

David.L.Goosling, *Frontier of Fear: Confronting the Taliban on Pakistan's Border* (The Radcliffe Press: London and New York, 2016), 274.

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The book *Frontier of Fear: Confronting the Taliban on Pakistan's Border* is a personal account of David Lagourie Gosling, who served as the Principal of Edwardes College Peshawar, the provincial capital of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, from 2006 to 2010. In this book, Gosling gives a detailed account of his time at Edwardes College and the education and politics that came with it.

A Cambridge graduate and nuclear physicist, Gosling served as the Principal of Edwardes College, Peshawar, a prestigious higher education college, and in fact the first co-educational college in the province, where Gosling made an important contribution in significantly increasing the proportion of female students and staff. Affiliated with the University of Peshawar, Edwardes College is named after Sir Herbert Edwardes, a soldier turned administrator who was a Church Missionary Society Vice President. The college, although often referred to as “western and elitist”, initially adopted local languages as the medium of instruction rather than English. Initially, degrees were awarded by the University of Punjab but in 1952, it was affiliated with the University of Peshawar. With the exception of Phil Edmunds and Revd A.M. Dalaya who were from the Sub-continent, majority of the principals (including the author) have been British.

The book revolves around the author’s life as the principal of the college and the various experiences that come with it. He gives a detailed account of events in and around the college from 2006-2010, which included bomb attacks that “were within an earshot of the college”.

According to the author, the college attracts a diverse mix of students from the province itself, FATA as well as the Northern areas of Pakistan. The diversity of students gave the author the privilege of hearing indigenous accounts of violent acts widespread throughout the province.

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He recalls how college students from Bajaur after returning from home told the author that the attack on the *madrassa* in Bajaur was in fact due to a US drone strike. The author also recalls how one of his students from Waziristan sent him an email asking for advice on whether or not to accept a large sum of money from two Americans to act as a “model.” He discloses that he advised his student not to interact with the men since they wanted him to spy for them in his area. According to the author, the student was later threatened by the men for refusing to cooperate with them.

Apart from administrative duties, the author recalls the numerous yet unsuccessful legal issues lodged against the college, court cases particularly over admissions and the countless phone calls he received for admission favours — which were mostly declined by him. He recalls an incident when the Chief Justice of Peshawar, blamed the British for the “overall complexity of the legal system.” Apart from external constraints such as court, educational authorities, the author said interacting with the intelligence agencies was also a routine matter. The author fondly recollects his interaction with Inspector Qasim — his ISI minder who (upon the author’s request) even took him to see the ancestral home of Bollywood actor Shahrukh Khan.

Although the college was a Christian institution, the author points out that majority of the students were Muslim and the aim of the college was to achieve “peace between Muslims and Christians.” It was very mindful of all its students, particularly Muslims, therefore importance was given to all religious events and activities of the Muslims. For example, the author’s policy was to “bend with the wind” and avoid any overlapping with Friday prayers or the Mass Service of the Christians to achieve harmony among the students of these two religions and other faiths as well. The author also recalls an incident where he received a death threat from some extremist elements.

In his book, Goosling narrates the weekly prison programme, in which he would take a few students to the Peshawar jail to interact with the prisoners which included locals as well as foreigners. He describes how during a visit, he met Sufi Mohamed, the founder and chief of *Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi* (TNSM) and Fazlullah’s father in law who the author refers to as the “elder statesman of

Pakistan's Taliban." However, the author has committed a grave error as the picture given in the book by the author, of Sufi Muhammad is not actually Sufi Muhammad but in fact Sheikh Muhammad Nazim Adil al Qubrusi al Haqqani. The author also mentions the Christian community in Pakistan and the unfair treatment towards them and the other religious minorities. He also recalls a conversation with the superintendent of the Peshawar Central Prison who highlights the misuse of blasphemy laws.

Comparing the Pakistani churches with Indian churches, the author feels that churches in Pakistan have failed to make a major contribution to nation building and instead continue to appeal to the West for moral and material support. The churches in Pakistan, the author laments, have produced few outstanding leaders, for example, Shahbaz Bhatti, the PPP Minister of Minorities who was assassinated in March 2011. Whereas in India, the author gives the example of the Governor of Nagaland, M. M. Thomas, the Mar Thoma Theologian, who could have been appointed as India's first Christian President if it were not for his untimely death. The author also points out that he likes that some of his predecessors faced difficulties with the local church leadership that expected the college to give "unfair priority" to its own community. He points out that the vision of the college revolves around "inclusiveness and service which is inspired by Christianity, but is also compatible with other religions including Islam". However, the author states that it was unfortunate that the local church leadership could not acknowledge this.

The author, while talking about the creation and rise of the Pakistani Taliban also delves into the state of affairs in Afghanistan, primarily focusing on the growth of the Afghan Taliban and its impact on Pakistan, especially in the tribal areas and the province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. He also talks about the consequences of Pakistan joining the 'War on Terror', the subsequent army operations in FATA and Swat, and the US drone strikes in FATA that resulted in a "furious backlash" by Pakistani militant groups such as the TTP against civilian targets. The author also mentions the death threat against himself for promoting co-education. The author talks about the massacre at the Army Public School in Peshawar, in December 2014 that resulted in the death of 145 people, mostly students.

Overall, the book is an interesting account of life of the author as the Principal of Edwardes college at a time when the province was going through tumultuous times. The author has been successful in holding the reader's attention by explaining the events that unfolded in the province and particularly in Peshawar while giving a fair account. For those who belong to the province or have any affiliation with the college are likely to relate to the author's experiences to a large extent.