

Pakistan Under Siege, Afzal, Madiha. Penguin India Press: 2018, 192.

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The author, Madiha Afzal, a US-based scholar, explains the structural roots of extremism in Pakistan by focusing on the dimensions law, education and Islamism. The methodology chosen is a series of public opinion surveys carried out in Pakistan over the past decade and a half. This data is combined with historical analysis and the author's own research.

The merit of the book is that it relates largely abstract themes to concrete issues concerning the Afghan Taliban, the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Lashkar-e-Taiba/ Jamaat-ud-Dawa, attitudes to India and the Kashmir issue, Afghanistan, the US etc. The central question of the book is 'Are ordinary Pakistanis extremists?' According to the author's findings, the situation of extremism in Pakistan is very complex in nature as overwhelming number of Pakistanis are opposed to the terrorism but their nationalistic ideology tend to show extreme narratives due to the anti-Indian sentiment, hate against the US and its policies towards Pakistan, status of Islam in the West and, possibly most of all, by a sense of 'national victimhood.' The findings help observe the nuances of extremism in the fabric of Pakistani society. To this end, the role of the Pakistani state itself and its 'reliance on Islam to define Pakistan's identity' and its policies towards India create an environment which nurtures the extremist views in the society. Therefore, a mindset of denial that terrorist attacks in Pakistan are the result of external conspiracy can be addressed as a root cause of the entire problem in society.

According to the author, Pakistan's image as a state and its people is of a villain, who created the monster of terror and now is reluctant to fight this monster and, hence, its citizens are facing the consequences. Therefore, the book is an attempt to highlight Pakistan's efforts to fight terrorism internally and externally. There is no doubt that some Pakistanis are linked to attacks

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in the West but the situation is far more complex to understand. Though the Pakistani society is multi-dimensional, its negative image portrayed in the rest of the world needs many corrections. The book took a comprehensive account of Pakistan's strategic miscalculations and the Pakistani society response towards terrorism and extremism.

The author through the use of opinion surveys and interviews provides an empirical foundation to prove that Pakistan's case of extremism is complicated in South Asia, only because of violence in the name of religion present in different strata of society. The author has also analysed the education system of Pakistan in this regard. The author is of the opinion that education is a vital instrument in shaping a nation's thinking. Pakistan's complex education system, ranging from public schools to maligned madrasa system, which is often accused of planting extremism in young minds, plays an important role in defining the attitudes of individuals towards extremism and terrorism. This argument of the author is validated through interviews with students and analysing the text-books used in curriculum deeply.

Overall this book is a good read for those who want to understand the link of extremism and terrorism with the society of Pakistan. However, the descriptive methodological approach of narrating the sequence of events makes it less appealing for the reader at some points. An optimistic reader might agree with Afzal's hopeful tone but a pessimistic one will wonder what, really, can be done to fix the flaws in our security architecture as Osama bin Laden hid out for years and opponents regularly attack government reformers.