

**Jamal Malik, *Islam in South Asia: A Short History*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2012, pp. 520, ₹745.**

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There are more Muslims in South Asia than in any other region of the world. South Asia is also a compact geographical region which is the meeting place of three major world religions. The majority population in the four most important South Asian countries—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka—profess Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism.

Though a lot of material has been published on Islam in South Asia, the book under review carries a whiff of freshness as it does not focus on political history alone, but the sociological aspect has also been taken care of. When the author talks about the cultural integration during the Mughal Period, he brings about various cultural nuances. Most of the chapters are followed by excursus highlighting a particularly important aspect of the period. For instance, after Chapter 7, dealing with 'Regional States, National Markets, and European Expansion' (approx. 1700–1800), valuable material has been given on Islamic endowments (Wakf)—an important form of Islamic charity. Similarly, after Chapter 9, dealing with the period 1800–1900 AD, the problem of Urdu has been analysed in a historical perspective; while dealing with colonial reform, the Khilafat Movement and Muslim Nationalism excursus on the discourse of communalism have been provided. But it is not confined to the period up to 1947; it stretches up to the issue of Muslim Personal Law, Shah Banos' case and the Ramjanm Bhumi–Babri Masjid issue. In another chapter dealing with the integration of nation-state and secession, not only have the dynamics of Partition been discussed but also the current discourse on 'Islamic Fundamentalism' in South Asia.

In most of the historical narrations of South Asia, the social structure of Muslims received only scant attention. But Jamal Malik with full sociological authenticity has analysed the social stratification among the Muslims of this region thus adding to the scant literature in history on the 'caste' among the Non-Hindu communities. It is to reemphasise the fact that the 'Textual Islam' and the 'Lived Islam' are not one and the same thing. The Islamic theological and philosophical precepts and principles on the one hand and the local, syncretic elements on the other were integrated in South Asian Islam. With the advent of Islam in South Asia, the culture became a composite culture which is described in popular parlance as 'Ganga–Jamuni Tehzeeb'. In the process, the cultural as well as the religious life of South Asia was immensely enriched. Several new religious traditions emerged. Pranam Panth, Kabir Panth, Sikhism, etc., are some of the obvious examples. Urdu is also a prominent example of the enrichment of South Asian Culture due to the impact of Islam.

Talking about the post-colonial period, the author has also written about the contribution of Nehru, described as the 'Nehruvian Era', that stood for composite culture, secular nationalism and communal harmony. As a result, the economic situation of Muslims also improved as it 'sought to enhance Muslim social

mobility in administration and economy by reforming educational institutions. These measures, however, basically promoted urban groups at the cost of rural population.' This is a debatable point because the rampant poverty among the urban Muslims cannot be ignored. In the same chapter on the social structure of Muslims of India, religious differences among the Muslims have also been discussed based on different branches of Deobandis, Ahl e Hadis and Barelvis as well as various Shia and Sufi groups.

As 'icing on the cake', the debate on 'Indian Muslims and Muslim Indians' (approx. 1947–2002) has also been included. In this chapter, some very important aspects which were either ignored or minimised have also been discussed such as the debate between Syed Abul Hasan Nadwi and Husain Ahmed Madani—a strong nationalist, and the stand taken by several Islamic scholars, prominently Moulana Wahiduddin Khan who strongly advocate 'absolute ijtihad'—the creative application of Islamic Law to meet the challenge of the changing social conditions. Madarsa education and its modernisation has also been dealt with to portray the contemporary situation of Muslims. To top it all, such current issues as Shah Bano, Salman Rushdie, the demolition of the Babri Masjid and its aftermath and its impact on Indian Muslims have also been dealt with.

The book under review may be placed under a different genre for its contemporaneity and shall serve as an invaluable resource to all those interested in the intellectual, social and cultural history of South Asian Muslims; especially students of sociology, social anthropology and political science shall find it immensely useful.

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