



# The Aga Khan Case: Religion and Identity in Colonial India

By Teena Purohit

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**The Aga Khan Case: Religion and Identity in Colonial India** By Teena Purohit

An overwhelmingly Arab-centric perspective dominates the West's understanding of Islam and leads to a view of this religion as exclusively Middle Eastern and monolithic. Teena Purohit presses for a reorientation that would conceptualize Islam instead as a heterogeneous religion that has found a variety of expressions in local contexts throughout history. The story she tells of an Ismaili community in colonial India illustrates how much more complex Muslim identity is, and always has been, than the media would have us believe.

*The Aga Khan Case* focuses on a nineteenth-century court case in Bombay that influenced how religious identity was defined in India and subsequently the British Empire. The case arose when a group of Indians known as the Khojas refused to pay tithes to the Aga Khan, a Persian nobleman and hereditary spiritual leader of the Ismailis. The Khojas abided by both Hindu and Muslim customs and did not identify with a single religion prior to the court's ruling in 1866, when the judge declared them to be converts to Ismaili Islam beholden to the Aga Khan.

In her analysis of the *ginans*, the religious texts of the Khojas that formed the basis of the judge's decision, Purohit reveals that the religious practices they describe are not derivations of a Middle Eastern Islam but manifestations of a local vernacular one. Purohit suggests that only when we understand Islam as inseparable from the specific cultural milieus in which it flourishes do we fully grasp the meaning of this global religion.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

**Purohit** demonstrates admirably how, over the past two centuries, *Satpanthi* religious complexity has been ironed out into what she would term 'identitarian religion.' It is research much enriched by her deep understanding of the *gin?ns*...This book is an important contribution to understanding religious change in South Asia. (Francis Robinson *American Historical Review* 2013-10-01)

**Teena Purohit**'s book *The Aga Khan Case: Religion and Identity in Colonial India* develops a critical theme in the study of South Asian Islam, that of its heterogeneity. Despite the attention scholars have devoted to this topic, Islam persists in appearing to be a homogeneous category to many non-specialists. Purohit pushes against prevailing assumptions that Islam can be understood through studies of texts and the Arab world, showing instead how Islam is shaped by specific local contexts...The book engages essential sources for an important discussion of the diversity of South Asian Islam. Purohit's argument that the Ismaili community was constituted in an Indian context and shaped by both local traditions and Quranic doctrines is valuable, especially in its close attention to the particulars of the case. She offers a model for how scholars might understand identity formation in India, the influence of the categories of colonial modernity and why we should be wary of accepting the assumptions about identity that dominate the religious landscape of the subcontinent today. *The Aga Khan Case* will prove useful for graduate students?those with a foundation in the history of Islam and/or South Asia, especially?and for students of empire and comparative religions more broadly. (Amber H. Abbas *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 2013-10-01)

[A] compelling study of the religious practices of *Khojas* in western India...**Purohit**'s most important contribution to the field of South Asian religious studies and to the broader field of Islamic studies is her powerful and persuasive analysis of the vernacular Gujarati texts that give us insight into the religious practice of the *Khojas*...Purohit's work challenges and provides new insights into the history of the practice of South Asian Islam...The book will, no doubt, appeal to an educated public interested in the global history of Islam, as well as to scholars and students of Islamic studies and South Asian studies. (Rama Sundari Mantena *History* 2013-10-01)

This is an innovative, conceptually rich, and philologically adept intervention in the overcrowded field of syncretism and 'conversion studies,' the dominant apertures through which the question of Islam in India in historical perspective is usually viewed. **Purohit** in a welcome move is able to break free of specialisms and focus on a medley of key religious texts. (Shahid Amin, University of Delhi)

**Teena Purohit** presents us with a highly original study of the making of sectarian identity in modern India. Very suggestive is her argument about the way in which one such identity, Khoja Ismailism, was created as Muslim by an erasure of messianism as a form of non-identitarian interaction. (Faisal Devji, Oxford University)

### **About the Author**

Teena Purohit is Assistant Professor of Religion at Boston University.

## **Users Review**

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**Matt Cresswell:**

The publication with title The Aga Khan Case: Religion and Identity in Colonial India has lot of information that you can learn it. You can get a lot of gain after read this book. This particular book exist new know-how the information that exist in this reserve represented the condition of the world currently. That is important to you to find out how the improvement of the world. This book will bring you within new era of the the positive effect. You can read the e-book in your smart phone, so you can read that anywhere you want.

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