

Some Recent Publications on Islam/Muslims

Shia Muslims of India: Religion, Society and Culture by Nadeem Hasnain,
2020, New Royal Book Company

Shia Muslims in South Asia, in terms of population, are second only to Iran. However, as a distinct category of Muslims, they remained neglected. The flood of books and articles focused on ‘Shia Islam’ in Iran and middle east after the 1979 Iranian revolution led by Ayatullah Khomeini but the Shias of India and Pakistan remained on the academic periphery. Earlier, their visibility in India was confined to the Moharrum processions and mourning rituals on roads for a few days in an year. A few studies done previously dealt with their religious faith and its history, not the society and culture. There was hardly any field study of their social-cultural life as a living and throbbing community.

This book, based on field data, presents various aspects of ‘Lived Islam’-beyond ‘Textual Islam’- in terms of Shia faith. Beginning from a short socio-religious history of Shiaism and its development in India, it moves to present their social institutions-marriage, family, kinship, economic organization, political organization and a separate chapter on Shia women. Moreover, it also covers some other important features of their social life such as life cycle rituals and ceremonies and the impact of local Hindu traditions over them, their ‘umbilical relationship’ with India, Sunni-Shia conflict in Lucknow and *Azadaari* as the defining feature of their identity. Thus the endeavour was to present the social reality of the Shias, a small but important minority of India.

This work may be taken as a major contribution to our understanding of the everyday life of the Shias of India. It also makes an attempt to situate India in global Shi’ism.

Moharrum Azadari: Ethnography of Mourning by Nadeem Hasnain, 2020,
New Royal Book Company

No event in the history of Islam has so deeply stirred the emotions of Muslims as the massacre at Karbala. Like the crucifixion of Christ, *Shahadat* (martyrdom) of Imam Husain has lent a halo to Shiaism. The social, moral, and political implications of the ‘Tragedy of Karbala’ immensely reflect themselves through the glowing tributes paid to Husain by the rulers, scholars and commoners of different faiths, communities, and regions. A time span of more than 1400 years has not diminished the popularity of the tragic event.

Azadaari involves a range of mourning beliefs and rituals related with the martyrdom at Karbala, now in Iraq, during the month of Moharrum, the first month of the Islamic calendar. Though an integral part of a Shia Muslim’s socio-religious existence, it is shared by

a large number of Sunni Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians in the Indian sub-continent. Since Azadaari is observed in different parts of the world and it is an inseparable part of the South Asian socio-religious ethos, the number and variety of customs, rituals, and traditions of Azadaari cannot be compared with any other region including Iran and Iraq.

The book describes the Azadaari of Awadh region and Deccan, especially Hyderabad, two of the most prominent centres of Azadaari in The world. The role played by Azadaari in the social, emotional and cultural life of the people has also been dealt with along with its' role as a form of political protest and struggle in the Muslim world.

“ Karbala is memory. Memory is human, all too human; history is not. Such is the timelessness of the memory that the howl of Karbala still echoes in the air after all these centuries. Such is the versatility of the symbolism attached to it that it had attracted poets, mourners, mystics, revolutionaries, devotees and writers alike”

-Suleman Akhtar(2019)

Women and Gender in the Qur'an by Celene Ibrahim, Oxford University Press, 2020

In *Women and Gender in the Qur'an* (Oxford University Press in 2020), Celene Ibrahim explores key themes related to gender in the Qur'an, focusing on women, such as female sexuality, female kin and relations, and female figures in the sacred text. Among her findings is that there are no archetypal women in the Qur'an and instead, the Qur'an provides a wide-ranging depiction of women, who figure as negative and positive exemplars and ultimately serve the specific didactic aims of Qur'anic narratives. The Qur'an invokes their good and bad examples, Ibrahim notes, especially to construct a moral framework for its immediate audience, the early Muslim community, the emerging polity.

In our discussion, she talks about the primary contributions of the book and its origins; she explains her choice to use a Qur'an-only approach to investigating the question of gender; and we discuss specific content from the book, such as the Qur'an's portrayals of daughters and mothers, Prophet Yusuf's harassment incident, women's speech, Muhammad's wives in the Qur'an, the concept – and the gender – of heavenly beings, such as the hoor, and a lot more.

The Feeling of History: Islam, Romanticism, and Andalusia by Charles Hirschkind, University of Chicago Press, 2020

Charles Hirschkind's lyrical and majestic new book *The Feeling of History Islam, Romanticism, and Andalusia* (University of Chicago Press, 2020) represents a profound work of retrieval that launches and executes a stinging rebuke of an ontology of Europe that presumes its exceptionalism. The central focus of Hirschkind's study is Andalucismo, or a

discursive, aesthetic, and political tradition that seeks to disrupt the alleged cleavage between medieval and modern Spain by recovering the deep and penetrating imprints of Muslim Iberia on contemporary Spanish society. To engage Spain's Muslim and Jewish past not as a bygone and irrelevant relic but as indelibly entwined to the present requires a form of attunement to the past that is activated by the sensoria and suspicious of historicist rigor. In the course of this poetically charged book, one meets a range of thinkers from across the political spectrum, and travels in unexpected avenues of inquiry such as the centrality of Flamenco to Andalucismo.

The Feeling of History combines piercing attention to the productive importance of the sensoria in encountering the past with an astonishingly lucid critique of dominant strands of the discipline of history. What emerges from this exercise is not only a richly textured interrogation of a hugely important though often lampooned tradition of Andalucismo, but also a politically urgent reconsideration of modern secular conceptions of how the past must engage and make claims on the present.

Muhammad and the Empires of Faith

The Making of the Prophet of Islam, by Sean W. Anthony,

University of California Press, 2020

Contemporary historians have searched for the historical Muhammad along many paths. In *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith: The Making of the Prophet of Islam* (University of California Press, 2020), Sean Anthony, Professor of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at Ohio State University, recommends employing non-Muslim and Muslim sources in tandem in order to view a fuller landscape of Late Antiquity. Anthony revisits the earliest Arabic materials, including the Qur'an, epigraphic and archeological evidence, as well as contemporaneous non-Muslim sources, and accounts preserved in the sira-maghazi literature. These make up the four cardinal sources for his historical and philological method. Anthony's book both introduces a comprehensive portrait of the sources available for understanding Muhammad in his time period, as well as demonstrates how we can arrive at new insights through a "lateral" reading across the Late Antique period. In our conversation we discuss the earliest evidence mentioning Muhammad, non-Muslim testimonies, narratives of Muhammad under the Umayyads, reinvestigating Muhammad as a merchant, the role of the scholarly tradition in recording biographical accounts, the sira of Ibn Ishaq, how Abbasid imperial discourses shaped biographical narratives, literary conventions and cultural aesthetics of the late antique hagiographical writings, comparative readings across Late Antiquity, and future directions for historians.

**Remaking Muslim Lives: Everyday Islam in Post-war
Bosnia and Herzegovina** by David Henig, University of Illinois Press, 2020

The violent disintegration of Yugoslavia and the cultural and economic dispossession caused by the collapse of socialism continue to force Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina to reconfigure their religious lives and societal values. David Henig draws on a decade of fieldwork to examine the historical, social, and emotional labor undertaken by people to live in an unfinished past--and how doing so shapes the present. In particular, Henig questions how contemporary religious imagination, experience, and practice infuse and interact with social forms like family and neighborhood and with the legacies of past ruptures and critical events. His observations and analysis go to the heart of how societal and historical entanglements shape, fracture, and reconfigure religious convictions and conduct.

The Routledge Handbook of Islam and Gender
by Justine Howe, Routledge, 2020

The Routledge Handbook of Islam and Gender (Routledge, 2020), edited by Justine Howe, includes an excellent introduction to Islam and gender as well as to the volume and 31 content chapters, written by national and international, and established and emerging scholars. It encompasses a wide range of scholarship on many themes in the study of gender and Islam, including sex, sexuality, masculinity, femininity, women's lived experiences, female authority, fertility, and queerness. It is organized in seven parts, which are: foundational texts in historical and contemporary contexts; sex, sexuality, and gender difference; political and religious displacements; negotiating law, ethics, and normativity; vulnerability, care, and violence in Muslim families; and representation, commodification, and popular culture. Each section utilizes various approaches, theories, and methods in understanding Islam, and examines key questions and debates in the specific area the chapters fall in.

The book makes for an excellent introduction to Islam and gender, its audience not limited to specialists and experts of Islam, but also undergraduate and graduate students of Islam, gender, religion, Anthropology, History, Sociology, to name a few. It is an essential pedagogical tool for the classroom, as well as an essential reference for any researcher of Islam.

**Indian Muslim Women's Movement: For Gender Justice and Equal
Citizenship** by Zakia Soman and Noorjehan Safia Niaz, Notion Press, 2020

This collection of essays and articles captures the beginning of the Muslim women's movement in India in the last two decades. Written at different points during the journey, these pieces provide a glimpse into the collective tumultuous journey of women demanding reform in Muslim family law in India and for equal citizenship without discrimination. This

journey was undertaken by ordinary women under their own leadership. This collection highlights the challenges faced by women. It also celebrates successes such as the organization of women into groups, abolition of triple talaq and women's entry into the *mazar* of Haji Ali Dargah. This book is a collection of articles written by authors, individually and jointly in various newspapers, magazines, journals and other publications. It challenges the misogynist regressive norms for women in family set by patriarchal religious groups. It calls for state accountability in providing safety, security and equality to Muslim citizens. Based on experiences and insights from grounded struggle of ordinary women, these essays give hope and provide strength in addressing discrimination through shared vision and collective democratic action. It calls out the failure of conservative religious leadership as well as elected representatives in providing an enabling environment to the community and particularly, women. It calls out certain feminists for their dual standards and for unsuccessful attempts to weaken the movement for reform in family law led by ordinary Muslim women.

The Language of History: Sanskrit Narratives of Muslim Pasts by Audrey Truschke, Columbia University Press, 2021

The Language of History analyses a hitherto overlooked group of histories on Indo-Muslim or Indo-Persian political events, namely a few dozen Sanskrit texts that date from the 1190s until 1721. As soon as Muslim political figures established themselves in northern India in the 1190s-when the Ghurids overthrew the Chauhan kingdom and ruled part of northern India from Delhi-Indian intellectuals wrote about that political development in Sanskrit. Indian men (and at least one woman) produced dozens of Sanskrit texts on Muslim-initiated political events. These works span Delhi Sultanate and Mughal rule, including texts that deal with Deccan sultanates and Muslim-led polities in the subcontinent's deep south. India's premodern learned elite only ceased to write on Indo-Muslim political power in Sanskrit when the Mughal Empire began to fracture beyond repair in the early eighteenth century. In other words, Sanskrit writers produced histories of Indo-Persian rule throughout nearly the entire time span of that political experience. This book seeks, for the first time, to collect, analyse, and theorize Sanskrit histories of Muslim-led and, later, as Muslims became an integral part of Indian cultural and political worlds, Indo-Muslim rule as a body of historical materials. This archive lends insight into formulations and expressions of premodern political, social, cultural and religious identities. Given the current political climate in India, where nationalist claims are often grounded on fabricated visions of India's premodernity, this book also contributes to ongoing debates in the Indian public sphere.

Islam, Civility and Political Culture (New Directions in Islam)

by Milad Milani, Vassilios Adrahtas, Springer Nature, 2020

This book provides a comprehensive and interdisciplinary exploration of civility and political culture in the Muslim world.

The contributions consider the changing interface between religion and politics throughout Islamic history, and into the present. Extending beyond saturated approaches of ‘political’ and/or ‘militant’ Islam, this collection captures the complex sociopolitical character of Islam, and identifies tensions between the political-secular and the sacred-religious in contemporary Muslim life.

The alternative conceptual framework to traditional analyses of secularisation and civility presented across this volume will be of interest to students and scholars across Islamic studies, religious studies, sociology and political science, civilisation studies, and cultural studies.