Dr. Di Placido was a Visiting Scholar in the Department of Political Science and the Center for Ideas and Society at the University of California Riverside (UCR); and an Academic Associate at the Cardiff School of Sport and Health Sciences at the Metropolitan University of Cardiff, Wales. His current research interests include the pedagogies of modern forms of yoga, the discursive study and the politics of scholarly knowledge production, social theory, sociocultural theorizing, and qualitative methodologies.

Shafi Md Mostofa, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: A Pyramid Root Cause Model*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan; 198 pp. ISBN: 978-3-030-79171-1, £86.99.

**Reviewed by:** Md. Didarul Islam, *University of Leeds, UK; University of Dhaka, Bangladesh*  
DOI: 10.1177/20503032221124563

Understanding the very nature of what drives a person to be a militant is an unfinished dilemma in academic literature, which subsequently paved the way for hundreds of academic articles and books. Bangladesh being no exception has also been witnessed militancy over the last few decades. In unpacking the nature of militancy in Bangladesh and what causes militancy in it, Shafi Md Mostofa (2021) in his *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: A Pyramid Root Cause Model* has engaged in a strong endeavor to elucidate three things: first, the Islamization process of Bangladesh and how it facilitated the rise of radicalization; second, the history and the drivers of radicalization/militancy; and finally, developing a pyramid root cause model to explain a linear relationship between causal factors and the end result. The key argument of the book is based on his fieldwork that suggests even though there are many socio-economic, political, personal and global factors which drive an individual to be a militant, it is a radical ideology that motivates an individual to become a militant by following a path of what the author calls “a Pyramid root cause model.” To the author, ideology justifies the individual’s efforts to become a militant.

Mostofa (2021) has divided his book into seven chapters which chronologically explains radicalization in Bangladesh from its origins to the present with special reference to the period between 2009–2020. The introduction contains a comprehensive literature review on radicalization, which allows for his key argument to fit with it. Mostafa notes that ideological factors received little attention in international literature and this lacuna, the author has tried to fill in this research gap with his position that “ideology” is the root cause of radicalization. The book is grounded on an excellent methodological foundation. The author mainly uses interview methods where he interviewed nearly seventy respondents from different backgrounds in Bangladesh including professors, security officials, and NGO personals.

In chapter 2, “The Islamization of Bangladesh,” the author explains how Islam became a dominant religion in the socio-political life in Bengal over the years. A general reader may question the relevance such a chapter has to radicalization, but they will realize that a key argument of the author is grounded in the chapter where he succinctly says that Islam had a radical fervor in Bengal and both Islamization from above and Islamization from below accelerated the rise of radicalization in Bengal. When Islam spread in Bengal, it was, at times, aided by the use of force and even the Sufis were not as nonviolent as popularly depicted. In addition, the expansion of Wahabi movements like the Faraizi movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth century fostered radicalization in Bengal. Later, this latent radicalization has been accelerated when Islamization from above (when the state}
apparatus started using Islam as a tool) was used by political elites. In brief, the author says that radicalization has been an innate state of mind of Bengal people due to the politicization of religion over centuries. An important contribution of the author is to inumerate the idea of Islamization from below and Islamization from above. He writes: “This Islamization from below accelerates Islamization from above, because Islam becomes a tool for the legitimization of the dominant ruling elites. The Islamization of Bangladesh from both below and above transforms Islamists/ fundamentalists into king–makers” (75).

Chapter 3 illustrates the rise and growth of militancy in Bangladesh where the author shows that radicalization has not been developed in Bangladesh overnight; instead, a series of historical periods have shaped the radicalization process in Bangladesh. The author brilliantly pictures how the foreign fighters in the Afghan and Palestine wars stirred the radicalization of Bangladesh. Chapters 4 and 5 collates the principal reasons behind Islamist militancy in Bangladesh where he divides the causes into three broad spectrums: local causes, ideology, and global factors. In chapter 4, the author shows how local causes, which include economic, political, social, cultural, educational, psychological, and personal frustration factors, drive individuals to become militants in different Islamist militant outfits. Perpetrators are highly skilled to capitalize on these drivers to bring vulnerable and at–risk individuals to the realm of militancy. Chapter 5 focuses on how the global factors including the fall of socialism, imperialism, the neo–liberal world order, Islamophobia and anti–Muslim sentiment in the West, the failure of Muslim majorities, modernization, diaspora radicalization, ISIS, Al–Qaeda connections, and the Rohingya crisis, etc. have aided some Bangladeshis to become militants. The author, besides situating the causes in academic literature, also deeply connected the interviews from his respondents. Even though there are numerous causes of militancy in Bangladesh, it is a radical ideology that is the root cause of militancy that the author considered to be a legitimization of other causes.

Building on this idea, the author brings a remarkable scholarly contribution to the radicalization puzzle in chapter 6 by developing a pyramid root cause model. Unlike the existing staircase models or NYPD (New York Police Department) models, the author claimed that radicalization is a process, but this process is more like a pyramid instead of a staircase. To the author, even though ideology is the root cause of radicalization, other socio–economic and political causes should be given proper attention to understand the causes of radicalization.

Having said that, I will offer three criticisms. Firstly, the author portrays anti–colonial heroes of undivided India like Masterda Surja Sen and Pritilata Waddedar as radicals and the anti–colonial movements as radical movements (82–84). Secondly, the author did not substantially provide arguments to the question of how his model fits with those who become violent extremists and internalize violent ideology after joining the group. And finally, the author remains skeptical throughout his book whether being radical is a necessarily means to become a terrorist/violent extremist. The unanswered question is whether an individual having a radical ideology will lead that individual to engage in terrorism. However, I agree with Howard Brasted (2021, ix) that “Dr. Mostofa’s investigation sets out to break new ground in explaining both its causes and trajectory and in his ‘pyramid root cause model’ arguably achieves this. Although clearly a purpose–built model, the clues it provides are of a kind to suggest that it may have a wider trans–national application.”

**ORCID iD**

Md. Didarul Islam © [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3977-4308](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3977-4308)
Reference
Brasted, Howard. 2021. “Forward.” In Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: A Pyramid Root Cause Model, by Shafi Mostofa, Md. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan

Author Biography
Md. Didarul Islam is currently pursuing his PhD at the University of Leeds as a Commonwealth Scholar. His thesis speaks on the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) policy framing process. He has an interest in different genres of research such as CVE policy, security, terrorism, radicalization, and refugee crisis. In addition, he is an Assistant Professor at the Department of World Religions and Culture, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. His upcoming co-edited book Former Extremists: Preventing and Countering Violence is going to be published by the Oxford University Press in 2023.