

Some Recent Publications on Islam / Muslims

Islam Translated : Literature, Conversion and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia by **Ronit Ricci**. University of Chicago Press. 2011

Muslims have been historically connected in various ways. Networks have fostered the spread of Islam through commerce and trade, Sufi brotherhoods and pilgrimage. Ideas too have traveled these paths and literary networks have facilitated cultural exchange across geographic and linguistic boundaries. The role of language in the process of making Islam intelligible to various local audiences serves as a shared thread for this excellent new book. This innovative study, which won the American Academy of Religion's Best First Book in the History of Religions Award, explores the role of Arabic in South and Southeast Asia as it affected Javanese, Malay, and Tamil Literatures. Ronit Ricci, Researcher at the Australian National University, determines the relationship between translations and religious conversion in the process of Arabization and vernacularization in these three linguistic contexts. Translation serves as tools for self-fashioning Islam in particular contexts, which is witnessed in the numerous telling of the *Book of One Thousand Question*. This detailed and theoretically rich study offers new perspective for Understanding Muslim communities who formulate and maintain a collective identity through textual production in local languages. It should be required reading for anyone who is interested in non-Arabic speaking Muslim communities from now on.

- Kristian Pettersen

Cosmopolitans and Heretics : New Muslim Intellectuals and the Study of Islam by **Carol Kersten**. Columbia University Press. 2011

Often when we read about new Muslim intellectuals we are offered a presentation of their politicized Islamic teachings and radical interpretations of theology, or western readings that nominally reflect the Islamic tradition. We are rarely introduced to critical Muslim thinkers who neither abandon their Islamic civilization heritage nor adopt, wholesale, a Western intellectual perspective.

In Carol Kersten's book, we learn about a few modern Muslim thinkers who engage their Islamic intellectual heritage with the philosophic apparatus of contemporary Western

though. Kersten, a professor of Religious and Islamic Studies at King's College, London, has tracked Muslim thinkers for years (follow his blog *Critical Muslims*), and thus book reflects a deep understanding of the wider dialogues occurring in contemporary Islamic thought. His analysis also traverses geographical limitations of much of the scholarship on contemporary Islam by discussing figures from both the eastern and western regions of Islam. We are introduced to the thought of Nurcholish Madjid (Indonesia), Hasan Hanafi (Egypt), and Mohammad Arkoun (Algeria). Through these thinkers Kersten explores how phenomenology, hermeneutics, secularization and postcolonial vocabulary can assist us in approaching religion generally. He frames his work through Russell McCutcheon's model of theological phenomenological and critical-anthropological strategies for engaging religion in order to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches in the study of Islam. Altogether, we have the first book length analysis of these important modern Muslims thinkers and their critique of both western scholarship and Muslim intellectualism.

- Kristian Pettersen

Muslims in Indian Cities : Trajectories of Marginalization (ed.) by Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot. 2012. C Hurst and Co. (Publishers) Ltd.

Numbering more than 150 million, Muslims constitute the largest minority in India, yet they suffer the most politically and socio-economically. Forced to contend with severe and persistent prejudice, India's Muslims are often targets of violence and collective acts of murder.

While the quality of Muslim life may lag behind that of Hindus nationally, local and inclusive cultures have been resilient in the south and the east. Within India's cities, however, the challenges Muslims face can be harder to read. In the Hindi belt and in the north, Muslims have known less peace, especially in the riot-prone areas of Ahmadabad, Mumbai, Jaipur, and Aligarh, and in the capitals of former Muslim states, - Delhi, Hyderabad, Bhopal and Lucknow. These cities are rife with Muslim ghettos and slums. However, self-segregation has also played a part in forming Muslim enclaves, such as in Delhi and Aligarh, where traditional elites and a new Muslim middle class have regrouped for physical and cultural protection.

Combining first hand testimony with sound critical analysis, this volume follows urban Muslim life in eleven Indian cities, providing uncommon insight into a little-known but highly consequential subject.

Lives of Muslims in India : Politics Exclusion and Violence by **Abdul Shaban**. Routledge India. 2011

The fast consolidating identities along religious and ethnic lines in recent years have considerably minoritized Muslims in India. The wide-ranging essays in this volume focus on the intensified exclusionary practices against Indian Muslims, highlighting how, amidst a politics of violence, confusing policy frameworks on caste and class lines, and institutionalized riot systems, the community has also suffered from the lack of leadership from within. At the same time, they have emerged as a mass around which the politics of vote bank, ‘appeasement’, foreigners, ‘Pakistanis’ within the country, etc. are innovated and played upon, making them further apprehensive about asserting their legitimate right to development. The important issue of the double marginalization of Muslim women and attempts to reform the Muslim Personal Law by some civil society groups is also discussed. Contributed by academics, activists and journalists, the articles thus discuss issues of integration, exclusion and violence, and attempt to understand categories like identity, minority, multiculturalism and nationalism with regard to and in the context of Indian Muslims.

A Voyage to Modernism : Syed Ahmed Khan Translated and edited by **Mushirul Hasan and Nishat Zaidi**. Primus Books. 2011

The nature of Muslim knowledge concerning the West through travel accounts makes for fascinating reading. The eighteenth-century encounters of Munshi Ihtishamuddin and Mirza Abu Taleb Khan, embedded in their travelogues, however, seem very distant and less urgent. With Syed Ahmed however, begins an entirely new phase with his interplay between Muslims and the West, on the one hand, and between Islam and Christianity, on the other, even though his portrait of England is sometimes facile, his account of his travels opens the

door to new questions, particularly because this was the period when the relations between Europeans and Indians were at the centre of many debates. Consequently, passages in the *Musafiran-i-Londan* introducing ‘Europe’ and ‘England’ are historically important enough to merit attention, since they are not used merely as fulsome descriptions of Western Society’s advances but also contain the germs of the Justification for an Anglo-Muslim rapprochement. This makes the *Musafiran-i-Londan* an important source for the construction of the history of an era.

Its English translation, the first ever to be undertaken in full, makes it accessible to those who have no knowledge of Urdu. Although several accounts of ‘India and West’ are available, a voyage to Modernism is of special significance. Set apart from his later endeavours like the *Tahzibul Akhlaq* and *Asar-al Sanadid*, it is the Syed’s impressions caught in a voyage to Modernism that mattered to all those who knew anything about his standing in public life and his stature as an enlightened reformer in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This eminently readable translation is enriched by editorial interventions by translators and editors of the work, and supported by rare archival photographs.

Muslim Law in India and Abroad by Tahir Mahmood and Saif Mahmood.

Universal Law Publishers, 2012

Muslims are the second largest religious community of India and therefore their personal law constitutes an important chapter of the Nation’s legal system.

This book offers a comprehensive study of the entire gamut of Muslim law as applicable in India. Extensive critique of each of the legislative enactments of India in this sphere are followed by a lucid exposition of the principles of uncodified Muslim law in their true spirit and in conformity with the present-day social conditions.

With a view to inviting attention to the contemporary understanding of Muslim law elsewhere, the book ends with glimpses of its reform in many of the Muslim-dominated and Muslim-minority countries. Texts of all statutory laws of India on the subject are included in the book and cases coverage is until January 2012.

Fatal Fault lines : Pakistan, Islam and the West by Irfan Husain.

Harper Collins. 2012

Do people of different faiths, different histories and backgrounds share similar goals and objectives? How are citizens of Muslim countries different from Americans in their aspirations and perspectives? Does humanity, at its core, share common values- ones that can form the basis of peaceful co-existence for people from different parts of the world belonging to different religions? Do we really understand each other's perspectives?

These questions have never been more important than they are now, as two societies stare at each other across an abyss that threatens to engulf us all.
