Question ‘Who is Hindu, wh

book. By analysing documents

question is complex and nuan

Hinduism as two monolithic and antagonistic faiths is so deeply ingrained that the complexity of their historical development and the convergence of their shared cultural heritage and lived experience is often ignored. The author explores the developments which gave rise to the emergence of distinct identities. In particular, she explores the role played by Ismaili Islam in this intricate interface of South Asian religious traditions.

The work is the culmination of a long period of research on Hindu

applied to the diverse communities in the South Asian context. While "syncretistic traditions have been perceived positively as 'bridging the gulf' between communities", they are also viewed as imperfect, spontaneous or "disorderly creations of the 'popular mind'" (Khan, 5). While "transculturation" or "contact zone" reflect the dynamism of these groups, they are "used exclusively to describe a discourse that reflects the victory of a dominant power over a subservient one as is perceived as a consequence of colonial rule" (Khan, 5). These concepts cannot encompass the full spectrum of cross-community interaction because they assume the existence of a structured and absolute religion. It is in this academic gap that, according to the author, an adequate analysis of the role of Ismailism in cross-community interaction has not been sufficiently pursued.

Standing on the Threshold

Upon this critique of modern scholarship, Khan builds her own framework. She praises Tazim Kassam's metaphor of South Asian Nizari Ismailism as the image of two black

Image of the two faces or chalice as described by Tazim Kassam

faces that can also be seen as a chalice depending on the perspective of the observer. The fact that neither perception can be claimed as the correct image helps Khan make her argument for a middle area, which she calls a threshold. The threshold is not a temporary space for a "syncretic" community, but "a permanent opening into a world of multiple values" (Khan, 6).

This concept allows Khan to pursue her anti-structural argument against fixed categories of Hindu and Muslim. Ultimately, her notion of a permanent threshold asks the reader to consider stepping out of the binary framework of Hindu versus Muslim into a nuanced, granular approach to religious identities – an area in which South Asian Nizari Ismailism could be better understood. She implies that the threshold space may even be the space in which non-

bounded communities, like Ismailis, can preserve their original understanding of religion against the orthodox and homogenizing forces of modern South Asia that firmly distinguish Hindus the

here is to try to grasp the huge diversity that characterises the religious beliefs and practices prevalent in medieval India" (Khan, 21). Khan's use of anecdotal evidence is particularly effective and illustrative.

Khan provides an interesting argument on the use of the terms Hindu and Turk as they were probably used in the past. The term Hindu would have been "applied exclusively

them to become the custodians of the threshold. Khan compares this to the ancient Roman deity Janus Bifrons, the god of doorways, who has two faces pointing in opposite directions. Although they are part of a single head, the faces look in different directions, "one towards the wide sphere of Islamic movements, the other towards the complex continuum of indigenous/ Hindu religions" (Khan, 44).

In examining liminal communities, Khan argues that they do not emerge spontaneously but rather as the result of complex factors. She argues that the Nizari Ismaili tradition of South Asia can help shed light on how and why a religious movement can appear1Tf0.56280TD5of

boundaries.

Khan holds that pre-

Further Readings

1. Asani, Ali. *Ecstasy and Enlightenment.* London, 2002.