South Asia is undoubtedly home to one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. The region has such a complex historical, ethnic, geopolitical, and economic dynamics that the fact that religion has been an essential element of South Asian cultures remains overlooked. Muslims are overwhelmingly linked with violence and terrorism, particularly in the West, in the post-9/11 scenario. Various nationalistic and religious standpoints have installed many ambiguities and misapprehensions about Muslims within and outside South Asia. Some of them are taken for granted without factual accuracy and pave the way to misleading interpretations of the history of Muslims in South Asia, the character of historical Muslims rulers, and the Pakistan Movement. *Islamic Civilization in South Asia* by Burjor Avari of Manchester Metropolitan University is particularly welcome to prompt an exploration of Muslims’ history in South Asia and to find answers to some of the most intriguing and complicated questions. After Avari’s previous book, *India: The Ancient Past*, which focuses on the history of the Indian Subcontinent in general, this volume offers a concise but comprehensive overview of Muslims’ “presence” and their political power in South Asia from a historical perspective. The book focuses on the dynamics of Islamic civilization in South Asia from the eighth century to now in chronological order. The author’s treatment of the subject and his focus on the most controversial aspects of South Asian history are evidently innovative, comprehensive, and unique in style. It is worth mentioning here that the book deals with only three states of South Asia: Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. This geographically demarcated analysis of Muslims in these three states is justifiable on the basis of their shared history, specifically when it comes to Muslims’ presence and rule on the Indian Subcontinent.

To begin this eleven chapters’ long volume, Avari mentions in the introduction (chap. 1) that *Islamic Civilization in South Asia* not only provides a chronological account of Muslims’ history in South Asia, but offers an alternative perspective to some of the major misconceptions about Muslims there. Today, it is (mis)perceived by many that the local Indian population was forcibly converted to Islam by Muslim rulers through the use of violence and coercive force. On the contrary, Avari argues that non-Muslims were converted to Islam for various reasons; for example, the exploitation of lower castes by Brahmins and others led the poor to convert to Islam. Furthermore, Muslim Sufis also played a vital role in preaching Islam in the region. Their shrines are venerated by Muslims and non-Muslims even today. Another common (mis)apprehension
about imposing taxes on non-Muslims by Muslim rulers, particularly Mughals, is also questioned in the book. Avari regards it to be an exaggeration that conversion of non-Muslims to Islam was more “rewarding” for Muslim rulers than imposing taxes on them. Moreover, he asserts that many non-Muslim elites converted to Islam in order to attain privileges under Muslim rule. He notes that the myth of a homogenous Muslim population or “nation” in the Indian Subcontinent has its roots in the Pakistan Movement. Muslims always belonged to, and still have, a diverse ethnic, regional, and linguistic background on the Indian Subcontinent. Throughout history, many Muslim rulers had more tensions among themselves than they had with non-Muslim rulers.

In order to substantiate his arguments, Avari uses various historical sources. In his note on the historiography of the book, he highlights the weaknesses of the sources of South Asian history; for example, biases of early Muslim scholars toward their own religious ideologies, the anti-Muslim views of the Anglicist school and, later, religious and nationalistic biases of Indian and Pakistani historiographies. However, he does acknowledge that these are the only sources available to rely on, and that the recent developments in historical research to draw out reliable information have made it necessary to revisit some of the taken-for-granted views.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide an account of the background and arrival of Arab Muslims and, later, of Persians and Turks, in South Asia. The main focus of these sections is to highlight that Islam was introduced by the Arabs and Persians long before the arrival of Turks in South Asia, particularly the southwestern areas now included in Pakistan. The author’s description of many theological aspects of Islam which predominate Muslim culture, such as zakat (alms or charity) and fatwa (religious ruling), in order to explain how these have played a vital role in shaping Islamic civilization in South Asia is unusual for such history books that cover a long span of time. Chapters 4 and 5 describe how Muslim rulers had established the Delhi Sultanate by the twelfth century, which remained the center of power in the following centuries. Later, the Mughal Empire included a majority of today’s South Asia, along with a smaller part of Central Asia. In three dedicated chapters on the Empire, the author provides information about the arrival of Mughals, their strategies of making alliances with local states, and the fall of their rule at the hands of the British. The majority of the iconic depictions of Islamic art, Sufism, and architectural monuments in South Asia belong to the Mughal era, such as the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort, the Lahore Fort, and the Badshahi Mosque. The author highlights various reasons for the fall of the Mughals; for instance, the rebellion of various tribes against the policies of Mughals in their later period, and the power