

## **Inside the Terrifying World of Jaish-e-Mohammed, by Abhinav Pandya, Harper Collins Publishers India, 2024, pp. ix+473**

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“Life will be glorious and worth living when they have an AK-47 in their hands, and their bullets will pierce through the chests of Hindus. They will get the ultimate satisfaction of youth when their bullets kill Hindus.”

— *Masood Azhar, Kashmir Aur Ghazwa—Emotional Bayaan*

In the aftermath of the terror attack in Pahalgam, Abhinav Pandya’s book *Inside the Terrifying World of Jaish-e-Mohammed*, assumes significant relevance as it offers a comprehensive analysis of the operational structure of Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and underscores the grave national security challenges being faced by Indian security forces and policymakers over the last few decades. The book aims to give critical insights into the inception, expansion and operations of JeM. Through meticulous research and analysis, the author effectively upholds the intent behind the book’s title. Drawing on high-

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value, confidential sources such as intelligence dossiers, interrogation reports, interviews of former and active JeM militants and over ground workers (OGWs); in addition to charge sheets, and discussions with intelligence and security professionals, the author presents compelling insights into the group's ideology, strategies and tactics, thereby offering an unsettling but informative journey into the terrifying world of JeM.

The book commences by analysing the Deobandi school of thought, which forms the ideological foundation of JeM, while also looking into other Islamist ideologies and their regional affiliations. It delves into how Deobandism impacts JeM's ideological worldview, its preachers and followers, and how significantly it influences the Pakistani state apparatus; thus, providing answers as to why even the ISI often struggles to contain JeM. JeM's reliance on Deobandi's extremist political ideology for perpetuating jihad against *kafirs*, the victory parades post Masood Azhar's release in 1999, and his extensive travel across the globe for garnering support and funds during JeM's inception, have been thoroughly documented. It also gives a historical overview of how the Afghan jihad, America's Global War on Terrorism (GWOt) and Pakistan's reduced reliance on local Kashmiri militant groups laid down the foundation for the birth of extremist anti-India groups in the region. The author also outlines how other transnational terrorist groups (TTGs) such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (both with whom JeM shares its pan-Islamic ambitions), Taliban and the Harkat groups have continued to share holistic ties with JeM, while the Tablighi Jamaat acts as a major source for cadre recruitment.

Throughout the book, several references have been made to JeM's radicalisation methods, with special emphasis on Azhar's oratory skills, indoctrinating speeches and charismatic religious influence. Quoting lines from Azhar's speech, "Allah said that Jannah is with armed jihad. You can find Jannah in AK-47s, mortars, grenades and canons", the author discusses Azhar's obsession with *jannah*, passion for *jihad* and abhorrence for *kafirs*. He further exemplifies Azhar's persuasiveness in framing India as the biggest threat to Islam and dramatising the perceived plight of Muslims across the world. These narratives have made him successful in radicalising and mobilising youth to carry out attacks for the liberation of Muslims across the region. Citing the National Investigation Agency's (NIA) founder, R.V. Raju, "Azhar is a strategic asset for Pakistan's ISI. They can afford to get any number of militants killed, but they need someone who can motivate the young to pick up guns to kill or die. They are cannon fodder. He is an ideologue. That's the difference." The author uses such examples to outline

how the highly-influential Azhar renders indispensable to ISI's strategic apparatus, compelling the latter to shield him for its Kashmir strategy.

A few other noteworthy insights in the book shed light on why the group persists to be a menace for the Indian security organisations. One such revelation is the high levels of secrecy adhered to by JeM. It discusses that whilst other groups are more interconnected, JeM frequently acts alone and refrains from sharing its cadres, OGWs and infiltration routes with other groups, thereby making it taxing for Indian officials to track them. In another key revelation, it highlights the stark differences between Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and JeM—often considered allies—by detailing the contrast in their cadres, recruitment tactics and ideologies. As such, the author states, “Generally, JeM takes approval from ISI; however, in some cases, if the ISI does not give it permission, Masood Azhar decides on his own”, thus highlighting the stark difference in the hierarchical adherence and operational goals of the state-loyalist LeT and state-sponsored yet independently functioning JeM. The author also discusses how LeT and JeM serve as important components of ISI's internal security strategy to keep “bad terrorists” in check, following organisational bans and cadre defections, underscoring the state's continued reliance on them.

With a special focus on its hallmark tactic—the *fidayeen* missions—the book elaborates on the training methods and techniques applied to evade security mechanisms. While it gives a detailed account of militants and their attacks, it also gives brief details of the lifestyles adopted by militants during their training, missions and interactions with host families in Kashmir. Additionally, it examines the impact of local and geopolitical developments, alongside India's changing counter-terrorism strategies, on the group's survival; and on its changing trend, tactics and scale of attacks over the two decades since its inception. However, the credibility of some of the data could have been strengthened by relying on verified, official sources not readily accessible in the public domain.

In conclusion, on the basis of the information in the book, it can be argued that JeM may actually be posing a bigger threat than other groups due to its ideological influence on Muslims in India. Moreover, the growing radicalisation propagated by the tightly-knit terrorist network across South Asia is acting as a catalyst in aiding these groups to pursue their goal of a pan-Islamic world conquered through *jihad*. The book also effectively underscores the persisting threat posed to national security by the strategic efforts of religious leaders to link local issues to global narratives to incite revolts. It also brings to attention the renewed interest of Al Qaeda in Indian

Subcontinent (AQIS) in Kashmir, JeM's links with Hamas, the possible involvement of female militants in the future, and the shift to hybrid militancy, all of which pose major threats to India's Kashmir and hinterland. It succeeds in demonstrating how JeM's local network coupled with Azhar's global outreach, continue to resonate with a growing number of radicalised youths, thus remaining a lingering threat over India's growing economy and ambitious ideals of *Viksit Bharat*.

The book is a valuable addition to the fields of terrorism and religious studies. It stands as a pertinent reference for scholars, analysts, policymakers and security officials, as well as for those individuals, nations and organisations who often overlook the complex realities of the Pakistani deep state, and disregard India's warnings to the world about the duplicitous and destabilising activities of its neighbour.