Ismailism and Islam in Modern South Asia

This book explores the evolution of a Shia Ismaili identity and crucial aspects of the historical forces that conditioned the development of the Muslim modern in late colonial South Asia. It reassesses the tortuous legal process that, since the 1860s, recast a Shia Imami identity for the Ismailis culminating with the installation of a line of successive living Imams, the Aga Khan(s), at the apex. It illustrates how, under the Imamate of Aga Khan III, the community virtually reinvented itself in the transregional western Indian Ocean and gradually in the global arena. This process reflects the complexities of heightened internationalist organizational activities that animated several of world’s major religions since the late nineteenth century — an age of ‘religious internationals’, as this book posits. Marshalling a rich corpus of neglected primary sources, the book elaborates on questions such as the Aga’s understanding of colonial modernity, his ideas of India, restructured modalities of community governance and the evolution of Imamate-sponsored institutions. It illuminates key strands in scholarship that characterized the development of the Muslim and Shia Ismaili modern, and above all, Muslim universality vis-à-vis denominational particularities that often transcended the confines of the modular nation and state structure. These are questions of crucial contemporary relevance that both inform the functioning of the present Imamate and forge what this book calls an ‘Ismaili international’. The book will interest historians, students and scholars in related disciplines working on Islam in modern South Asia and its wider networks.

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Ismailism and Islam in Modern South Asia
Community and Identity in the Age of Religious Internationals

Soumen Mukherjee
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### List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKA</td>
<td>Aga Khan Academies</td>
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<tr>
<td>AKAM</td>
<td>Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance</td>
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<td>AKDN</td>
<td>Aga Khan Development Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>AKES</td>
<td>Aga Khan Educational Services</td>
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<td>AKF</td>
<td>Aga Khan Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>AKFED</td>
<td>Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development</td>
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<td>AKHCP</td>
<td>Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>AKHS</td>
<td>Aga Khan Health Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>AKPBS</td>
<td>Aga Khan Planning and Building Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKRSP</td>
<td>Aga Khan Rural Support Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKTC</td>
<td>Aga Khan Trust for Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSASUC</td>
<td>Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAMWS</td>
<td>East African Muslim Welfare Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBO</td>
<td>Faith-Based Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOCUS</td>
<td>Focus Humanitarian Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIS</td>
<td>Institute of Ismaili Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOR</td>
<td>India Office Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISA</td>
<td>Ideological State Apparatus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITREB</td>
<td>Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG</td>
<td>Lloyd George Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LON</td>
<td>League of Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Malcolm Darling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEC</td>
<td>Muhammadan Educational Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>Maharashtra State Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAI</td>
<td>National Archives of India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNI</td>
<td>Norwegian Nobel Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>OUP</td>
<td>Oxford University Press</td>
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<tr>
<td>REC</td>
<td>Religious Education Centres</td>
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<tr>
<td>RNGO</td>
<td>Religious Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP</td>
<td>Secondary Teacher Education Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNAG</td>
<td>United Nations Archives at Geneva</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary

**Ajam**
the Persian cultural sphere; a person not born Arabian

**Allama**
an honorary title for highly regarded scholar of Islamic thought

**Anjuman**
community assembly

**Arabiyya**
group solidarity

**Bandobasts**
rules of conduct instituted by communities such as the Parsis for governance

**Bekhudi**
selflessness instrumental in creating a community, as conceptualized by Muhammad Iqbal

**Bida**
deviant innovations

**dai al mutlaq**
religious leader of the Mustali Ismailis, or the Bohras; hidden Imam’s vicegerent

**(abbreviated as dai)**

**dawat**
religious establishment of communities such as the Bohras, religious missions

**farman**
edict

**ginan**
religious literature of Ismailis of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent

**hadith**
sayings of the Prophet Muhammad

**Hazir Imam**
lit. Imam of the time, refers to the spiritual head of the Ismailis

**Hizmet**
in Turkish, Islamic principles and ideas of service of the Gülen Movement

**Ijma**
consensus of the Muslim community, or of the ulama

**Ijtihad**
independent reasoning in interpreting Islamic sources

**Iman**
belief

**Islah**
amendment, improvement

**Isnad**
means of assessing the *hadith* traditions on the basis of chain of transmitters

**Jamaat**
assembly; congregation

**Jamaatkhana**
assemble hall used for religious and social activities of community
Glossary

**Jihad** lit. ‘to strive’, with significant moral connotations for both internal or spiritual sphere as well as external or physical ‘holy war’

**Kamaria** jamaat accountant

**Khudi** self; individual, a key component of Muhammad Iqbal’s politico-religious thought

**Malahida** heretic

**Mehfel** association; assembly; gathering

**Millat** community; an Ottoman Turkish system of administration of different ethnic and religious groups

**Mujtahid** one who is qualified to perform *ijtihad*

**Mukhi jamaat** treasurer

**Mukti** liberation

**Mumin** believer

**Mutaa** temporary marriage

**Nurcu (or Nur)** light

**Panchayat** a community organization governance constituted originally of five members

**Pirs** saints

**Qaum** community; nation

**Sharia** Islamic law

**Sunna** tradition orienting conduct of life, more specifically referring to Prophetic tradition

**Tanẓimat** a series of Ottoman administrative and constitutional reforms in the nineteenth century

**Tafsir** exegesis, especially Quranic exegesis

**Talim** authoritative teaching

**Taqlid** acceptance of religious ruling coming from higher religious authorities; blind adherence

**Tagyyia** religious dissimulation; doctrine of mental reservation

**Tarjuman** interpretation

**Tawil** classical interpretive approach in Ismailism; science of elucidating particular meaning of the Quran

**Ulama** theologians (sing. *alim*)

**Umma** people; community, usually refers to the Muslim community
Note on Transliteration

I have not used any diacritical marks but have, naturally, retained those used in quotations while citing other works. Non-English words are usually italicized (e.g. jamaat), while well-known terms are not (e.g. Imam). Such words and expressions have been all glossed in their first usage. In addition, a separate glossary has been also provided for the readers' convenience. Names of places, institutions etc. have been spelt according to their contemporaneous spellings (e.g. Bombay; Simla Deputation; Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College).