

4-1-2014

## David Hansen, Radical Rhetoric-Moderate Behaviour: Perceptions of Islam, Shari'a, and the Radical Dimension in Urban Pakistan. Tapir academic press Trondheim, 2012.

Muhammad Junaid Nadvi Ph.D.

*International Islamic University Islamabad*, [mjunaidnadvi@gmail.com](mailto:mjunaidnadvi@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Nadvi, Muhammad Junaid Ph.D. (2014) "David Hansen, Radical Rhetoric-Moderate Behaviour: Perceptions of Islam, Shari'a, and the Radical Dimension in Urban Pakistan. Tapir academic press Trondheim, 2012.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 5: No. 2, Article 21.

DOI: 10.62608/2158-0669.1206

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol5/iss2/21>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of International and Global Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact [phuffman@lindenwood.edu](mailto:phuffman@lindenwood.edu).

**David Hansen, *Radical Rhetoric-Moderate Behaviour: Perceptions of Islam, Shari'a, and the Radical Dimension in Urban Pakistan*. Tapir academic press Trondheim, 2012.**

The radicalization of Islam in Pakistan has recently occupied center stage in political debates on print and electronic media among the clerics, politicians, academicians and analysts regarding global security and has become a major concern for governments at national and international levels. Despite the political attention it receives, however, the phenomenon of radicalization in Pakistan, including the factors and causes contributing thereto and actors and processes involved therein have not been academically studied or explored to any considerable extent. Only a few systematic studies on the subject have been conducted so far. Those who have carried out such studies include Tariq Rahman, Ayesha Jalal, Sohail Abbas, Sohail Mahmood, Amir Rana, Shabana Fayyaz, and Christine Fair.<sup>1</sup> While these authors have addressed the socio-cultural factors contributing to radicalization in Pakistan, they have done so only as parts of their studies. In contrast, the book under review exclusively addresses the socio-cultural factors contributing to radicalization in Pakistan.

The need to understand and explain the phenomena referred to as *radicalization* or *Talibanization* is becoming increasingly urgent, given the massive humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Pakistan, accompanied by a pervasive sense of fear and apprehension. While it is difficult to explore or analyze such transformations while they are still occurring, Hansen proposes some reflections on the social, economic, and political dynamics in Pakistan as they unfold at this stage. The terms radicalization and Talibanization are being employed to refer to the increasing tendency among Muslim populations to use a peculiar brand of that religion as the justification for the use of force in an effort to seek the conquest and control of territory, populations, and resources and the establishment of specific forms of judicial and social systems. To exert their authority, groups of radicalized or "Talibanized" Muslims carry out acts of unbridled violence against the general population, including gruesome murders, decapitations, lashings, and the amputation of limbs. The use of such violence and the strategic creation of intense fear among members of the general population underlie the formation of radicalized social and political systems; fear is engendered to maintain control and ensure compliance with the dictates of the leaders.

There is a tendency to conceive of radicalization solely in terms of ideology. References to ideological or religious "zealotry," "extremism," or "militancy", imply a sort of "backwardness," "simple-ness," lack of education, or absence of civilized thought and a barbaric or "savage" worldview among members of radicalized communities. However, the use of overarching ideological categories relies on some form of biological determinism, thereby rendering such categories deeply racist. Additionally, the use of such binary terms such as "backward" versus "modern," "savage" versus "civilized," or illiterate versus "enlightened" serves to obfuscate the issues behind radicalization rather than clarify them. Indeed, categories such as backward, savage, barbaric, or pre-modern fail as explanations for the actions of members of radicalized groups since such labels become tautologies or self-reinforcing pretenses of "truth": they committed the act because they are barbaric; they are barbaric because they committed the act. In other words, the reliance upon psychological and ideological categories that refer to some kind of assumed inherent proclivity or tendency among certain people to commit heinous acts becomes essentialist. Such explanations obscure both the history

---

<sup>1</sup> Tahir Abbas has shed light on Islamic radicalism from a European perspective. His book, *Islamic Political Radicalism*, contains excellent articles which deal with the roots of radicalization and its growth in Eurasia. He has elaborated at length upon the international political factors behind Muslim radicalism. Likewise, Sabeeha Aziz's *The Changing Pakistan Society* is a classical work on Pakistani society and culture that addresses the possibility of using folklore as a mechanism of social control and the concepts needed for the analysis of changing realities of Pakistan's social structure and organizational system. Ayesha Jalal has dealt with the subject in South Asian context in *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* and, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*.

and reality that contribute to the formation and the dynamics of radicalism. The importance of locating specific actors within specific historical contexts and material concerns is overlooked when it is simpler or more sensational to resort merely to ideology, belief, or mind-set as explanations for historical phenomena.

Instead of characterizing the perceived extremism and violence as some kind of inherent flaw among a particular people or within a particular religion, culture, or belief system, it is more fruitful to explore the political economy of radicalization in order to lay bare the material basis that may have generated it. It is more useful to examine the conflicts between competing social classes attempting to establish their hegemony and deploy religion (or a specific form of it) in order to justify their position in social and economic hierarchies. Unfortunately, Islam seems to provide an ideological cover for class-based privilege and exploitation. In many Muslim countries, members of the upper class increasingly proclaim their attachment to Islam, in a frenzied search for an ideological guarantee of their social and material advantages,<sup>2</sup> while the ruling class uses Islam to give religious endorsement to their conservative attitudes. A historical evaluation of the intersections of (specific interpretations of) religion and political power may serve to demystify radicalism and locate it more appropriately within historical and material conflicts. Hansen's work does just this.

The book under review examines the socio-cultural factors of radicalization in Pakistan and is comprised of 11 chapters. Chapter 1, the *Introduction*, gives the contemporary perceptions of Islam, Shari'a, and the radical dimension among urban Pakistanis. While its main emphasis is on the perceptions of the abovementioned themes, based on empirical fieldwork in Pakistan, the author also acknowledges the evolution of Islam, political Islam, and radicalism in Pakistan since the country's creation in 1947 (pp.1-12). Chapter 2, *Islam and Identity in Pakistan*, discusses and analyzes how Islam has been subject to change in post-independence Pakistan. The chapter provides a closer look at Islam as the state's ideology, religious sects in Pakistan, and how Islam has been instrumentally orchestrated in Pakistan's history (pp.13-46). Chapter 3, *Contemporary Urban Islam*, explores how respondents regard themselves as Muslims and how they perceive contemporary issues related to Islam. This chapter has dual focus: (1) to examine the perceived changes in Islam's content, rituals, and practice and (2) to explore the perceptions of modernity regarding Islam. The author also explores the ways in which the contribution of religious seminaries, *madaris*, and other non-governmental organizations operating as welfare providers in society are perceived (pp.47-98). Chapter 4, *Towards an Orthodox Urban Sufism*, is based on the observations of *Urban Piri-Muridi* (the relationship between a saint (*pir*) and a disciple (*murid*)). The chapter sheds light on this nuanced and infrequently discussed theme in contemporary Pakistan. The author illustrates that respondents often explain their perceptions of *piri-muridi* as a system of reciprocity. He explains that despite what many scholarly works on Islam in Pakistan assert, the *piri-muridi* relationship is not necessarily always seen as being in opposition to orthodox interpretations of Islam, which stresses on classical understanding.<sup>3</sup> Chapter 5, *Political Islam in Pakistan*, discusses matters relating to Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and *Shari'a* (Islamic Law) in early Islamic societies, as they are often claimed by Islamists in Pakistan to represent "the pure past" as well as the ways in which Islamic ordinances and approaches to Islamic law in Pakistan have been formulated throughout Pakistan's history (pp. 143-180). Chapter 6, *Calling for Shari'a*, explores how respondents perceive *shari'a* as a system for Islamic legislation, what it constitutes for them, as well as how and whether such a system should be implemented in contemporary Pakistan (pp. 181-216). Chapter 7, *The Rise and Fall of Lal Masjid in 2007*, is included as a part of the

<sup>2</sup> Rodinson, Francis (2005) 'Foreword', pp.7-15, in Kaur, Ravinder (ed.) (2005) *Religion, Violence and Political Mobilization in South Asia*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

<sup>3</sup> There is, however, an increased awareness of and an attempt at filtering out pre-Islamic practices from the practice of modern Islam, particularly with respect to how *piri-muridi* co-exists alongside the (more) scriptural or orthodox Islam (pp. 99-143).

explanation of radical Pakistan situated within the context of political Islam (pp. 217-254). Chapter 8, *Radical Islam in Pakistan*, attempts to locate factors that may have had a role in theoretically radicalizing people on Pakistan. The author presents this chapter as a comprehensive theoretical contribution to the field, as he feels that no such work exists, although there are many excellent scholarly contributions that deal with single-case contributing factors (pp. 255-306). Chapter 9, *Culture of an Adversarial Otherness*, discusses how the issue of *jihad* is viewed in Pakistan by drawing on the author’s current and former experience in the field. He sheds light on one rhetorical “othering” (namely anti-Americanism), which serves as an example of how radical rhetoric is expressed among certain groups of people. The chapter also presents how the “cartoon controversy,” involving publication of caricature cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, was perceived by respondents following a discussion of Islamist movements in Pakistan, the historical links between militant Islamists and the Pakistani authorities, and possible motivations for people taking part in extremist acts (pp. 307-352). Chapter 10, *Extremism and Terrorism in Pakistan*, looks at how respondents define fundamentalism and how they explain the phenomena of extremism and terrorism. Also analyzed are examples of the terrorist attacks against the USA on 9/11 as well as acts of terrorism within Pakistan as a way of discovering how such extremist and terrorist acts are perceived by respondents (pp. 353-398). Chapter 11, the *Conclusion and Implication* section, presents the aim of Hansen’s study, which was to uncover and present how respondents in the chosen cities for research perceive Islam, Shari‘a, and the radical dimension often associated with Islam, with a primary focus on post-9/11 developments and their repercussions on Pakistan (pp. 399-400).

The work is highly commendable and is beneficial for the researchers and academicians having keen interest in the religious dimensions of the sub-continent and especially Pakistan. While Dr. Hansen’s study confirms that most of the Pakistani population is still moderate despite the growing attraction of the radical rhetoric, the work clearly demarcates the difference in understanding of Islam and Shari’ah and their derivative offshoots practiced in Pakistan, and how certain schools of thoughts have promoted religious phenomenon. Hansen’s work is unique as it makes the scholarly examination of the radicalization of Islam both relevant and engaging (a quality that many other books on the topic lack). Hansens’ work unpacks the views and emotions of Pakistanis on a range of issues. The book is highly recommended for the students of religious studies.

Muhammad Junaid Nadvi, PhD  
University of Management & Technology, Lahore  
mjunaidnadvi@gmail.com