

Title—Muslims in Britain: An Introduction
Author—Sophie Gilliat-Ray
Year—2010

Categories: Islam, Migration, Culture, Politics

Place: Britain

Time: 700-Present

Argument Synopsis:

Gilliat-Ray's book is a comprehensive study of Muslims in Britain, tracing where they have come from, geographically and ideologically, to a consideration of their present situation. The book is separated into two parts. The first part explores the history of Muslims in Britain and the predominant religious reform movements. The second part examines demographics, religious nurture and education, leadership, mosques, gender, religious identity and youth. Gilliat-Ray emphasizes how the legacy of colonialism maintains a strong hold on the shared memory of many Muslim groups. She notes the common assumption that the presence of Muslims in Britain and their influence on culture in British society is a recent phenomenon. She asserts that this history goes back much further than the end of the Second World War.

She begins with an overview of some of the key aspects of the complex history of Muslims in Britain, with a focus on English perceptions of Islam. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was a qualitative and quantitative shift in the nature of Muslim settlement in Britain. She demonstrates how the character of Muslim communities began to change with the rapid expansion of the British Empire. Gilliat-Ray posits that it is essential to appreciate the religious roots of Muslim communities and to grasp the significance of religious ideas and interpretations that have led to the development of multiple Islamic discourses over time. The religious, social, and political identities of Muslims in Britain have been shaped by the legacy of Islamic religious movements established in predominantly Muslim countries. Gilliat-Ray claims that there has been an underappreciation of the impact and presence of Islam and Muslims in Britain.

Gilliat-Ray identifies the various areas of the world that the Muslims in Britain originally came from, namely South Asia and the Middle East. She highlights some of the differences between these groups in a discussion of religious reform movements in both locales. In her second section, she focuses on the organization and activities that sustain British Muslims in their religious identity and practice. She claims that intergenerational conflict is often the area where the struggle to reconcile forces of tradition and change is taking place. Gilliat-Ray highlights how British Muslims have devoted more energy and resources to the creation of mosques than any other institution. The process of establishing a mosque is seen as the Islamization of space in Britain. She concludes by underscoring how British Muslims have unwillingly seen themselves become the subject of public debate and focus for social and security policy in British society as a result of global events and trends.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- The character of Muslim communities began to change with the rapid expansion of the British Empire
- Islamic religious movements established in colonial India were trying to define correct and authentic religious practice in an atmosphere of religious competition and under the rule of a foreign colonial power
- Many young Muslims are actively participating in the world most relevant to them—modern (secular) Britain