
Richard Eaton. *Shrines, Cultivators, and Muslim 'Conversion' in Punjab and Bengal, 1300-1700*

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Richard Eaton. « Shrines, Cultivators, and Muslim 'Conversion' in Punjab and Bengal, 1300-1700 ». *The Medieval History Journal*, Vol. 12, 2009, p. 191-220.

- 1 This historiographical analysis of conversion in northern India suggests a much more nuanced approach to the introduction and adoption of Muslim culture during the 10th-16th centuries. Eaton challenges several established paradigms about how and why southern Asians adopted "Islam". Following a long discussion about why we should reconsider our understanding of "conversions" on the southern Asian frontier, Eaton examines two zones with respect to Indo-Islamic interactions and conversion practices. In the western Punjab and eastern Bengal, we find radically different sets of conditions for conversion patterns. Eaton uses his familiarity with Bengali to describe how the emergence of a landed peasantry and the growth of agriculture led natives to convert. In particular, as deforestation accelerated and farming systems changed, the number of peasants with Muslim names increased. In the western Punjab, a myriad of shrines dotting the landscape played a critical role in conversion trends. Eaton focuses on Baba Farid's shrine in Pakpattan, in the vicinity of Lahore. His intriguing discussion, using biographical dictionaries, shows how one powerful nomadic Jat family there was slowly drawn to Sufism through the *diwans*, who oversee shrines. These Jat communities gradually became sedentary and Islamic through contacts with the shrine and its extensive land holdings.

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