

Title—The Muslims of British India

Author—Peter Hardy

Year—1972

Categories: Islam, Colonialism, Identity, Empire, Culture

Place: British Raj

Time: 1820-1950

Argument Synopsis:

Hardy provides a survey of the whole field on Indian Muslim history up to 1947 in his book *The Muslims of British India*. Hardy reveals that the study of Islam and Muslims in South Asia is not yet as disciplined or sophisticated as the study of Islam and of Muslims in the classical lands of Islam. The book is a history of India's Muslims from the time of the break-up of the Mughal empire, when their political elite ruled in subcontinent in imperial splendor, up through the break-up of British India. In his discussion of the break-up of the Mughal empire, Hardy notes how Muslim rule in India, much like British rule, was much more of a confidence trick played on the compliant population than its rulers would publicly concede. Put another way, the existence of both Mughal and British rule over India does not reveal the superiority of the rulers. He claims that the presence of Muslim rulers in India undoubtedly stimulated an increase in the number of Muslims in the country.

Hardy argues that in the eighteenth century the British began ruling over a Muslim community unified at best by a few common rituals and by the beliefs and aspirations of a majority of their scholars—he asserts that Indian Muslims did not see themselves as a unified group. The history of British India revealed that a call for revival of a classical Arabic Islam could unite for common action India's Muslims, otherwise divided by class, education, language and regional culture. Because of the success of religious appeals, the British began to view India's Muslims as homogenous. Essentially, Hardy argues that it was the British that made it possible for the Muslims of India to view themselves as a unified people and a faith. One of the main themes of his book is the manner by which Indian Muslims in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came to internalize and act out an essentially incorrect image of themselves that had been nurtured and projected by the ruling British.

Hardy explores the British view of Indian Muslims as a monotheistic, iconoclastic, naturally aristocratic and above all homogenous class of people, and the ways this shaped the postcolonial future of India's Muslims. He argues that the transfer of this perception from the ruling British to the Muslim intelligentsia in the early twentieth century provided one of the chief ingredients of the Pakistan movement. Hardy places the class of landed Muslims of the United Provinces, what was once the heartland of Mughal rule, at the forefront of the movement for Pakistan. Hardy argues that the transformation of the Muslim League from a small and struggling party to the vehicle for popular demand for Pakistan occurred in the United Provinces between 1937 and 1939.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- At the advent of colonialism in India, the Muslims in the subcontinent did not see themselves or act as a nation
- The British viewed Indian Muslims as a monotheistic, iconoclastic, naturally aristocratic and above all homogenous class of people
- It was the British who made it possible for the Muslims to leave the imperial chronicle behind and see themselves as a people and a faith