

Envoy's memoir

in response to their queries that I had just come from a posting in Pakistan, they would — rather than showing the interest I had anticipated — react as if I had touched a taboo. Conversation would usually shift at once to some other topic. A variant to this theme came from the group I would call the professional “Pakistan-baiters” who would ask my impressions, allow two or three sentences, and then use them as a platform for a 15-minute homily on the sins of the neighbors.

Very different societies

If I had one overriding impression, it was of colossal ignorance on both sides of the border in matters regarding life on the other side. In so much of what was written or said, there appeared to be little concern for accuracy, facts being readily invented or distorted to suit preconceived ideas. Where truth emerged, it tended to be an accidental phenomenon. I valued my experience in Pakistan highly, for the ability it engendered to penetrate the propaganda and half-truths to which one was continuously subjected in both countries.

Responsibility for this sorry state of affairs — the sorer because if two peoples have a reason and interest for knowing the truth about each other it is Pakistanis and Indians — can be laid on several shoulders. The media must take much of the blame. India's free press is all too ready to build on rumor and resort to sensationalism. Ironically, Pakistan's controlled press during the period of

my own assignment took a much more measured approach — although I suspect this was due not so much to superior journalistic capabilities as to the not-so-subtle restraining influence of the military. The government-controlled news services on both sides, while avoiding the perils of sensationalism, unfortunately do little more than repeat the official line of the day. Perhaps the lion's share of the blame, however, rests with the general public itself — both Indian and Pakistani — who are predisposed to believe the worst about each other and whose voracious appetite for the sensational scarcely encourages scrupulousness where reporting the news is concerned.

Having said the above, I would err grievously if I did not recognize the excellence of publications such as *India Today* and the professionalism of newspapers such as *The Muslim*. These are unfortunately the exception rather than the rule.

In the circumstances a particularly heavy responsibility for informing their respective governments is carried by their two diplomatic services. Without access to the files one cannot assess performance with any degree of accuracy. I was in general much impressed with the superior calibre of diplomat fielded by both sides, although in the highly-charged atmosphere in which the two embassies had to work, it would have been difficult for even the most rational individual not to lose his cool on occasion. Moreover, neither the Indian nor the Pakistani service is free of the temptation which afflicts all foreign services, i.e., the



The author (center) and Canadian dignitaries in New Delhi ceremony.