
BOOK REVIEW

From Patan to Karachi: The Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Mission in the Indian Subcontinent. A Review of "Ismaili Pirs, Vakils and Sayeds of South Asian Regions"

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Who among the orientalist can tell you about the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī mission in the Indian Subcontinent with utmost historical conviction? Owing to the paucity of authentic historical documents, scholars have generally kept their face turned towards the Ismāʿīlī history outside of the boundaries of South Asian regions. Books on the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī mission in the Indian Subcontinent are published rarely. In fact, one would find no more than 5 to 10 scholarly books on the aforementioned subject. Thus, it is worth stressing on this juncture that books like "Ismaili Pirs, Vakils and Sayeds" are worth reviewing academically. Precisely speaking, in this review I would analyze and evaluate the content, structure, research methodology etc of the book "Ismaili Pirs, Vakils and Sayeds" by Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik Ali (A writer from the Ismāʿīlī community).

Ismaili Pirs, Vakils and Sayeds of South Asian Regions, written by Mr. Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik Ali – A writer from the Ismaili community and the caretaker of the Mukhi Hashoo Museum, Karachi – is an epigrammatic history of the Ismāʿīlī Dāʿīs (preachers) known as Pirs, Vakils and Syeds, who were responsible for the spread of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī form of Islam in the name of Satpanth in the regions of South Asia. The author, an M.A. in Islamic History, has written more than a dozen books on Ismāʿīlī history, beliefs, practices, institutions, doctrines etc. Written in an uncomplicated style, the book employs straightforward and easy-to-understand English. The motive behind the compilation of this brief book is to provide scholars and non-academic readers with content liberated from the myths and legends that surround the life of the Ismāʿīlī Dāʿīs of the Indian subcontinent.

In today's time, the Ismāʿīlī community is a global one – with its members living in various countries of Asia, Africa and Europe. Generally speaking, like most of the youth, Ismāʿīlī youth also find it boring to read about the history of their faith. A few who successfully develop their interest are forced by the pressures of linguistic barriers and paucity of reliable historical documents, to turn their attention towards the Ismāʿīlī history beyond the boundaries of South Asian regions. Thus, hardly a few academic publications have hitherto been made on the history of the spread of Ismāʿīlī form of Islam in India. This book is therefore not only an attempt to compile the Ismāʿīlī history of Indian subcontinent, but also a treasure for those who are interested in producing scholarly works

on the history of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī mission in the Indian subcontinent.

Academically speaking, it is very strange to note that the book is not divided into chapters. However, headings have been appropriately used to distinguish the discussion on the life and missionary works of one Dāʿī (preacher) from another. Moreover, the flow of the book is very easy to follow for the life and missionary works of all the Dāʿīs have been presented in a chronological order. Nevertheless, the narrative and argumentative style of the author combined with simple everyday English enables a reader to easily retain the interest in the book. In-text citations have been preferred over other forms of citations. Although author has used certain rare and atypical primary sources at a number of junctures to prove his points, however, it is very disappointing to note that the author has made several claims which lack proper historical evidence – an act which is not uncommon in author's other publications as well.

The book highlights a number of new discoveries of primary sources and rarely known historical sites, however, not even a single illustration of a primary source or historical sites of relevance have been incorporated along with the text. Deliberate omission of pictures and illustrations combined with the quality of paper and binding style has resulted in low cost of the book. In fact, the book is easily available at a number of stationery shops owned by Ismāʿīlī individuals at very cheap rates.

Last, but by no means the least, this is a praiseworthy effort by the author to shed light on a subject that receives almost no attention by the Ismāʿīlī studies scholars and academics, but deserves a great deal of scholastic consideration.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

How to cite this article: Damani, AJ. 2020. From Patan to Karachi: The Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Mission in the Indian Subcontinent. A Review of "Ismaili Pirs, Vakils and Sayeds of South Asian Regions". *Ancient Asia*, 11: 2, pp.1-2. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/aa.178>

Published: 25 February 2020

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