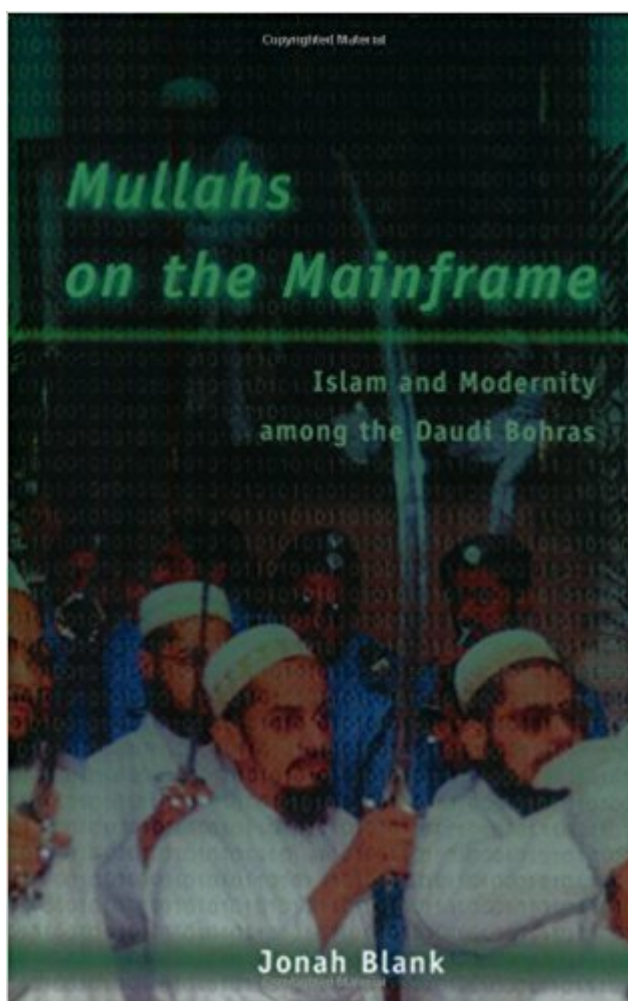


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# Mullahs On The Mainframe: Islam And Modernity Among The Daudi Bohras



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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 Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"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*

As a Daudi Bohra, I can attest to the quality of research the author has put in to his work to create this really interesting case study on our community. He has done it not from secondary sources but by living within the community, understanding its customs and learning its language. I found this account very well structured and intellectual and it presents an example of how great leadership can transform a community to live harmoniously in this age and yet value their centuries old religious principles. Great job Sir.

Jonah Blank's book is well researched and written to appeal to both traditional Bohras and the second generation Daudi Bohras settled in the Western Hemisphere. The initial emphasis on the factual data and the rituals provides a credible introduction to the theme of the book. He discusses with decorum the intellectual controversies that have plagued the sect and exhibits non-judgemental finesse. The glossary, index and elaborate references are very helpful. Although his bias is implicit, he provides the readers with the varying view points. Further, although he worked with the "inner system" to come up with this book, he is limited by the lack of access he had, to the "batin" text. His discussion of the philosophy of the sect in the broader Shiite perspective provides a good balance

and allows the readers to think through the nuances of orthopraxy, he frequently alludes to. However, a more in-depth comparison with the orthodox Shiite dogma and more elaborate a description of the Fatimid era and hierarchy would have been more enlightening. Maybe, a topic for future manuscripts!

This is simply The most important recent text on the status of Bohras living today. Jonah does a great service to not just for Bohras but to the study of Shiism in all its rich variants; a much neglected area of study. I am eager to read more of Jonah's work...he balances the facts and figures well, with a wonderful sense of emotional connection to living people and living communities; characters come alive as part of the fabric of this community. Simply a must have for those interested in Isma'ilism.

We have precious few representations of devout Muslims who are devout, respectful of other religions and progressive in thought and action. Islam has the reputation in the West by some as being militant and rejecting of other faiths. A broad brush covers a world of differing views in Islam. In history and current practice the Bohras who are dispersed around the world, represent peace, devotion to Allah, and toleration of the diversity of religious belief in the world.

Well written book to Recognise the Bohras Of the Modern world ..EXCELLENT WORK BY THE AUTHOR. JONAH BLANK

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