over 2.5 lakh gram panchayats with high-speed internet.

The growth of regional languages can also be seen in the entertainment industry. The rise of OTT platforms has led to the creation of content in various regional languages. This has not only increased the demand for regional content but has also provided a platform for regional artists to showcase their talent.

Furthermore, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have also started supporting regional languages, allowing people to communicate in their mother tongue. This has not only helped in promoting local dialects but has also made it easier for people to express themselves in their native language.

The revival of regional languages can also help boost the local economy. By promoting regional languages, we can encourage the development of local literature, music, and other art forms. This, in turn, can help create job opportunities and boost the local economy. Moreover, virtual content and digital libraries must be available in every language. We all consume content in different forms throughout the day, and language should not be a barrier to it.

To sum it up, the revival of regional languages in India is crucial as it connects people with their roots and heritage and helps preserve our cultural identity. The government and private sector need to take steps to promote regional languages by making content available in vernacular languages, designing boards and flyers in regional languages, and normalizing communication in local dialects. Just like we embrace regional food and celebrate its authenticity across India, the various languages of our country should also be cherished and celebrated everywhere.

Courtesy TOI

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the FINS or its members.

India is Proud of:
Dr Shakuntala Kale

Married Off at 14, Labourer's Daughter rose to Head the Maharashtra State Board!

"When everything is against you, when you are aware that conditions will never improve for you, then you find strength within."

Shakuntala Kale, the former chairperson for the Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education, has undergone incredible struggles to reach where she has today.

Hailing from a small village in Ambegaon Taluka in Pune district, Shakuntala lost her father in Class IV, and her mother was subsequently forced to work as a labourer in the fields.

As a result of the family's dire financial situation, she was "married off" at the age of 14 soon after she had passed Class X. Education soon took a backseat.

"We didn't have a junior college in our village and there was no way I would have been sent outside to study. So, I was married off at the age of 14," Shakuntala said in interview to the Times of India.

After marriage she moved into her husband's household and gave birth to two children. To put things mildly, women's education wasn't a priority in her community.

"Society was regressive and probably still is in many villages. They don't want women to go out, study or work. But my husband and father-in-law were as supportive as the system would allow it," she said to ToI newspaper. However, she was determined to make something out of herself.

Thanks to a distance learning programme at Savitribai Phule Pune University, she completed her diploma in Education, followed by a BA and MA in Marathi language.

After she completed D Ed, she was working as a teacher in the same school where she studied. "Normally, one thinks that if there are facilities one can improve. But when everything is against you, when you are aware that conditions will never improve for you, then you find strength within. I started dreaming of taking the Maharashtra Public Service Commission exam," she told Times of India interviewer.

With absolutely no access to necessary study material for the exams or even access to a television, she relied on the household radio to keep abreast of the news and improve her general knowledge. At home, meanwhile, she was waking up at 3 am to fetch water from the village well, while completing her household chores before and after her teaching schedule for the day.

Finally, in 1993, she passed the MPSC Class II exam, and was given a position at the education department in Solapur.

In 1995, she cleared the exam for Class I officer and was appointed head of women's education and extension department. The same year she completed her PhD and research topic was "The portrayal of women in rural novels". It was also the international year for women.

After spending nearly two decades across various education departments, Shakuntala Kale was appointed as chairperson of the Maharashtra state board in September 2017.

There are still parts of this country where women are up against incredible restrictions to their growth and development. Some are denied the opportunity to further their education, while others don't even get a chance at going to school. This is precisely why Shakuntala Kale's story is so inspirational. She made it, despite all the odds. Her iron will achieve the excellence in her career which can only be praised with folded hands.