

Book Review

Radicalization in South Asia: Contexts, Trajectories and Implications

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South Asia is at a crossroad. Democracy in South Asia is strong but history shows that its countries have been swinging between illiberal democracy, autocracy and military-backed dictatorships. Pluralism and the very socio-political fabric of this region is under serious pressure.

This book, *Radicalization in South Asia: Contexts, Trajectories and Implications*, edited by Mubashar Hassan, Kenji Isezaki, Sameer Yasir, is a collection of eleven chapters focusing on religious radicalization in five Asian locations: India, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The book opens with three chapters on India. The first chapter posits that Indian Maoism has no innovative political strategies to counter contemporary Indian capitalism or the dynamism of the Indian state. Its military strategy has also become obsolete and it is difficult to enlist average people for such a dangerous war with the technologically superior state. Their restricted territorial locality too has alienated them from vast sections of people, and their struggles against capitalist exploitation and non-class oppression. One can debate the relevance or failure of Maoism globally but its appeal amongst the poor and deprived sections cannot be ignored.

The second chapter describes how Kashmir's syncretic culture had been traditionally passed on to young Kashmiris, helping them reject radical and violent influences at least to an extent. The chapter also discusses how social media is undermining traditional socialization patterns and interpersonal relationships.

The third chapter brings forth how anti-India narratives are increasing not just in Pakistan but also in Bangladesh, based on an analysis of existing terrorist propaganda literature. The chapter also analyses strategic communications around terrorism in India's foreign policy, especially as the stability of domestic politics and the democratic environment in Bangladesh is significant to India.

Chapter Four starts the second section of the book with an analysis of the macro level political, religious and ideological contexts for radicalization in Maldives and the relationship between Salafism and radicalization which is not unidirectional but locally contextual.

Chapter Five offers a comprehensive plan on countering radicalization in Sri Lanka which emerges from majoritarianism and marginalization with policy action, domestic reform and regional and global engagement including employment generation, education and language sector reforms, and better urban planning.

Chapter Six presents a model of de-radicalization and rehabilitation of male youth extremists in Pakistan based on the Pakistan Army's collaboration with a voluntary organisation. The model uses a holistic approach including corrective religious instruction, mainstream education, vocational training,

and recreation with post-reintegration monitoring to ensure zero recidivism along with lessons for replicating this model in other parts of the world.

Chapter Seven similarly explores the interesting premise of how higher education systems are unable to prevent young people from embracing extremist ideologies, especially since 9/11, given the fear-driven anti-radicalization policies and the market driven neo liberal policies in higher education in Pakistan.

The last four chapters focus on Bangladesh. Chapter Eight investigates the role of madaras in radicalizing Bangladeshi youth and debates on the madaras' autonomy versus their secularization along with discussions on Islamophobia and Bangladesh's own war on terror.

Chapter Nine explores a hitherto little explored topic of why women join terrorist outfits. This chapter offers the inputs of law enforcement officials, civil society and academicians regarding the gendered dimensions of security and how women's socio-economic indicators interact with socio-political grievances, relationships with religious radicals and indoctrinated beliefs.

Chapter Ten explores ways of exposure and expression of radicalization among urban Bangladeshi youth with an in-depth analysis of the push and pull factors like alienation, crisis of identity and religious globalization.

Chapter Eleven, the final chapter of the book, gives a critical overview of Bangladesh's responses to increased terrorism by analysing not just its counter terrorism operations but also its counter-narrative campaigns, de-radicalization goals and counter-radicalization policies.

Illiberalism and nationalism are global phenomena today, yet radicalization, in particular, geographies has diverse trajectories, best understood with context specific local knowledge. The editors have carefully combined select, innovative premises backed with fresh, indigenous perspectives, resulting in a comprehensive analysis of a transnational phenomenon. This book is a diverse, dynamic read due to its expert analysis, research and case studies. Its insight into the ideologies and human behaviors associated with radicalization makes it a useful reading not just for academicians, practitioners and policy makers but even laypersons interested in an introduction to conflict studies. This book not only situates radicalization with reference to multiple factors like violence and extremism but also posits that rather than cut and dried models or patterns, radicalization is best understood as a cohesive set of multiple intersecting issues like grievances, ideologies and support structures, giving the common man's understanding of radicalization an academician's informed, balanced and holistic backing.

South Asia has witnessed radicalization around diverse extreme ideologies. This includes both the political extremism and radicalization through religious and cultural differences. This volume is a handy book to understand these phenomena at one go. Based on case studies, it also helps to understand the malaise in its local context as the contributions are based on the dynamics of the specific regions.

There are fault lines and there is fundamentalism – we need to develop policies, laws and programs that identify not just the law and order aspect of radicalization but also its socio-economic and psychological roots that are often ignored in a martial zest to try and exterminate it. The book is insightful as it unravels the context of radicalization in each country, emphasizing on the specificities of the complex local politics, thus avoiding sweeping generalizations. This book is timely as the region

is facing challenges of diverse radicalizations. It is also a move away from the literature on radicalization that focuses mostly on the Middle East and Europe. It has new perspectives on the causes and context of radicalization, from the local and psychological to the global and structural. It offers guidance to policy makers and practitioners and is an important contribution to both the literature and practice on radicalization.

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