

# The Shi'a in Modern South Asia

## Religion, History and Politics



*Edited by*

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## Preface

This book brings together a selection of papers first presented at the conference 'Contesting Shi'ism: Isna 'Ashari and Isma'ili Shi'ism in South Asia' held at Royal Holloway, University of London, in September 2011. The articles included here were first published as 'Isna 'Ashari and Isma'ili Shi'ism: From South Asia to the Indian Ocean', a special issue of *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24, 3 (2014).

The original conference was intended to address the fact that most scholarship on Shi'i Islam has focused upon the supposed Shi'i heartlands of Iran and Iraq, while academic interest in the South Asian Shi'a has somewhat lagged behind by comparison. This is despite the region's large Shi'i population, as well as the cultural importance that Shi'i regimes, elites and populations have historically held across the subcontinent. Recent years, however, have seen the production of a wealth of important studies within this rapidly expanding field, and it is hoped that the papers included within this volume will contribute to these discussions, and introduce readers to many of the conversations in current progress.

These articles are authored by numerous active scholars working across a range of disciplines, including history, religious studies, anthropology and political science. They explore the historical and contemporary dynamics of various South Asian Shi'i communities – both Isna 'Ashari and Isma'ili – over the last two centuries, and focus upon a range of Shi'i centres including Karachi, Lucknow, Bombay and Hyderabad, as well as South Asian Shi'i diasporic communities in East Africa. Taken *en masse*, these essays demonstrate the enduring vitality of these communities, whose members have responded in a range of ways to the opportunities and challenges of the complex religious, social and political changes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We hope that these essays together will further facilitate a greater recognition of the historical influence of Shi'ism within South Asian Islamic cultures and

societies more broadly, and will help to establish South Asia at the centre, rather than the margins, of studies of the Shi'a in the modern world.

For enabling the original conference to take place, we would like to thank our hosts at Royal Holloway, as well as the Newton International Fellowship Scheme, jointly run by the British Academy and the Royal Society, for their generous sponsorship of the event. We would also like to thank all participants and attendees at the event for their valued contributions. Special thanks are owed to Professor Francis Robinson for his support, and for his plenary address which is re-published here. We would also like to thank Professor Sarah Ansari, as well as Charlotte de Blois and the rest of the editorial team of the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, both for all their hard work in bringing the original special issue of the journal into being, and for their permission for the republication of these papers. Lastly, we are greatly indebted to Suvadip Bhattacharjee and others at Cambridge University Press, India for bringing this book to fruition.

Justin Jones  
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