



In Their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba

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To cite this article: Thomas K. Gugler (2019) In Their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, 42:3, 620-621, DOI: [10.1080/00856401.2019.1608418](https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2019.1608418)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2019.1608418>



Published online: 19 Jun 2019.



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for ‘genre distillation—to sift out of the heaving assemblage that is the masala form generic tropes and constellations that are shorn of the local in any recognizable way’ (p. 135).

Meheli Sen’s intervention in an otherwise underexplored range of genre film cycles gives these films the attention that they rightly deserve. Her interrogation of neglected genres of Indian cinema, which seeks to illuminate an alternative history, is as relevant to the history of Indian cinema as to any other. However, if the fantastic, the horrific and the supernatural provide a view from which to locate the fissures and cracks needed to exhume these alternative histories, it is important that we blend the bird’s eye view with the worm’s line of vision and also look beyond the textual.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2019.1608417>



In Their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, by C. Christine Fair,
London, Hurst & Co., 2018, 307 pp., £40.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781849045728

Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) was set up by Hafiz Saeed in 1990 as the military wing of the Markaz al-Dawah Irshad, which was later replaced by Jamaat ud Dawah (JuD), and is internationally known for the attacks in Mumbai in 2008. Between April 1999 and December 2016, LeT conducted 205 attacks, killing 1,191 people (p. 2), as Fair explicates in the introductory first chapter (pp. 1–20). Its annual operational budget is estimated to be about US\$50 million (p. 10). In August 2017, JuD formed a political party, the Milli Muslim League, which is not recognised by the Election Commission of Pakistan. Fair’s study is based on LeT’s literature, i.e. the books, pamphlets, calendars and periodicals published by Dar-ul-Andlus, as well as nearly one thousand so-called *shaheed* biographies (pp. 16–7).

In the second chapter, Fair locates the phenomenon of transnational Islamist terrorism in the context of the dynamics of the Indo–Pakistan security competition (pp. 21–43) by illustrating how Kashmir is considered by Pakistani politicians as the unfinished part of Partition’s agenda (p. 22). Moreover, Pakistan’s growing nuclear arsenal enables the country to use terrorism as a tool of statecraft without repercussions (p. 23). In the third chapter, the author’s concise historical summary of militant outfits employed by Pakistan’s ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) for proxy warfare explains why LeT has become ISI’s favourite (pp. 45–66), even though it draws from the small following of the Ahl-e-Hadees tradition, a Sunni school of thought that emerged in northern India in the mid nineteenth century and opposes everything introduced in Islam after the earliest times (in particular *taqlid*). But with a following of only an estimated 4 percent of the Pakistani population and few domestic resources, it is easier for ISI to control LeT (p. 64) than the Deobandi militant outfits. Fair’s fourth chapter locates LeT in the context of other Ahl-e-Hadees institutions, outlines the development of its military camps, its organisational structures including its various departments, district offices and chains of schools, as well as its magazines and so-called social welfare institutions (pp. 67–109). In Chapter 5 (pp. 111–48), she evaluates 918

posthumous biographies of activists (p. 111) drawn from LeT publications. Treated as martyrs, they seem to be mostly educated, underemployed and belonging to the lower middle class. Their age at recruitment averaged seventeen years (p. 115), and Fair finds evidence for twelve different recruitment paths (p. 125). The next chapter analyses LeT's literature regarding its political vision for Pakistan and its interpretation of jihad and *takfir* (excommunication) (pp. 149–95). Pakistan's political leaders are portrayed as Muslims by self-declaration and people should not evaluate their religiosity. Muslims may be hypocrites (*kalima-go munafiq*) or infidels in practice (*kalima-go kuffar*), but as long as they have accepted Islam, they should be fought through *dawah* rather than jihad. The practice of *takfir* should be avoided as far as possible (p. 183), and jihad limited to the Hindus in Hindustan in order to settle the scores of 1947 and 1971 (p. 184).

In the last chapter, Fair discusses various options to deal with the LeT (pp. 197–214). She criticises 'the bizarre consistency of US policy towards Pakistan, which treats Pakistan more like an ally when its behavior is more congruent to that of an enemy' (p. 200). At the same time, India seemingly lacks the military capability to punish Pakistan for its reliance on terrorism as a key foreign policy tool. The organisational structure of LeT, however, makes it vulnerable to leadership decapitation (p. 204). The optimal move would be 'a splendid first strike that removes operational and apex leadership, as well as key handlers in the Army and intelligence agencies, nearly simultaneously' (p. 206); it would most likely need to be initiated by India. Fair declares: 'The United States should consider undertaking countermeasures to subvert Pakistan's [nuclear] program, as it did with Iran, and even consider imposing the kinds of sanctions that crippled Iran and brought it to the negotiating table' (p. 208). Pessimistic about the prospects for peace through dialogue with Pakistan, she suggests that the US government should reconsider its position on Kashmir (p. 211).

Fair's research is highly impressive for both the density of data and the analytical value. Her contextualisation of the LeT, which spells out its relationship with the Pakistan military and its 'nuclear coercion strategy' (p. 46), demonstrates that the relevance of this topic extends far beyond security studies; the book is an overdue enhancement of the field of international relations. As an American political analyst, Fair is outspoken about her recommendations and her clarity is welcome and refreshing. In sum, this is by far the best monograph on the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba available at the moment. The last chapter is a vital read for anybody interested in fostering the development of more peace and security in South Asia despite the fact that international relations in Asia are highly complex, and that there are other important aspects a single volume cannot address such as the role of China in these conflicts.

The Acknowledgements state that the proceeds from the book will be donated to non-religious charitable organisations in India that assist victims of terrorism (p. xii). It will soon be supplemented by a volume by C. Christine Fair and Safina Ustaaad titled *A Call to War: The Literature of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba* (p. x).

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