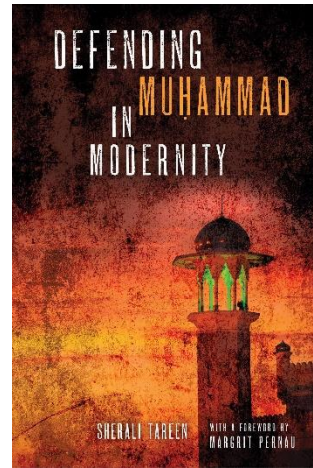


## Book Reviews

SherAli Tareen. *Defending Muhammad in Modernity*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2020. Pp. xxii+482. ISBN 976-0-268-10670-6. Paperback. Price: \$35.00.

This first book from SherAli Tareen is a masterful historical and theoretical analysis of South Asian Deobandi-Barelvi distinctions in the light of their respective responses to the challenges of modernity and colonialism. What is especially valuable is the author's close analysis of seminal texts of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. While many existing studies emphasize social, institutional, and political histories of South Asian Islam, Tareen's readings of the original writings composed in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu offer refreshing and insightful observations that navigate the often complex and arcane logic and discursive fields of South Asian Muslim scholars while bringing these debates into conversation with contemporary Western critical theory, especially as relevant to religious studies and political theology, as well as drawing insights from contemporary scholarship on other religious traditions in confronting modernity whether Christianity or, in the South Asian sphere, Hinduism and Buddhism. An important source of Tareen's theorizing is the work of Talal Asad on secularism. The presentation is rendered particularly engaging through the author's literary flare and judicious incorporation of biographical anecdotes that illuminate individual personalities at pivotal junctures in history.



The work consists of twelve chapters and provides an extensive critical apparatus, including suggestions for its use in a variety of

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\* <https://doi.org/10.52541/isiri.v61i2.2416>

pedagogic contexts. The book is divided into three parts. Part One on “Competing Political Theologies” focuses on the early nineteenth century; Part Two treats the later nineteenth century; and the third section consists of the final chapter on more recent Intra-Deobandi tensions featuring internal disagreements among Deobandi authors, in particular, Ḥajjī Imdād Allāh (d. 1899), Rashīd Aḥmad Gangōhī (d. 1905), and Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī (d. 1943).

A central theme in Tareen’s reading of these texts as excursions into political theology is that the seemingly arcane differences across Deobandi and Bareilvi scholars regarding the status of the Prophet Muḥammad and the range of popular devotional practices related to him are animated by profound existential and moral concerns (p. 25), namely those of divine sovereignty, prophetic authority and charisma, and the scope and legitimacy of everyday religious rituals, which became especially urgent for South Asian Muslims with the loss of empire and their reduced status under colonial domination.

For Tareen, the Deobandi/Bareilvi sub-traditions are above all contested, as are all discursive traditions. Studying rival Deobandi-Bareilvi positions and polemics, therefore, discloses how the ‘*ulamā*’ as custodians of tradition assembled their religious authority, through selecting memories and models of the past and developing distinctive imaginaries of God, the Prophet, and the community which then were mapped onto debates concerning law, theology, and everyday practice (p. 15). The continuing relevance of these discussions to the historical challenges facing Muslims is clear, and the approach of excavating the deeper existential issues underlying such debates is at the very core of the potential contribution of philosophy and theory to the understanding of the human and historical situation of lived religion.

The work takes off from a paradigmatic rupture represented in the career of the controversial and pivotal figure Shāh Ismā‘īl Shahīd (d. 1831). Tareen devotes much of Part One to reviewing specific works of Shāh Ismā‘īl opining that he wrote the famous reformist tract *Taqwiyat al-Īmān* (Fortifying Faith) as a response to moral chaos, and thereby departed from his previous orientation to treating abstruse and speculative mystical philosophy in the *ishrāqī* (Iranian abstruse philosophical) mode in works such as ‘*Abaqāt*. As background, Tareen undertakes some important comparisons to the approach of Shāh Ismā‘īl’s grandfather Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1762).

Tareen offers a pioneering analysis of several other texts of Shāh Ismā‘īl. Along with the *Taqwiyat al-Īmān*, a shorter and less well-known treatise considered in Chapter Three is the *Yak Rōzah*—since it was

composed in one day—that defended his strong position on what is possible for the divine (everything, including lying) against criticism by Fażl-i Ḥaqq Khairābādī. Next in Chapter Four Shāh, Ismā‘īl’s work *Manṣab-i Imāmat* which Tareen characterizes as a treatise on “salvational politics” is reviewed to demonstrate how this work on the ideal political order argues that the true sovereign has the goal of cultivating moral individuals and preserving public markers of Muslim distinctiveness rather than conquering or controlling a territorial state. Chapter Five, as a counterpoint, highlights the responses of Fażl-i Ḥaqq Khairābādī as a precursor to subsequent Barelvi positions.

Part Two focuses on the later part of the nineteenth century and in particular the emergence of Deobandism and Barelvism as distinct *maslaks*. In this part of the book, Tareen analyzes a number of seminal terms including *maslak*, *rasm*, and *bid‘ah* across diverse genres including reformist tracts, sermons, and letters, *fatāwā* collections, biographies, and narrative histories, in order to disclose important features of the emergence of Deobandi/Barelvi sub-traditions in South Asian Sunni Islam. A notable example is his treatment of the term *maslak*. According to Tareen’s etymology, *maslak* is derived from the Arabic cognate *sulūk* (conduct) and thus it evokes proper comportment and “the cultivation of virtues” although *maslak* in the South Asian Islamic context comes to represent a normative orientation that is yet malleable and often ambiguous and multivalent. In his exposition, Tareen lists three components of a *maslak* as being knowledge (the sources), hermeneutics (the interpretive protocols), and practices, arguing that the extensive amount of shared material and method across Deobandis and Barelvis is characteristic of their “neighborly epistemic,” despite the fact that the word *maslak* now commonly suggests difference and even competition. Of course, the “proximate other” in terms of the sociology of religion is often the very interlocutor with whom relations and exchanges are most charged and doctrinal differences most polemically highlighted.

In conclusion, this is an exemplary treatment of South Asian Muslim intellectual history by a scholar able to place the original texts into broader contexts, thereby demonstrating how debates and arguments about what initially may seem to be arcane doctrinal points and obscure practices, in fact, address fundamental theological and political crises with profound moral and existential implications. This analysis pushes back against the image of the Deobandis as Wahhābī anti-Sufis while resisting simplistic stereotypes of Deobandi-Barelvi orientations into the facile binaries of legal/mystical, puritan/populist, and reformist/traditional. Especially relevant to contemporary Pakistan are the

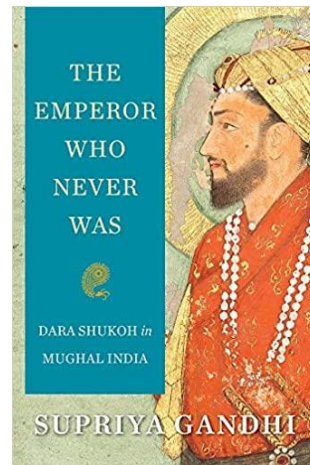
author's concluding reflections on the "internal other" such that the rich and continuing intellectual vitality and production of *madrasahs* and their scholars need to be engaged and encouraged by scholars and more broadly in the interest of a richer and more nuanced appreciation for Islamic thought. This work also exemplifies trends in the contemporary study of Islam through the author's approach that highlights the relevance of regional and historically specific and complex materials to broader questions of philosophy and theory that are debated across the humanities and social sciences within the global academy.

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Supriya Gandhi. *The Emperor Who Never Was: Dara Shukoh in Mughal India*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020. Pp. 349. ISBN 9780674987296. Hardcover. Price: \$29.22.

Recently, there is much debate among the scholars of medieval Indian history about prince Dārā Shukōh (d. 1659), the heir apparent of Mughal emperor Shāh Jahān (r. 1628-1658), who lost the battle of succession and his life to his brother Aurangzēb (r. 1658-1707). While Muslim orthodox historians of the day tried to portray Dārā as a heretic, historians from Hindutva-leaning ideology tried to picture him as a secular-minded prince who lost his chance to become the emperor due to the conspiracy of orthodox elements of the Mughal court. Supriya Gandhi's *The Emperor Who Never Was: Dara Shukoh in Mughal India* highlights both sides of Dārā's life. The author keeps a balance between Dārā's administrative and military duties in his father Shāh Jahān's court, and the prince's urge for understanding various Indic and Abrahamic ideas. In her own words,



I had no wish to promote an outdated and flawed idea of history that privileges "great men." Neither did I seek to step inside Dara Shukoh's mind and try to ascertain his inner motivations. But I did want to explore his context in the court, along with the Mughal state's workings, and the ideas

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