
Introduction: *The Shi'a in South Asia*

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The Shi'i communities of South Asia, roughly 60 million people, represent, after those of Iran, the second largest grouping of Shi'as in the Muslim world. Until recently our knowledge of them has not matched their numbers. Indeed, they, and here I refer to the Twelver Shi'as rather than the Isma'ilis, have suffered from the paradox of being both highly visible but in scholarly terms largely invisible. Where the Shi'a live in South Asian towns and cities, arguably, no community has been more visible or more audible: visible because of their great processions at Muharram; and audible, certainly at Muharram, but also throughout the year in their *majalis*, as they recount the events of Karbala, often transmitting them by loudspeaker to the *muhalla*.

Up to the 1980s these significant religious communities had attracted just two major works of scholarship: Hollister's, *The Shi'a of India* (1936) and Engineer's *The Bohras* (1980).¹ This dearth of scholarship began to change in the mid-1980s. First there was S.A.A. Rizvi's major two-volume survey of India's Twelver Shi'as (1986), followed by Juan Cole's path-breaking study of the establishment of the Shi'i state of Awadh from the eighteenth century (1988).² From the 1990s attention turned to Shi'i commemorative practice with Vernon Schubel's study of Shi'i devotional rituals (1993), David Pinault's studies of ritual and popular piety (1992) and devotional life (2001) which were followed in similar vein by Toby Howarth's examination of Shi'i preaching in Hyderabad (2005) and Syed Akbar Hyder's exploration of the role of Shi'i martyrdom in South Asian memory (2006).³ Subsequently there have been two important studies of the Khoja Isma'ilis: Marc van Grondelle's demonstration of the role of British imperial power in turning them into a successful transnational community (2009) and Teena Purohit's demonstration of how the Khoja Isma'ilis were created in their particular Muslim form by the removal of pluralistic religious practices from their devotions

¹John Norman Hollister, *The Shi'a of India*, (London, 1953); Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Bohras* (New Delhi, 1980).

²Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna 'Ashari Shi'is in India*, in 2 Vols. (Canberra, 1986); J. R. I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722–1859* (Berkeley, 1988).

³Vernon Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (Columbia, 1993); David Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York, 1992), and *Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India*, (Houndmills, 2001); Toby Howarth, *The Twelver Shi'a as a Muslim Minority in India: Pulpit of Tears* (Abingdon, 2005); Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York, 2006).

(2012).⁴ The year 2012 saw Justin Jones' authoritative work on the creative responses of Lucknow's Twelver Shi'as after the British brought Shi'i political power to an end.⁵ At the same time, and not before time, serious attention began to be paid to the role of women in Shi'i devotional practice in books by Karen Ruffle (2011) and Diana D'Souza (2012), which both focussed on the Shi'i women of Hyderabad.⁶

The essays in this special issue illustrate how research is being pressed forward on a broad front. In particular they illustrate how scholars are beginning to develop a grasp of religious change amongst the Shi'as over the past two centuries to match that which has been achieved for the Sunnis. The following themes, all present to a greater or lesser extent in modern scholarship on the Shi'a of South Asia, run through these essays: there is the role of political power, but also its lack, in establishing and shaping Shi'i communities; there is the centrality of the tragedy of Karbala to Shi'i identity and to the Shi'i sense of community; there is the tendency, as time moves towards the present, for Shi'i practices of pluralism and inclusiveness to weaken in favour of exclusiveness; then, associated with this development, there is the impact of religious reform, and significant religious change, which compares suggestively with religious change in the Sunni world; there is the enduring impact of Iran, the Shi'i centres in Iraq and more recently Shi'i activism in the Lebanon; and finally there is the specific role of women in fashioning Shi'i devotion and community.

Let us turn to the role of power, or its lack, in shaping Shi'i communities. While not forgetting the role of the networks of Isma'ili missionaries across land and sea, or indeed, the continuing role of Twelver Shi'i missionary activity as set out by Amir Ahmad Khan in this issue, political power has played the key role in establishing Shi'i communities in South Asia. Thus Fatimid power in Sind in the tenth and eleventh centuries established the basis on which Isma'ilis were able to establish themselves in the Indus Valley. Thus, too, the Shi'i Deccan sultanates (the Bahmani 1307–1527, the Bidari 1489–1619, the Qutb Shahi 1518–1657, and the 'Adil Shahi 1527–1686), the last two of which had strong Safawid connections, created the framework for the establishment of Shi'i communities in the region. The presence, moreover, of powerful Shi'as in the administration of the Sunni Asaf Jahi regime in Hyderabad, in particular the great late-nineteenth century prime minister, Sir Salar Jung, helped the further consolidation of a Shi'i presence. Turning to northern India, we can say the same for the Nawabs of Awadh, descendants of the Iranian soldier of fortune, Sa'adat Khan, Burhan ul-Mulk, who in Lucknow laid the foundations of the greatest centre of Shi'i culture and scholarship outside the Shi'i cities of Iran and Iraq.⁷

Colonial power also had a role to play in supporting and shaping Shi'i communities. The British rulers of the United Provinces always paid especial attention to the Shi'i *mujtahids* of Lucknow, doubtless concerned in part at least to counter the influence of the powerful Sunni 'ulama of the city. Of course, this was a double-edged benefit from the point of view of the *mujtahids*: while it was probably useful to have the ear of the colonial authorities, it did

⁴Marc van Grondelle, *The Ismailis in the Colonial Era: Modernity, Empire and Islam, 1839–1969* (London, 2009); Teena Purohit, *The Aga Khan Case: Religion and Identity in Colonial India* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012).

⁵Justin Jones, *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism* (Cambridge, 2012).

⁶Karen G. Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood and Everyday Practice in South Asian Shi'ism* (Chapel Hill, 2011); Diane D'Souza, *Shia Women: Muslim Faith and Practice* (New Delhi, 2012).

⁷Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*.

not do to be seen to be too close to them. This said, the major example of Shi'i communities being shaped by colonial power lies in the relationship between the British, the Aga Khans and the Khoja Isma'ilis. It was a Bombay High Court decision of 1866, recognising Aga Khan I as the hereditary Imam of the Isma'ilis, which helped this fugitive from Iran both to assert his authority over many of the Khoja Isma'ilis of India's west coast but also to build up huge wealth.⁸ This position enabled his grandson, Aga Khan III, over a period of half a century, to develop relationships with the British governments in Delhi and in London which were cemented in a relationship with the British royal family rooted in shared love of thoroughbred horses and racing. During this period Aga Khan III, by working through British power, was able to help the spread of his community's influence throughout the Indian Ocean region and beyond.⁹

The contributions to this issue add to our understanding of power and the shaping of Shi'i communities. Sajjad Rizvi here shows how the scholar, Sayyid Dildar 'Ali Nasirabadi (1753–1820), developed a theology combining 'anti-Sunnism, anti-Akhbarism, and anti-Sufism, coupled with a critique of philosophy' to support Nawabi power in northern India. It ran alongside the development of the *marisiya* tradition as a means of entrenching Shi'i values in popular culture. The overall package gave Twelver Shi'ism a distinctive, and for many Sunnis a provocative, presence. Tahir Kamran tells of how this new assertiveness, expressed through *tabarra* (the ritual cursing of the first three Caliphs), was received in the Punjab where in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it led to abrasive relationships with the Chishti *pirs* of Sial Sharif.

As the Twelver Shi'i presence was shaped by power, so it also came to be shaped by lack of power. Justin Jones shows how Dildar 'Ali's descendant, Sayyid 'Ali Naqi, fashioned a new interpretation of Imam Husain under colonial rule in the first half of the twentieth century, developing a distinctly twentieth-century Protestantised Shi'ism based on a model of the demystification and moral perfection of the human condition, alongside a political project in which Husain's message was used as the basis for anti-colonial protest accompanied by support for Indian nationalism. Moving from politics to socio-economic advancement, Shireen Mirza shows how the Khoja Shi'i Tanzeem organisation in contemporary Hyderabad uses Shi'i tradition to develop an activist stance towards life. It pays particular attention to poorer students, seeking "to identify self-reliance as part of a collective strategy of modernisation and survival". Hizbollah's defeat of Israel in the Lebanon is presented to them as an example of a successful Shi'i movement striving to achieve justice and progress.

Once Shi'i communities have become established, the regular telling of the story of Karbala, the regular mourning of its martyrs, and the taking out of *ta'ziya* processions during Muharram have played the central role in the creation and re-creation of a Shi'i sense of identity, and by the same token a central role in the consolidation of Shi'i community. Toby Howarth's excellent analysis both of *majlis* addresses in Hyderabad, and of the circumstances in which they have been given, provides a strong sense of the processes at work. In the Hyderabad context, moreover, these are not just ritual performances but ones in which

⁸Purohit, *Aga Khan Case*; Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 155–178.

⁹van Grondelle, *The Ismailis*.

the conveyance of meaning in words is crucial. The language used has moved from Persian to Urdu and recently has included English. Howarth reminds us, too, of the frequency of remembrance. In addition to the mourning ceremonies on the first ten days of Muharram, there are a further ten set aside throughout for remembering the martyrs of Karbala, and a further forty-one on which *majlis* might be held in remembrance of members of the Prophet's family and the Imams. The emotional intensity of the performances, for this is what they are, is expressed in copious weeping, chest-beating and self-flagellation.¹⁰ These performed acts of remembrance have been subject to substantial study in recent years.¹¹ Consideration has also been given to their wider resonance in South Asian culture as a whole.¹²

Given the centrality of remembrance, it is not surprising that its many aspects are never far from the arguments of the articles in this issue. Jones and Mirza both illustrate a process of reinterpretation of the central story to meet new requirements. Rizvi, as we have already noted, emphasises its naturalisation in the Awadhi environment, a process well-studied elsewhere.¹³ Michel Boivin shows how the determination of some Khoja Isma'ilis to defend their traditional practices of remembrance, against the Aga Khan's attempts to ban them as part of the elevation of his status as the reincarnation of the Seventh Imam, led to their break away from the Khoja Isma'ilis to form the Twelver Khoja community. Simon Fuchs, on the other hand, illustrates the centrality of the Karbala story from another angle. Iran's ambition to lead the world Muslim community against the West after its revolution led in Pakistan to attempts to de-emphasise the Karbala story and the particular significance of the *ahl-i bait* (the Prophet's family), and to elevate instead Ayatollah Khomeini as the *marja'* (the guide to be followed) of Pakistan's Shi'as, as well as his doctrine of *vilayati-i faqih* (the rule of the jurist). The Pakistani Shi'i response indicated that not all were ready for the leadership of a single *marja'*, nor were they unanimously prepared for 'Arif Husain's version of *taqrib* (religious dialogue) between Shi'as and Sunnis.

Inclusiveness and pluralism were long part of the Shi'i tradition on the subcontinent. Muharram processions might include town dwellers of all faiths. Shi'i places of worship and devotional performances could be designed to be inclusive.¹⁴ Hasan Ali Khan has laid out for us the remarkable Isma'ili/Sufi/Satpanthi engagement which existed in the Indus valley from the tenth to the twentieth century CE. Isma'ili *dais*, helped by Fatimid power to enter Sind and the Multan region, came to work with Suhrawardi Sufis to create a Satpanthi tradition of worship, including amongst others Hindus and Christians. Their inclusive purpose was demonstrated in the site plans and original designs of the great Suhrawardi shrines of Multan and Uch Sharif.¹⁵ He notes Shi'i *panjatas* on the upper parts of the shrine of Baha-ud-din

¹⁰Howarth, *The Twelver Shi'a*.

¹¹Schubel, *Religious Performance*; Pinault, *The Shiites*; Pinault, *Horse of Karbala*; Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood and Everyday Practice*; D'Souza, *Shia Women*.

¹²Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*.

¹³Karen G. Ruffle, 'Karbala in the Indo-Persian Imaginaire: The Indianizing of the Wedding of Qasim and Fatima Kubra', in Denis Hermann and Fazbrizio Speciale (eds.), *Muslim Cultures in the Indo-Iranian World during the Early-Modern and Modern Periods* (Berlin, 2010), pp. 181–200.

¹⁴See, for instance, Mushirul Hasan, 'Muharram: an individual and collective experience', in Muzaffar Ali (ed.), *A Leaf Turns Yellow: the Sufis of Awadh* (New Delhi, 2013), pp. 170–177.

¹⁵Hasan Ali Khan, *Constructing Islam on the Indus: The Material History of the Suhrawardi Order, 1200–1500 AD*, Royal Asiatic Society Books (Delhi, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

Zakariya at Multan as well as a Hindu *trishul* on top of a Sufi shrine in a nineteenth-century photograph. This is a cosmopolitan heritage which in recent years the Pakistani Auqaf (Endowments) Department has been concerned to conceal.¹⁶

Teena Purohit has likewise recently examined the Satpanthi traditions of Gujarat. Starting from the *ginans*, devotional poetry in Gujarati, Hindustani and Sindhi which were an essential part of Satpanthi ritual, she has noted that it “synthesized religious ideas from a number of religious traditions without giving the impression that such syntheses were either forced or contradictory”.¹⁷ She goes on to demonstrate first how the struggle between the Aga Khan and the Khoja leadership undermined this religious pluralism and second how Aga Khan III amended the written traditions of his community, which among other things involved the destruction of 3,500 *ginans*, to produce a theology which focussed on his semi-divine role.¹⁸

Karen Ruffle has introduced us to another inclusive strategy, that of vernacularisation of the Karbala story. In the seventeenth century, the Qutb Shahis patronised a Hindu writer of *marsiya*s who translated into Urdu Mulla Kashfi’s *Rawdat-al Shuhada*, his account of the marriage of the eleven-year-old Fatima Kubra and the thirteen-year-old Qasim during the battle of Karbala, and the subsequent martyrdom of the latter. The opportunity was seized to set out the full Indian ritual of a wedding, but decorating the hands with blood not *mehendi*, and enabling a presentation of the Karbala story to meet Indian, indeed Hindu, sensibilities. Such inclusiveness was, of course, central to the success of all expanding religious traditions.¹⁹

The articles in this issue confirm the general move in the direction of exclusiveness presented by Khan and Purohit. This was certainly the tendency in Sayyid Dildar Ali’s anti-Sunni and anti-Sufi theology for the Shi’i Awadhi state set out by Rizvi. Kamran comparably notes the divisive impact that this theology (along with Sunni revivalism) has had on Shi’i-Sunni relations in the Punjab, talking of how ‘shared synergies’ were lost. Indeed, in this respect the Punjabi experience was a metaphor for Shi’i-Sunni relations across the rest of India. Arguably greater exclusiveness would also have been the impact of the contemporary and activist Shi’i message mediated to the poorer *muhallas* of Hyderabad by Mirza’s Tanzeem. The Isma’ili Khojas, as depicted by Soumen Mukherjee in their latest manifestation as the Aga Khan Development Network, would appear to offer little space for those who are not community members.

This said, not all developments have been in the direction of exclusiveness. The modern challenges of power have rendered some Shi’i responses more complex; there has been a return to inclusiveness in the political field. As noted above, the influential Shi’i cleric of Pakistan, ‘Arif Husain, followed the lead of Ayatollah Khomeini in the 1980s–90s by seeking to create a united Muslim front, preaching in favour of religious dialogue with Sunnis in Pakistan. So, too, did Sayyid ‘Ali Naqi, half a century earlier, strive to make Imam Husain an example for all humanity. In 1940s Lucknow he celebrated the 1,300th anniversary of the martyrdom of the Imam with a ‘Husain Day’, whose events were arranged not just by

¹⁶Hasan Ali Khan, ‘Shia-Isma’ili motifs in the Sufi Architecture of the Indus Valley 1200–1500’, University of London PhD dissertation, 2009. The final chapter of this thesis tells of the fate of these Shi’i-Isma’ili elements at the hands of the Pakistan Auqaf Department.

¹⁷Purohit, *Aga Khan Case*, p. 4.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 111–32.

¹⁹Ruffle, ‘Karbala in the Indo-Persian Imaginaire’.

Shi'as but also by Sunnis and Hindus, and which represented not just general human protest against injustice and oppression but also a specific statement of resistance to British rule.

From the late eighteenth century a major feature of Sunni Islam in South Asia was a process of religious revival and reform. One key trigger was the loss of political power, which meant that Muslims had to learn how to create an Islamic society without power. 'Ulama took the lead, realising that now they were no longer supported by the state, they must build a constituency for themselves in society. So they established chains of *madrasas*, translated the Qur'an and *hadith* into vernacular languages, set up *fatwa* offices, and spread knowledge widely by adopting print and preaching widely. Features of the process were a growing encouragement for each individual Muslim to engage with central messages of Islam, and an attack on all ideas of divination, which focussed particularly on belief in Ibn al-'Arabi's *wahdat-al wujud* (unity of being) and any idea of intercession at saints' shrines. Muslims were to be guided by God's revelation alone; their consciences, prompted as far as possible by the 'ulama, were the element which would preserve them from eternal damnation. There was also a new emphasis on personal responsibility in faith: Muslims knew they had to act on earth to be saved.²⁰

Until recently we knew relatively little about how the Shi'a responded to this environment. Justin Jones, however, has demonstrated how substantial the Twelver Shi'i response, based on Lucknow, was. It ranged from considerable institutional development to missionary activity to ritual innovation.²¹ The essays in this issue are full of further examples of reform at work amongst the Shi'a. Rizvi's Sayyid Dildar 'Ali launched an assault on *wahdat-al wujud* and on Sufism in general worthy of the most extreme Sunni reformers, although we should recognise that his purpose differed from theirs. One of the reasons for the Twelver Khojas splitting from the Isma'ili Khojas was that, perhaps mirroring practice amongst some Sunnis, they wanted their children to be taught the Qur'an, as well as scepticism of the Aga Khan's claims to charismatic spiritual leadership. Sayyid 'Ali Naqi's Husainology pioneered a Shi'i selfhood that was human and blessed with this-worldly qualities – Husain was a moral exemplar and not an intercessor. Similar qualities of action on earth and personal responsibility were fostered by Tanzeem in Hyderabad, which was aiming to fashion a new Shi'i community by strengthening each individual part. A similar activism on an Indian Ocean scale is exemplified in the missionary Madrasa't ul-Wa'izeen, a *madrasa* founded in Lucknow in 1919, which forms the focus of Amir Ahmad Khan's article. In the hands of the Aga Khan's followers this religious drive to serve society on earth has become transformed into the Aga Khan Development Network.

It is evident from what has been stated above that the Shi'i communities of South Asia were substantially supported by outside influence, in particular from Iran. The essays in this issue offer further evidence of this process. Sayyid Dildar 'Ali was specifically sent by the prime minister of Awadh to the shrine cities of Iraq as part of a programme to build a class of 'ulama to support the new Shi'i state. In spite of the fact that Dildar 'Ali returned as a

²⁰Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860–1900*, (Princeton, 1982); Francis Robinson, 'Religious Change and the Self in Muslim South Asia since 1800', in Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (Delhi, 2000), pp. 105–121 and Francis Robinson 'Other-Worldly and This-Worldly Islam and the Islamic Revival', in Francis Robinson *Islam, South Asia and the West* (Delhi, 2007), pp. 171–188.

²¹Jones, *Shi'a Islam*, pp. 32–146.

proponent of Usulism as opposed to the Akhbari ideas he had been supposed to develop, the plan succeeded beyond expectation, leading to the establishment of the greatest of Lucknow's Shi'i scholarly families, the Khandan-i Ijtihad, and enduring connections between Lucknow and the traditional intellectual centres of Iran and Iraq. Arguably, the Aga Khan was the most significant Iranian presence in Bombay in the nineteenth century. There, as Nile Green has shown us, he joined a large community of Iranian exiles to use the opportunities of the great port city to impose his authority over the Isma'ili Khojas and to begin the process of spreading his neo-Isma'ilism through the Indian Ocean region.²² Amir Ahmad Khan makes clear the various connections of birth of marriage, of scholarship and of religious allegiance of the Mahmudabad family, the largest Muslim landholders in northern India, which would make them an ongoing channel of connection to the Shi'i world of West Asia. The new assertiveness of the Shi'a in that region after the Iranian revolution and the rise of Hizbollah in the Lebanon was reflected both in Pakistan and in India, as Fuchs and Mirza show respectively. This raises the issue of how the even greater Shi'i militancy of recent years will play out in the region.

Influence, however, has not been all one way. One of the striking features of the Islamic history of South Asia since the eighteenth century is how a region, which had for long been a receiver of influences from the West, has also come to be a broadcaster of influences in the opposite direction.²³ The missionary work of the Mahmudabad family's Madrasa't ul-Wa'izeen is one example of this. But so also is the striking suggestion from Jones that Ayatollah Khomeini may have been influenced by Sayyid 'Ali Naqi's Husainology. Mirza shows how the Twelver Shi'i diaspora throughout the Indian Ocean region was linked by its trading networks, its use of print, and its ties to the Shi'i centres in Iraq. This connected community came to be reflected in institutions like the World Islamic Network (founded 1991), which strives to disseminate 'modernist' Islamic ideas beyond the boundaries of its community while focussing surplus capital on community development. Mukherjee demonstrates how the Aga Khan's section of the old Khoja community has come to spread its social service ethic both through the same region as the Twelver Khojas but also more widely. In the process, as he puts it, they have come to 'realise the social conscience of Islam through institutional action'. The projection of Shi'i ideas and values from South Asia to the rest of the world is a developing story of great interest.

It is a matter of surprise that there are only passing mentions of women in the essays in this issue. But current scholarship on women's contribution to religious activity, indeed religious leadership, in Islam is much more ambitious than this would suggest. For the Sunni world, recent work on women's religious authority - indeed women's authority over men - includes Muhammad Akram Nadwi's *al-Muhaddithat*, his 400-page introduction in English to his twenty-four volume work in Arabic recording the contributions of women to the transmission of knowledge.²⁴ There is Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach's *Women*,

²²Green, *Bombay Islam*, pp. 118–178.

²³Francis Robinson 'South Asia and West Asia from the Delhi Sultanate to the Present: Security, Resources and Influence', Ministry of Higher Education, *Working Papers: Symposium on the Academic Chairs of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and their Contribution to the Development of Human Knowledge* (Oman: Ministry of Higher Education, 2012), pp. 74–86.

²⁴Mohammad Akram Nadwi, *al-Muhaddithat: the woman scholars in Islam* (Oxford, 2007).

Leadership and Mosques, which offers examples of women exercising authority over men.²⁵ In addition there is recent work illustrating women's religious leadership of women.²⁶

As far as the Shi'i women of South Asia are concerned Pinault, Ruffle and D'Souza have studied Hyderabad representations of the women of the household of the Imams. Ruffle tells us of how women have relished the examples of these 'strong women',²⁷ while D'Souza marvels at the confidence and determination of some women determined to go on pilgrimage to Karbala without their menfolk.²⁸ This said, given the great social changes of the past fifty years, the many different South Asian environments in which Shi'i lives have been lived, and the many new roles that women are performing, there would appear to be many opportunities for research on the interactions between social change, new social aspirations and the images of perfection scholars choose to represent in the household of the Imams.

The other main dimension is the active role taken by women in transmitting the message of Karbala. Scott Kugle in a remarkable and ingenious article has explained the role of the courtesan Mah Laqa Bai (1768–1824) in sustaining what he terms "a dignified place for Shia devotion in a Sunni court" through her poetry, a full *diwan* of Urdu *ghazals*. She was able to do so not just because of the quality of her compositions but because she was attached successively to the households of two Hyderabad prime ministers.²⁹ Writing in early-nineteenth century Lucknow, Mrs Meer Hasan 'Ali tells of the numbers of women's *majalis* held in Muharram.³⁰ Recently Howarth and D'Souza have recorded the major role played by women preachers in Hyderabad. D'Souza reminds us that it is possible for a woman to become a *mujtahid*, although the few who have achieved such positions in South Asia have come from Iran and Iraq.³¹ Women still find their role of leadership primarily in giving sermons to other women. However, given the changes slowly taking place in Muslim societies, and in the world at large, women will come to expand their role.

I hope that there is enough here to indicate that the Shi'i communities of South Asia are a rewarding subject of study. The essays in this issue, alongside other recent published research, indicate that the dearth of scholarship is at an end. Indeed, there is in general a rich scholarship devoted to Shi'i ritual devotion, and a growing scholarship, despite the gap in this issue, devoted to Shi'i women. On the other hand, what the articles in this issue indicate in particular are the growing lineaments of, to use a term developed by Abigail Green and

²⁵Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach, *Women, Leadership and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority* (Leiden and Boston, 2011).

²⁶For the Sunni world recent works are: Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, 2005), and Sadaf Ahmad, *Transforming Faith: The Story of Al-Huda and Islamic Revivalism among Urban Pakistani Women* (Syracuse, 2009). For the Shi'i world there is Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton, 2006).

²⁷Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood*, p. 20.

²⁸D'Souza, *Shia Women*, p. 240.

²⁹Scott Kugle, 'Courting 'Ali: Urdu Poetry, Shi'i Piety and Courtesan Power in Hyderabad' in Hermann and Speziale, *Muslim Cultures*, pp. 125–166.

³⁰Mrs Meer Hassan Ali, W. Crooke ed., *Observations on the Mussulmans of Indiadescriptive of their Manners, Customs, Habits and Religious Opinions made during a Twelve Years' Residence in their immediate society* (London, Oxford University Press, 1917), pp. 17–54.

³¹D'Souza, *Shia Women*, p. 20.

Vincent Viaene, Shi'i 'religious internationals': both Isna 'Ashari and Khoja Isma'ili.³² They also point to processes of religious change which offer possibilities for comparison not just with the Sunni world of South Asia, but also with the non-Muslim faiths of the region.
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³²Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene eds., *Religious Internationals in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities since 1750*, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 1–19.