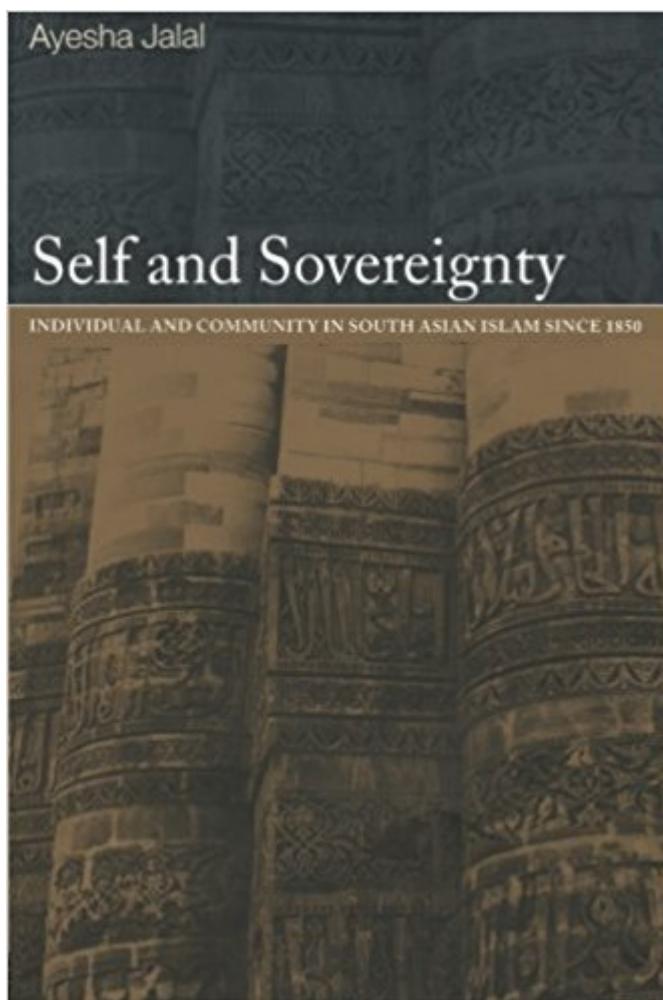


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# **Self And Sovereignty: Individual And Community In South Asian Islam Since 1850**



## **Synopsis**

Self and Sovereignty surveys the role of individual Muslim men and women within India and Pakistan from 1850 through to decolonisation and the partition period. Commencing in colonial times, this book explores and interprets the historical processes through which the perception of the Muslim individual and the community of Islam has been reconfigured over time. Self and Sovereignty examines the relationship between Islam and nationalism and the individual, regional, class and cultural differences that have shaped the discourse and politics of Muslim identity. As well as fascinating discussion of political and religious movements, culture and art, this book includes analysis of:<sup>\*</sup> press, poetry and politics in late nineteenth century India<sup>\*</sup> the politics of language and identity - Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi<sup>\*</sup> Muslim identity, cultural difference and nationalism<sup>\*</sup> the Punjab and the politics of Union and Disunion<sup>\*</sup> the creation of Pakistan Covering a period of immense upheaval and sometimes devastating violence, this work is an important and enlightening insight into the history of Muslims in South Asia.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

'Jalal has produced an outstanding book, which brings a new level of understanding to the recent history of that third of the world's Muslims who live in South Asia.' - Francis Robinson, Asian Affairs February 2002

Ayesha Jalal is Professor of History at Harvard University. Her books include Modern South Asia with Sugata Bose (Routledge, 1998) and Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia (1995).

Ayesha Jalal heavily relies on Urdu press and poetry to analyze the Muslim and Hindu sentiments from 1850s to just before the partition of India. What gives these resources balance vis-a-vis Muslim and Hindu opinion is that both Hindus and Muslims wrote in Urdu. Hindus increasingly less so over time. Majority of Hindu newspapers in Punjab were written in Urdu. The label of the book is slightly misleading, the book is about Muslims, but it's focus is North Indian Muslims and especially Punjab. The author exclusively relies on resources from Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and to a lesser extent from Bengal. There is absence of South, Central, and Western Indian Muslims. It is a fascinating read when it comes to languages, the part they played in the conflict between Hindus and Muslim. When it comes to Punjab, for administrative reasons, British scrapped Persian and made Urdu official language of the province. The author in detail describe the impact it had on literacy to relation between Hindu, Muslims, and Sikhs in the province. The comparison with Bengalis is an interesting one. On the one hand Punjabi elite was readily willing to give up Punjabi in the favor of Urdu, Bengali Muslims refused to do do. Already, decades before the partition, and later Bangladeshi independence from Pakistan, there was this stark difference when it comes to United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar etc) and Punjab on the one hand and Bengal on the other. Punjabi and North Indian Muslims adopted Urdu as an identity language of Muslims, while Bengali Muslims refused. Another major theme of the book is the downfall of Turkish Caliphate and what role it played on the psyche of Indian Muslims and why they were obsessed with the fall of the Caliphate. It is a well researched book on the status of North Indian Muslims prior to the partition and possible motives behind the partition of India.

A work of encyclopedic proportions, *Self and Sovereignty*'s wide-ranging investigation into South Asian Muslim thought and politics since 1850 is sure to fascinate aficionados of South Asian and Islamic history alike. In almost six hundred pages of meticulously researched analysis, Tufts University scholar Ayesha Jalal surveys the cultural, political and religious movements of the past 150 years in an attempt to unravel the complex intermingling of trends that reconfigured Muslim identities in colonial and postcolonial South Asia. Her questions are as complex as they are provocative: By what process of social re-engineering, combined with preexisting cultural difference, did religious distinctions come to be privileged over class, cultural and regional differences? How were South Asian Muslims able to surmount longstanding cultural, regional and even religious differences, to forge the world's first nation founded on the basis of religion? But these questions have been asked before. Jalal's point of departure from other contemporary thinkers on the Muslim

"problem" in South Asia is found in the boldness and breadth of her objective: to entirely rethink the puzzle of identity and difference in South Asia in the context of the changing relationship between the Muslim individual and community of Islam. Relying extensively on hitherto unexploited sources in Urdu and Punjabi as well as a broad collection of official documents of the late-colonial state, Jalal undertakes a meticulous reexamination of the circumstances by which the idiom of separation prevailed over prospects for Indian unity, presenting the tension between Muslim and Hindu communities in all their manifest complexity. Her research leads her to the conclusion that, with the end of Muslim rule in India, self-perceptions of Muslim identity and the place of the Islamic community in South Asia were fundamentally altered. Through the intertwining of external interests - political, cultural, economic and social - with the religious, a potent wedge was inserted between Muslim and Hindu, giving birth to the social and geo-political polarization of these religious communities that persists to this day. Though Jalal offers insights the processes of identity formation and inter-group dynamics throughout the subcontinent, her discussion of the history of ordinary, non-elite Muslims and their Hindu counterparts, including women, is weak. Moreover, at times Jalal's analysis glosses over history that might serve to weaken her argument. For instance, short shrift is given to the movements initiated by Shah Waliullah and other thinkers of the Islamic revivalist movement who sought to "purify" Islam by returning to the hadith and purging contemporary practice of syncretic or otherwise externally influenced customs and rituals. Though tolerant of other religions, Waliullah regarded Islam as having superseded the religions of the past; hence a well-defined separation between 'Islamic' and 'un-Islamic' became increasingly important. Waliullah's philosophy might not have been significant for understanding Islamic identity and nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries if his ideas had perished with him; however, his mantle was adopted with vigor by modern leaders in Pakistan like Mawlana Mawdudi, founder of the Jama'at-i Islami (the Islamic Party), an organization that would put down the roots of Islamic fundamentalism all across South Asia and the Middle East. These few criticisms notwithstanding, *Self and Sovereignty* is as important a contribution to the study of Islam in South Asia as any to appear in the last decade. Jalal's outstanding tome offers compelling arguments for reconceptualizing the nature of individual-community interaction in South Asia, and the role of this dynamic in shaping political realities through to independence. Moreover, it would be shortsighted to limit the scope of applicability of Jalal's insights to the Muslim or even South Asian contexts alone. Beyond their value to students of South Asian and Muslim history, Jalal's conclusions have important ramifications for the way scholars of religion, culture and politics understand communalism and nationalism, and indeed the way South Asians understand their political and

social heritage.

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