

## BOOK REVIEW

### NAUMANA KIRAN'S "RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN PAKISTAN POST 9/11 SCENARIO, CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS": An Analytical Overview

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*Religious Extremism in Pakistan: Post 9/11 Scenario, Challenges and Achievements*, (Islamabad: Iqbal International Institute for Research and Dialogue, 2024) by Dr. Naumana Kiran, a professor in the History Department at University of Punjab, is a meticulously researched and thought-provoking work that draws attention towards several dimensions of religious extremism in Pakistan with the focus of attention on post 9/11 period. However, author has also raised a thorough and detailed historical context of each issue, to provide a complete comprehension of the nature, severity and forecasts of the religious extremism in Pakistan.

RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN  
**PAKISTAN**  
POST 9/11 SCENARIO, CHALLENGES  
AND ACHIEVEMENTS



NAUMANA KIRAN



Generally Pakistani people have a rich background of peaceful and harmonious traditions particularly dominated by Sufis who always

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emphasized on the tolerance, however, the roots of religious extremism in Pakistan can be traced during the time of General Zia-ul-Huq following the Afghan Jihad of 1979 and Dr. Kiran's study provides a comprehensive historical framework of this theme, tracing the evolution of religious extremism in Pakistan from its origins to the present day.

The book's primary focus on the post 9/11 period offers valuable insights into the impact of global events on Pakistan's internal dynamics. Through a nuanced and balanced approach, author examines the various factors contributing to the rise of religious extremism, including political, social, and sectarian influences. During Musharraf's period Pakistan had to bear the consequences of terrorism due to another Afghan War, it also experienced extreme levels of sectarianism which manifested in many forms including target killing of various communities and Dr. Kiran has discussed it in a very appropriate way especially the target killing of Hazara community. Not only this, Pakistan for the first time was challenged by Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan who established a state in Malakand Division. Another challenge was to deal with emergence of welfare wings of these religious extremists' outfits which were banned by Musharraf Government. She has also made a persuasive effort to interpret the direct and indirect involvement of women in the religious extremism as well as their participation in the fight against it. Through this insightful work author has also analyzed the policies and efforts of elected governments and other stake holders in dealing with this issue.

Dr Kiran's work is a frank and open conversation that needed to be had as she clearly highlighted the role of Pakistani Clergy and *Ulemas* who debate over sectarian differences and spread the wrong concepts of Jihad. Pakistan was founded on the principles of religious tolerance, peace and harmony and although initially, there were some clashes like anti-Ahmadiyya movement, country's policy remained clear and anti-sectarian. During the civilian rule of Zulfqar Ali Bhutto, the only biased incident was the declaration of Ahmadiyya community as non-Muslims, however, author has stressed that the introduction of Islamization in Zia period gave impetus to sectarianism, militancy and extremism. Furthermore, the politicization of Islamic institutions and their mushrooming also intensified the religious extremism as

Dr.Kiran has cited the percentage in her book that before 1980 the total ratio of madrassahs was only three percent which was increased to 136 percent till 1986. The main objective of these Islamic institutions was to prepare and train the *Jihadists* (mujahideens) with the help of secret agencies of Pakistan, America and some Arab States. She has also discoursed the hotly discussed topic of *Madrassah* education, emphasizing that it is not molding students into neutral and balanced individuals but into sectarian minded persons, who after completing their education, propagate divisions among Deobandi, Barelvi, Shia etc. sects in the society.

This book has total six chapters along with an introduction and conclusion in which Dr. Kiran has touched upon many topics of direct concern. The opening pages of the books are the thematic summary of the book where writer has explained the turbulent history of Pakistan and evolution of religious terrorism. The first chapter, starts with the rising impact of Afghanistan's Taliban regime on the border provinces of Pakistan and she has discussed Malakand Division as a test case for Musharraf's Government. While Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat-i-Mohammadi was set in 1994, yet strengthened the TTP which challenged the Pakistani Government by setting a State in Malakand in the pretext of religion. Nevertheless, a series of military operations were started to deal with such outfits and the Pakistan has reinstated its writ completely after some efforts.

Second and third chapter explores the sectarian violence in Pakistan and focuses on one small community named Hazara as victims and role of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi as slayer. It mentions the lethargy of Pakistani Government (see chapter two) that how unchecked extremist groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi posed dangers to not only a locality but also to a country and eventually to the whole world. Dr. Kiran takes readers into confidence by explaining the factors responsible for the establishment of this party. This party was emerged in 1980 and established its links with Taliban and started a sectarian reign of terror. It also explains that later in post 9/11 scenario its link with ISIS was discovered by Pakistani agencies that led towards the neutralization of this sectarian group and its founder. Dr Kiran has tried to do in depth study of the Hazara community that how and why Lashkar-e-Jhangvi kept exploiting this small tribe in the form of target killing and attacks.

The chapter four explains the welfare wings of extremist organizations with particular focus on Jamat-i-Islami and Jamat-ud-Dawa that how their welfare wings operate and offer facilities to the down trodden and poor sections of society and make them believe about their ideology of religious extremism. Although author has stressed that these welfare activities have nothing to do directly with acts of religious fanaticism but indirectly can be supportive for the spread of intolerance in the society.

Chapter five is all about analyzing the role of civil societies and Non-Profit Organizations in spreading awareness to eliminate the terrorism. Chapter six investigates the connection of religious terrorism with women that how they were used as a tool of suicide bombers for violence and how this whole episode affected them as they were related to those as well who were the victims of religious terrorism. A research gap is existed regarding highlighting and interpreting the role of these women and Dr. Kiran has explained with full rigor that women of Pakistan have played multifaceted role in war of religious extremism from being participants, victims to serving as activists.

This author has concluded this book on a positive note that although Pakistan has suffered a lot due to the traumas of religious radicalism however, it is amazing to observe that how swiftly, Pakistani society has recovered from the sufferings of terrorism and has shown its willingness to live for peace, harmony, and growth.

The main strength of this book lies in Dr. Kiran's writing style, which is conversational and easy to understand. It is concise and comprehensive and executes the vital task of recording some of the most horrendous events of recent past. Moreover, this work fulfills those research gaps which were largely ignored by academia like the link between Hazara community, role of welfare wings of Religiously Extremist Organization in the spread of religious extremism and LeJ or women's character in extremism. The other strength of this book lies in its well-organized structure, clear writing style, and extensive bibliography, making it a helpful source for scholars, researchers, and policymakers interested in understanding the intricacies of religious extremism in Pakistan.

Overall, this work is a substantial contribution to the existing literature on the subject, offering a rich understanding of this critical issue. Dr.Kiran's work is essential reading for anyone seeking to grasp the complexities of religious extremism in Pakistan and its implications for regional and global security.

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