



Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity among the Daudi Bohras

By Jonah Blank

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In Jonah Blank's important, myth-shattering book, the West gets its first look at the Daudi Bohras, a unique Muslim denomination who have found the core of their religious beliefs largely compatible with modern ideology. Combining orthodox Muslim prayer, dress, and practice with secular education, relative gender equality, and Internet use, this community serves as a surprising reminder that the central values of "modernity" are hardly limited to the West.

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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1076102 in Books
- Published on: 2001-03
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .90" w x 6.00" l, 1.26 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 408 pages



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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Policy adviser to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and a senior editor at U.S. News and World Report, Blank (Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God) here focuses on the Bohras, a community of Shia Ismaili Muslims from Gujarat numbering upwards of a million worldwide. This is a groundbreaking work for two reasons: it is the first full description of a community never before studied from outside, and it demonstrates that an orthodox Islamic community can also embrace Western ideas and technology by adopting all aspects of modern culture that are not forbidden to it. The Daudi Bohras are both "traditional" and "modern." Blank reviews the community's history, organizational structure, rituals, domestic life, orthopraxy, and maintenance of community boundaries. The Bohra have dramatically improved orthopraxy among members, creating a high level of observance of basics while increasing the educational level and scientific sophistication of the community ("there is no conflict whatsoever between science and faith"). The author demonstrates the extent to which Westerners have adopted a view of Islam distorted by stereotypes, fostered by media reports, and sustained by a triumphalism about values that Westerners believe are exclusively theirs. What the Bohras have done, Blank concludes, is to "break down the false dichotomy between modernity and tradition, to let members of the community revel in both." This brilliant study is both academically rigorous and a welcome introduction to the real success of this Islamic community in the modern world. Highly recommended for all academic libraries and large public libraries. William P. Collins, Library of Congress

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Review

"This is a groundbreaking work.... This brilliant study is both academically rigorous and a welcome introduction to the real success of this Islamic community in the modern world. Highly recommended." - Library Journal; "[A] model piece of scholarship, the kind of work you want to give to younger scholars so as to awaken them to the wonders and the variety of the world.... Here is one brilliant venture by a young, superbly trained American social scientist who delves into the world of Indian Muslims, and renders that world with artistry, precision, and detail." - Fouad Ajami, author of Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey; "[Blank's] book should be read for his portrait of a group trying to carve out a place for their practices while maintaining peaceful relations with religious activists and secularists alike, a delicate tightrope act that he chronicles well." - John R. Bowen, Washington Post Book World

From the Inside Flap

In this important, myth-shattering book, the West gets its first look at the Daudi Bohras, a unique Muslim denomination who have found the core of their religious beliefs largely compatible with modern ideology. Combining orthodox Muslim prayer, dress, and practice with secular education, relative gender equality, and Internet use, this community serves as a surprising reminder that the central values of "modernity" are hardly limited to the West.

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