



The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200-1800

By Muzaffar Alam

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The Languages of Political Islam illuminates the diverse ways in which Islam, from the time of its arrival in India in the twelfth century through its height as the ruling theology to its decline, adapted to its new cultural context to become "Indianized."

Muzaffar Alam shows that the adoption of Arabo-Persian Islam in India changed the manner in which Islamic rule and governance were conducted. Islamic regulation and statecraft in a predominately Hindu country required strategic shifts from the original Islamic injunctions. Islamic principles could not regulate beliefs in a vast country without accepting cultural limitations and limits on the exercise of power. As a result of cultural adaptation, Islam was in the end forced to reinvent its principles for religious rule. Acculturation also forced key Islamic terms to change so fundamentally that Indian Islam could be said to have acquired a character substantially different from the Islam practiced outside of India.

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Editorial Review

Review

"A fascinating window into one of South Asia's most creative historical periods."

(Holly Donahue *Virginia Quarterly Review*)

"A significant contribution to the understanding of medieval, pre-modern India."

(*Muslim World Book Review*)

"This work is the single most useful and reliable volume on medieval north Indian cultural history available today. . . . Alam's book will undoubtedly benefit students of history, literature, and religion."

(Syed Akbar Hyder *Journal of Asian Studies*)

"Alam works on a large canvas with sweeping brushstrokes, seeking to relate the political theory of Muslim states in South Asia . . . to the broader sweep of medieval and early modern Islamic thought. . . . Alam has created a powerful framework for rethinking not only the creation and spread of Mughal political culture but also its ramifications into the eighteenth century and beyond."

(Robert Travers *Eighteenth-Century Studies*)

From the Inside Flap

This book shows the ways in which political Islam, from its establishment in medieval north India, adapted itself to a variety of indigenous contexts and became deeply Indianized.

This process, by which preexistent Arabo-Persian traditions were molded to new Indian contexts, involved changes in the manner in which Islamic rule was conceived and conducted in the subcontinent. It became gradually apparent to the conquering Muslim sultans (and later to their successors, the Mughals), as well as to medieval thinkers and writers of treatises on Islamic morality, theology, and political doctrine, that the conduct of Islamic statecraft in a country comprising mostly Hindus entailed shifts in Islam's conceptual and institutional vocabulary. Islamic rulers could not command a vast country without accepting certain cultural limitations to the exercise of their power. In this process of acculturation, political Islam in India was forced to reinvent itself as a doctrine of rule.

From this stemmed a second change: a shift in the meanings of key Islamic terms, especially those pertaining to statehood, and in relations between rulers and subject populations. Through a close reading of a variety of texts, Muzaffar Alam shows that the vocabularies in use went through certain changes so fundamental that the language of Indian Islam became quite different from what was in vogue in contexts outside.

With its profound deployment of primary and secondary sources to study Indo-Muslim statecraft vis-à-vis Islamic theocratic languages over an eight-hundred-year stretch, this book provides major insights into the changing nature of political Islam in India.

About the Author

Muzaffar Alam is a professor in the Department of South Asian Languages and the Department of Civilization and History at the University of Chicago. He is the author of several books and coauthor of, most recently, *A European Experience of the Mughal Orient*.

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