



# Playing with Fire: Pakistan at War with Itself

*Pamela Constable*

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A volatile nation at the heart of major cultural, political, and religious conflicts in the world today, Pakistan commands our attention. Yet more than six decades after the country's founding as a Muslim democracy, it continues to struggle over its basic identity, alliances, and direction. In *Playing with Fire*, acclaimed journalist Pamela Constable peels back layers of contradiction and confusion to reveal the true face of modern Pakistan.

In this richly reported and movingly written chronicle, Constable takes us on a panoramic tour of contemporary Pakistan, exploring the fears and frustrations, dreams and beliefs, that animate the lives of ordinary citizens in this nuclear-armed nation of 170 million. From the opulent, insular salons of the elite to the brick quarries where soot-covered workers sell their kidneys to get out of debt, this is a haunting portrait of a society riven by inequality and corruption, and increasingly divided by competing versions of Islam.

Beneath the façade of democracy in Pakistan, Constable reveals the formidable hold of its business, bureaucratic, and military elites—including the country's powerful spy agency, the ISI. This is a society where the majority of the population feels powerless, and radical Islamist groups stoke popular resentment to recruit shock troops for global jihad. Writing with an uncommon ear for the nuances of this conflicted culture, Constable explores the extent to which faith permeates every level of Pakistani society—and the ambivalence many Muslims feel about the role it *should* play in the life of the nation.

Both an empathic and alarming look inside one of the world's most violent and vexing countries, *Playing with Fire* is essential reading for anyone wishing to understand modern Pakistan and its momentous role on today's global stage.

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