

Book Reviews

GENDER-BASED EXPLOSIONS: THE NEXUS BETWEEN MUSLIM MASCULINITIES, JIHADIST ISLAMISM AND TERRORISM CULTURE & RELIGIONS, GENDER

Author: Maleeha Aslam
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Written by Dr. Maleeha Aslam, a fellow of Cambridge Commonwealth Society who has worked at the United Nations Institute of Sustainability and Peace as a postdoctoral fellow, *Gender-Based Explosions: The Nexus between Muslim Masculinities, Jihadist Islamism and Terrorism Culture & Religions, Gender* has attempted to explore relationship between element of gender based mindsets and politics in the age of terror. The book has tried to answer questions like "why are Muslim men so violent? How media, culture and religious thoughts interact to form their egoistic behaviors? The book claims that Muslim men have not only faced systematic political oppression but also cyclic marginalization. They are also living with a sense of being dejected, intimidated and humiliated. Many of them have found sufficient opportunities to project themselves as honourable, masculine figure in proper cultural manner. Therefore, 'troubled they become troublesome' and many of them use militant jihadist networks as outlets to achieve self-actualization and heroism. The additional gender based urge to become a hero is what is actually manipulated by terrorist networks and makes situation complicated.

The author has carefully differentiated among the terms used throughout the book, including Muslim, Islamic, and Islamism. A Muslim, according to her is one who has "made a declaration of faith in Allah as the only Divine existence and in his Angels, Messengers, Revealed Books and the Hereafter." A Muslim may or may not engage in religious practices. Islamic refers to "whatever may be accepted at the essence of the religion of Islam . . . [and] that aspect and practice of faith that is uncontested across heterogeneous global Muslim societies and about which there are no two opinions." Aslam cites philosophy drawing on spiritualism, calligraphy in mosques, and the call to prayer, azan, which follows a familiar Arabic rhythm, as examples. All of these have been developed and used consistently for centuries and are recognized as Islamic by Muslims globally. Islamism, on the other hand, is contemporary, amorphous, and

political. It is the application by a group of people (Islamists) of their own particular interpretation of the religion of Islam to the functioning of their present-day society. Muslims may or may not be Islamists, and at any moment in time [end Page 108] a number of competing variations of Islamism may exist.

She maintains that Islamic philosophy does not permit aggression in Jihad and forbids killing and violence against opponents.

Also, there is absolutely no place for “male ego” in Islam; a religion that focuses on “human” values. The author provides details from the lives of prophets mentioned in the Quran and underlines that their behaviour effectively demonstrated and strongly advocated patience, wisdom, courage and fearfulness — but never worship of some hypothetical “male” ego.

Despite the fact that revenge is allowed in Islam it is not a prescribed behaviour. Regardless, Muslim men are increasingly becoming more revengeful. The growing trend of revengefulness is promoting extremism. It is rightly stated that because revenge is a cultural and social imperative in Pakhtun culture, hence, extremism is more rapidly growing in KPK. In this context, surprisingly women do have a role in catalysing the development of such behaviours, as they demand from men to take revenge at any cost. A price is always attached on “masculinity” that is called into action during conflict. If one is man enough, one must be able to settle scores and also defend clan and familial honour.

The author is of the view that “gender” is a foundational bedrock where Al Qaeda, the Taliban and other terrorists have to be defeated as this is wherefrom they feed their constant supply of human resource. Dr. Maleeha has aptly stated that radicalism, militancy and terrorism can only be solved through people-centred interventions. Therefore, relevant governments and civil society should promote an alternative culture of growth, self-expression and actualization for Muslim men. To achieve sustainable counterterrorism results, Maleeha recommends underlining masculinities in Muslim contexts. *Gender-Based Explosions* is divided into three parts: “Framing the Global Chaos: An Overview,” “Islam, Masculinities, and Performance,” and “Pakistani Masculinities and Vulnerable Social Groups in the Age of Terror: A Pilot Study of Muslim Men in Islamabad, Aged 18-40.” Several tables produced from the pilot study are included within the text, and a statistical profile of the research sample is included as an appendix. The author has proved in her study that dejected ordinary Pakistani youth are predisposed to terrorism by political and economic oppression, filled with masculine mindsets and ambitions for heroism, fall in hands of radical clerics; without understanding this context it will be virtually impossible to check the acts of terror that stem from their desperation and indoctrination.

Book is not only well researched but is also written in morally engaging manner. It is destined to be an important contribution both in

gender and contemporary Muslim studies. The line of argument of the book though is very powerful and relevant to curb Islamist militancy but some of the findings are troubling as are beyond the traditional Western 'security' thinking about terrorism and conventional militancy. The analysis of this book is also relevant to Middle East studies.

This book is going to be an excellent contribution to both the Islamic texts, often used by trainers to justify terrorist violence, and the feminist theory that has yet to find an appropriate foothold in much of the Muslim world. It is also author's sensitive and probing interview technique with Muslim men in Pakistan that separates this book from others. Her trust towards these violent militant males does not shake once she is writing on terrorism among Muslim men. She portrays humane and nuanced faces to those who see 'counter-terrorism' as merely a strategy to pacify and/or nullify 'the other'. While interrogating her own gender theory, the author has made professional use methodological considerations making book a scientific piece of work. She concludes with evidence the ways in which the policies of the non-Muslim world must dramatically shift to reduce incentives to violence among the men whose families and neighborhoods seem forever under siege.

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PAKISTAN: A HARD COUNTRY

Author: Anatol Lieven

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In post 9/11 era, Pakistan has been portrayed by the mainstream scholars as a hazardous place on the face of the earth on the basis of its deteriorating security situation, declining economic condition and social unrest in the form of street protests and strikes. The prevailing transnational threat of terrorism in the presence of nuclear weapons has associated the probabilities of nuclear terrorism to Pakistan. Henceforth, the terrorism has become a gravest threat to

Pakistan's national security. It also provided sufficient chances to its traditional rivals to consciously criticize the state's core values. Under the US led-war on terror, Pakistan has become an essential ingredient of US politics of South Asia. The Anatol Lieven's analysis foresees the future of Pakistan and its standing in the world politics.

The well-articulated research work of a London based scholar Lieven under the title of *Pakistan: A Hard Country* is a remarkable contribution in the ongoing debate on Pakistan and its allegedly continuous standing in world politics. Lieven, a former journalist of *The Times*, is presently a Professor of International Relations and Terrorism Studies at King's College London.

The analytical approach of the writer in this book describes the analysis of Pakistan's internal and external problems. The central theme of the book is constructed on the view that the state is "divided, disorganized, economically backward, corrupt, violent, unjust, often savagely oppressive towards the poor and women, and home to extremely dangerous forms of extremism and terrorism." (p. 4). The book represents Lieven's research of 20 years on Pakistan's status in the contemporary world. The debate begins with the significance of nontraditional security threat to Pakistan. The four portions of Lieven's work cover four different dimensions of state. The first portion deals with the historical foundations of the state along with its cultural, demographical and geographical characteristics.

The second part of the book emphasizes the internal structure of the state which is generally based on justice, religion, military and politics. After evaluating the internal arrangements of the state, Lieven elucidates the provincial balance of the country. Finally, the discussion ends with the calculation of Taleban's role in the politics and an assessment of state's defeating Taleban strategies. In short, the twelve chapters of this book

grounded on aforementioned outlines are well researched and insightful, because in his work, Lieven heavily relies on empirical sources by conducting interviews of diverse personalities which include: politicians, intellectuals, soldiers, intelligence officers, bureaucrats, villagers, religious personalities and general public.

The convincing argument of Lieven emphasizes the ecological disaster as a result of climate change and their regular occurrences are the potential threats to states existence and to its organized society (p. 3). In order to highlight the effects of global warming on Pakistan, the writer focuses the “floods of 2010 which brought about a major transformation of state’s system, by damaging local agricultural and infrastructure.” (p. 205).

The critical examination of Pakistan’s nuclear capabilities by international community in the US-led war on terror has mounted on Pakistan specific security concerns by turning blind eye on India’s nuclear program which not only sparked an arms race in the region but also forced Pakistan to detonate its nuclear devices.

The US deliberate ignorance of Pakistan’s role and its significance in the war on terror while signing of a civil nuclear deal with India, which escalated a new debate in the region, has underestimated Pakistan’s efforts in fighting against terrorism. Even the Pak-US alliance in war on terror has shifted Pakistan in serious political, economic and social crises. Contrary to a widespread belief, “Pakistan was not responsible for the creation of Taliban in Afghanistan,” the mainstream Madrasahs of Afghanistan started and promoted the Talibanization initially (p. 406).

This is surprisingly one of the contemporary scholarly books on Pakistan, which reveals an account of entirely unfamiliar arguments. The book defies the rationality based on false perception, incorrect evidence and flawed assumptions in the argument that Pakistan is a failing state. The work of Lieven states, Pakistan is a hard country in a struggling phase. It is a deeply troubled state which is facing presently the threats of ecological change. The greatest threat of insurgency to the state’s existence is difficult to accept as a potential threat to Pakistan.

Furthermore, the writer is of the view that at regional level, the cooperation between Washington and Beijing can safeguard Pakistan’s survival. Both the US and China should avoid the struggle to control Pakistan. Concerning the US engagement in Afghanistan, Pakistan is a vital component of US strategic calculation. Therefore, the inevitable role of Pakistan in US Afghan policy is a supporting rationale in shaping South Asian politics (p. 477). Along with US, the EU, like China as a South Asian key player, should also exert its influence in resolving the Afghan conflict while recognizing Pakistan’s legitimate goals.

The whole discussion of Lieven’s book revolves around the survey of Pakistan. It also contains few accounts of shortsighted India’s role in the region. The US could play an effective role in minimizing the toxicity Indo-Pak relations. It is appropriate for the US to limit the

India's covert involvement in Afghanistan, which could be a viable option and prerequisite for the establishment of regional peace.

Later on, the peaceful resolution of disputed territories could be helpful for the development of pleasant Indo-Pak bilateral relationship. In short, the writer tries to foresee the future of South Asia by providing sufficient options to overcome the present crisis.

The academic and journalistic attributes of Lieven represents more than two decades of analysis based on extensive travel in order to access empirical knowledge.

Therefore, balancing and convincing arguments evaluated the role of centrifugal and centripetal forces in Pakistan. It is hard to say the book introduces several new ideas while eliminating the existing prejudices regarding Pakistan's values. Moreover, the book is a complete account of politics, history, sociology and anthropology, because it has diversity in its theme.☐

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SHOOTING FOR A CENTURY

Author: Stephen P. Cohen

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Shooting for a Century is a comprehensive account on the historical, cultural, and strategic relationships between the two irresistible rivals of South Asian region; India and Pakistan. Within the mist to 35 years this rivalry will be crossing a century and the situation is still to be understood and resolved. This book is written by a renowned author on South Asian studies; Stephen P. Cohen. He is a senior fellow in foreign policy at the Brookings Institution. He is considered as an expert on South Asian studies. He is the author of numerous books including *India: Emerging Power* and *The Idea of Pakistan*. He co-authored a book; *Arming without Aiming: India's military Modernization* with Sunil Dasgupta and he was also the lead author of *The Future of Pakistan*.

This book is written in very effective way. It has defined the relationship between the two countries as one of the most talked and discussed issue of all the times. The author has tracked the history and has mentioned several factors about how and why the conflict between the two is inevitable. The issues regarding Pakistan and India are the reason that the region of South Asia is always under a spot light by international community and especially media. This scenario will be completing its century in after almost thirty-five years and still the situation is not, what we can say 'stable'.

Both the countries have historical, cultural and strategic differences which make this region always in state of activity either armed conflicts or sort of cold war. The author has tried to describe the nature of rivalries and conflicts since the birth of both the states in a very critical way. The independence of both the countries might have satisfied the locals of both the states but independence of each other was way too hard to accept. After independence issues and crises are also being discussed comprehensively and has been enlightened in terms of the major causes of the rivalry between the two countries. The book is unique and good in the sense that it has provided a reader a story of both the sides/countries/people in the form of polls, opinions, diary pages speeches etc.

In chapter two; the conflicts are described including that of trade, water, Kashmir, Siachen, etc. The issues are discussed in a way that they are providing a prediction of resolution of the mentioned conflicts. Due to the social and cultural differences and also historical issues the two countries might not want to resolve it sometimes, but the solution are

there, and the issues can be resolved. Quiet and optimistic approach is being put forward. Including the smaller issues, both share some of the minor ones as well. So both the countries are rich in disputes but they hardly find any solution to those.

In chapter three; the author have talked about resolving the issue, but he also made this argument that even if the problems are solved between the two the differences might remain for much longer than expected. The religion based issues might be the root cause of that. Author has discussed about several film stars who are Muslims, and also some who have worked there and were Pakistani nationals. The hatred among people is also one of the causes that the solutions could not be made possible till now. But India, as she claims that present is not the future, so she gives little hints that in future, might be there is a process of normalization between the two countries. However, the role of certain extremist groups and individuals cannot be underestimated in this process.

Chapter four enlist the reasons Pakistan has for the long lasting conflicts with India. Ideology is the main pillar, on which Pakistan was created so there is no doubt that any sudden act that will try to diminish the essence of ideology of Pakistan will be responded back with a hard hand. The extremist groups on this side, has always been influencing and triggering the conflicts between the two. Also on this side, army has always being influential and always had its role in the decision making, be it on front or at back end. Lack of political tenure, has led Pakistan to face problems and this has also effected the normalization processes with its neighbor. However, in this book Zardari government is being praised as it completed its tenure, though faced many problems but is successful than others.

After discussing the major ideological and historical details, author has moved towards the other prominent explanations in the next (fifth) chapter. It includes the culture, state identity, minorities, strategies, and also nuclear assets that both countries possessed. After both the countries turned nuclear, they had not faced any direct war due to the balance strategically. And war does not seem to be the solution but an instigator to go wilder and more destructive.

In chapter six; it is described that not only direct conflicts but also both the countries have been engaged in indirect attacks both in terms of strategy and also through other non-conventional ways, media and propaganda more specifically. At the other hand, there are people who want to have peace and normalization between the both countries. The external, other international actors have been involved in resolving the situations between two for quiet long, but it is also said that it is just an apparent thing which in reality does not exist. And instead of normalizing the relationships, it is making all worse.

In the last chapter (seventh) of the book the author has tried to

describe the American interests and policies. Author has highlighted the support and policies of America towards both the countries. He has also described the issues like Kashmir, cooperation with Afghanistan and also the most important thing, the expected nuclear crises or risks, because in case of Pakistan and India there is almost nothing certain.

The author has described 'way forward' to address the issue of Pakistan and India. The international community especially America would do major role in normalization process between the two countries. Both the countries can cooperate under the shadow of America surrounding the case of Afghanistan in general. The book is a good read comprehensive account on the issues and conflicts of both the countries. It is also very important to keep in one's library.®

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