



## Being the Other: The Muslim in India

*Saeed Naqvi*

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The clouds are moving ecstatically from Kashi to Mathura and the sky will remain covered with dense clouds as long as there is Krishna in Braj. These lines were composed by Mohsin Kakorvi, an Urdu poet, to celebrate not Lord Krishna's birthday but that of the Prophet Muhammad.

Awadh, the author's birthplace, was steeped in this exquisite confluence of cultures. Sadly, this glorious tradition has been systematically destroyed over the past century. In many ways, Awadh stood for everything that independent India could have become, a land in which people of different faiths co-existed peacefully and created a culture that drew upon the best that each community had to offer. Instead, what we have today is a pale shadow of the harmony that once existed. Everywhere there are incidents of sectarian murder, communal propaganda and divisive politics. And there seems to be no stopping the forces that are destroying the country.

In this remarkable book, which is partly a memoir and partly an exploration of the various deliberate and inadvertent acts that have contributed to the othering of the 180 million Muslims in India, Saeed Naqvi looks at how the divisions between Muslims and Hindus began in the modern era. The British were the first to exploit these divisions between the communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the run-up to Independence, and its immediate aftermath, some of India's greatest leaders including Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, and others only served to drive the communities further apart.

Successive governments, whether formed by the Congress or BJP, compounded the problem by failing to prevent (if not actively supporting) tragic events like communal riots in Gujarat (1969 and 2002), Bombay (1992, 1993), Muzaffarnagar (2013), the breaking of the Babri Masjid (1992) and so on.

As a reporter, and editor, Naqvi covered all these events (with the exception of Partition), and in the book he shows us, with acuity and insight, how each of these resulted in the shaping of the discontent of the Muslim in India. Thought-provoking and troubling, *Being the Other* is essential reading for all those interested in understanding the forces that have shaped contemporary Indian society.

## Being the Other: The Muslim in India Details

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### **Anvesh says**

Let me be clear with my rating, thinking and concepts covered deserve 5 stars. But the brooding in early chapter and the book not presenting as many facts at some place made me give this a 4 star rating.

I read this line somewhere else " People with privilege barely register the fact that their view of reality comes from their vantage point and usually fail to grasp the situation of those without it". It is hard to argue against it, it is so true especially in context of backlash seen against Metoo movement and Muslims in our country.

Government actions to improve lives of muslims are labeled as "Appeasement", I've heard this word before reading this book. I come from a town which has 30% muslims, I haven't seen a single successful muslim doctor out of that town, no great professional success from education. Even the, when my government does something for education of muslims, i hear the words "they are appeasing Hindus". I'm ashamed to have felt this " Had i born in a muslim family, I'd not have had opportunity to finish two professional degrees". There is very little done by governments to really improve educational and living standards of muslims and author doesn't shy away from stating facts as such.

Author also emphasizes on how insecurities are bred in Indian Muslims owing to repeated inaction from Police in guaranteeing them enough protection and most riots show that muslims are major victims out of any riot. This was covered by Guha as well in India after Gandhi. There is no emphasis needed on the point that Peace is good for everyone except Political parties. For electoral gains, parties are quick to incite any small issue and this has been done both by MIM and BJP in my state. Only education and rational thinking will keep individuals away from falling prey to such agendas.

But, with increasing polarization and reducing restraint in general, it is a mere hope that lives of muslims will get better in India.

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## **Toshali Gupta says**

Seemed more factual and opinionated at times, the book did a good job in explaining how the Indians Muslims have perceived the history of politics since partition while referring to exact events with timelines.

While acknowledging that this could be a biased account of narration, I appreciate the comprehensive account of events and facts and the disclaimers at different points to suggest the personal opinions of the author.

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## **Rajesh CNB says**

### **A brilliant presentation of a subtle and controversial truth**

I have two best friends. Both are Muslims. In our younger days, we grew up in each others company, many times eating from the same plate and mingling in each other's families. I went to namaz on several occasions and they both visited temples in my company. Our parents never ever came in the way of our friendship. They were as much of brothers to my sister as I was to theirs, even to this day. This book, its theme, its presentation took me on a journey of our friendship. It made me ask the question, is there any way that I "othered" them. On hindsight, I might have on a couple of occasions.

What hit home was this. In our country, invisible lines of culture separate the Hindus and Muslims. We "other" each other quite naturally. In Naqvi's own words:

"We have lived in a state of uninstitutionalized apartheid for decades, even centuries. The segregation belonging to people of different religions has been complicated by the restrictions of caste"

Thinking back, I think this statement rings more or less true. When I was about ten years old, I had befriended the son of our maid, who was quite elder to me and used to play around with him a lot. He was affectionate, gentle and quite playful with me. It upset my grandparents (who had come to live with us only recently then) and they asked my mother to speak to me about it. My mother, being the post-graduate and the liberal she was, never could bring up the word "lower-caste" into the conversation. She ended up saying that he is "dirty". But I got the whole message clear and loud and ignored it thoroughly. But for my parents' liberal upbringing, I would have been a Hindu who could easily "other" people. I said all this because I wanted to set the context in which we have to understand the book.

The Hindu-Muslim divide is quite a complicated subject. I had only partially understood its religious roots. I had the fortune of reading the Geeta and the Quran and also appraise Krishna and Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Unto Him) as historical characters through the works of S.L.Bhairappa and James Michener. Both Krishna and Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Unto Him) to me were legends who changed the world. I thought I understood their religious ideologies and the influences they would have had in their lifetimes to believe and act as they did. And I had strongly felt that if both would have met, then they would have found

a middle-ground and be comfortable with each other. Perhaps they would even be friends!

This book brought into sharp focus the political side of the equation, which was rather hidden to me. It also introduced me to the concept of "Soft Saffronization" which every political party and every political leader exploited to deepen the divide between both religions. I began to see that the roots of the divide have been sown by the British right from 1857. This makes it a 161-year-old conflict, brewed and shapeshifted to a near perfect schism through numerous incidents such as the partition, the Babri Masjid conflict, the Godhra incident, the Kashmir issue and a score of other events. Learning about these events from the point of view of "the other" was not only an emotional experience but also raised a few questions on human frailty and fallacy.

Naqvi's narrative is powerful. He claims his facts and attributes it to his balanced point of view as a journalist. Referring to numerous studies, books and other journalistic anecdotes from his experience, he provides "proof" to the claims. His simple hypothesis is this. "The Hindu-Muslim divide has enormous political dividends. Each political party has had its share of the harvest of this dividend." However, the method of proof is more journalistic than statistical. What I mean to say is that, however balance one might try to achieve, it's a subjective analysis of opinions and views expressed by others, dotted with findings from reports of many a committee formed to study the "status of Muslims", albeit by a Government that wants to "appease" the Muslim community. This is where I would like to take with a pinch of salt the arguments presented in this book. I would like to believe that any representation of a "Minority Community" under such circumstances would always tend to be biased towards generating sympathy for the community so as to gain more of a benefit than not.

In presenting his case, Naqvi has to deal with powerful personas such as Lord Mountbatten, Jawaharlal Nehru, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Sardar Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, P.V. Narasimha Rao and the like. The world sees them differently. History has shown them as such. The legends that they are, one must remember they are human beings and not Gods. Their logic and ethics are as skewed as any of ours. Just because their decisions did not fare well with the minority community doesn't mean that they had malice in their hearts. Though this book doesn't imply that, giving it the name of "Soft Saffronization" is going a little overboard.

But I have to give it that Naqvi has no malice too. He is presenting a point of view. His point of view. As a person belonging to a minority group, his voice needs a hearing. And we need to search our souls and ask ourselves all the questions he is asking us. "Do Hindus of Nepal have more rights in this country than the Muslims of India?" That is the question we need to ask ourselves. Are we culturally, politically, economically biased towards Hindu majority and are we sidelining the Muslim minority? Do we dole out the same treatment to Parsis, Jains, Christians, and Sikhs? As a country, have we marginalized our minority groups? If so, how can we help improve their living conditions? How can we make them self-reliant, self-sufficient and self-respecting people who are proud of India? These and many more questions can and should be asked.

Strongly recommended read for those who can manage to read it without getting to be quickly judgemental. If you can exercise patience and restraint and can willingly see an alternative point of view, then this book will open your mind to a new alternative reality.

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**Rahul Govindwar says**

Expected far more neutral views from such an experienced journalist like Saeed Naqvi. This book is full of stories where there has been injustice with Muslim community - only one side explained. Maybe it is difficult to write a book with balanced views but this book is definitely not one.

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### **vivek says**

Excellent narration of the big problem we face in modern time the nexus of Pakistan Hindu India Muslim ... book takes us through journey of turning points in our post independence history till date which has made this divide to deepen .

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### **Arvind says**

To borrow from "The Alchemist"

If u really want to play victim, the whole universe conspires against you.

This has to be the most filled-with-hate and the sickest book I have read. I am not on Whatsapp but from what I have heard, can say its full of Whatsapp level conspiracy theories and crap.

The author sees dresses (sarees/shirts-trousers) from a religious angle, sees language from a religious angle, sees the war on terror as anti-Muslim, sees Western anti-Muslim "prejudice" due to Israel, curses Hindus for land reforms and abolition of zamindari, blames Nehru primarily (and Gandhi) for partition, calls Hindus plotting and happy for partition, almost justifies killing of innocents in Bombay blasts, justifies religious extremism if facing administrative "neglect". In case u feel i m exaggerating I have posted status updates with locations and in quotes.

There is no mention of UCC/personal law reforms. High crime rate, fundamentalism r conveniently blamed on the "other" (Hindus or d West). Infact Mr. Hasrat Mohani who threatened bloodshed in the constituent assembly of India is mentioned lovingly.

I shudder to think that such a man was a top political editor in prestigious newspapers. Also, I think this book should have a diff title - It is a personal memoir. If the author represents his community, I fear for d future of India n d world.

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### **Saket Suman says**

The state of India's religious minorities, particularly the Muslim community, has long been a subject of interest for researchers from India and abroad alike. Numerous studies, research papers as well as non-fiction titles have pointed out the various flaws in our "secular structure" and elaborated on how India's Muslims continue to strive for an equal identity in the Indian socio-political structure. The continued conflict in Kashmir has only added to the worry as separatists as well as our immediate neighbour on the West attempt to contest it on the singular principle of Muslim majority, while ignoring the historical relevance as well as the Instrument of Accession. On the other hand, petty politics and unchecked defenders of Indian patriotism have let us down by not only fuelling tension through their provocations but also giving ground to those who test the patriotism of our Muslim community from across the border.

A recent offering from Aleph Book Company provides sufficient insight into the "Other" in our society and reasonably explains the view from the other side of the aisle. Being The Other: The Muslim In India by Saeed Naqvi, eloquently addresses the debate on the state of Muslims in India and more importantly, the

offering, point by point, addresses sufficiently all those issues that the so called defenders of Indian patriotism seek to hurl against the “other”.

“In Allahabad University, during the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi agitation, I put a simple question to the packed audience consisting of teachers and students, almost equally divided between Hindus and Muslims. ‘Have the Hindus in this audience ever seen the inside of a Muslim home?’ One or two murmered, ‘My father knew Persian’ or ‘My mother cooks chicken’ as evidence of his or her emancipation from religious parochialism,” Naqvi mentions on the back jacket of the hardbound book. “But, no, none of them had ever been to a Muslim home. Likewise, the Muslims in the gathering had never visited a Hindu home. At that moment, a truth hit me between my eyes. We have lived in a state of uninstitutionalised apartheid for decades, even centuries.” Saeed Naqvi does not beat around the bush but comes straight to the point. The nine chapters of the book, fortunately, make no effort to patronize and flaunt the practices of a particular community or shy away from or confront the issues raised by those on the opposite end.

Given that the book is written partly in a memoir format, the credentials of the author become significant. Does one blindly trust the author? No. Naqvi has been a reporter and foreign correspondent for over four decades. In fact, he started his journalistic career as a staff reporter with this paper and by now has travelled almost the length and breadth of India and visited over a hundred countries in pursuit of stories. He has covered many wars since the country’s 1971 war with Pakistan, which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh, including the civil war in Sri Lanka, 1971; the Sino-Vietnam war, 1979; the US bombing of Libya, 1986; the first coup in Fiji, 1987; the Nicaragua war, 1989; Operation Desert Storm, 1991; the US occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, 2003; and the Syrian civil war, 2011. Besides virtually every Indian leader of any importance, he has interviewed world statesmen like Nelson Mandela, Fidel Castro, Muammar Gaddafi, Henry Kissinger, Benazir Bhutto, Hamid Karzai, Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin, J R Jayewardene, Hashemi Rafsanjani and scores of others. His writings have appeared in several national and international publications, including BBC News, the Sunday Observer, SundayTimes, Guardian, Washington Post, Indian Express, Citizen and Outlook magazine. Naqvi is one writer readers can rely upon.

In this remarkable book, partly a memoir and partly an exploration of the various deliberate and inadvertent acts that have contributed to the “othering” of the 180 million Muslims in India, the author looks at how the divisions between Muslims and Hindus began in the modern era. The British were the first to exploit these divisions between the communities in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the run-up to Independence, and its immediate aftermath, some of India’s greatest leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and others, only served to drive the communities further apart. Successive governments, whether formed by the Congress or BJP, compounded the problem by failing to prevent (if not actively supporting) tragic events like communal riots in Gujarat, Mumbai, Muzzafarnagar, the breaking of the Babri Masjid and so on. As a reporter and editor, Naqvi covered all these events (except Partition), and in the book he shows us, with acuity and insight, how each of these resulted in the shaping of the discontent of the Muslim in India.

“...What we see today is a pale shadow of the harmony that once existed. Everywhere there are incidents of the sectarian murder, communal propaganda and divisive politics. And there seems to be no stopping the forces that are destroying the country,” regrets Naqvi in *Being The Other: The Muslim In India*.

Almost one-third of the book is a memoir while the rest comprises the author’s observations and eyewitness accounts of various seminal events in the contemporary Indian history. The author hopes that when the readers have finished this account, he or she “will have gained a measure of understanding of what is being lost to communalism”.

### **Anil Swarup says**

"Mistakes were made- Partition was one of them". This has been and still is a moot point but the author firmly believes that partition was indeed a mistake. He doesn't spare anyone, including Gandhi for relenting. He quotes copiously in this well researched book to prove his point. Partition, according to the author created fault lines that continue to haunt the sub-continent. One may disagree with this and with a lot more that is written in the book but the book makes for a compelling reading. Saeed takes pride in the "ganga yamuni" ethos, the eclectic ethos that binds the Indian Multi-cultural and multi-social firmament of the country. This firmament, according to the author, is already under severe strain and it all started with the partition. He is also very critical of the role being played by the Indian media: " Indian media has shown a singular lack of initiative when it comes to covering or having a view on international events. The attitude seems to be- you shape the world, we will mark time with caste, cricket and shallow TV debates." The author is also seriously concerned about increasing lack of communication between the two communities. These "distances of the mind (are) more durable than the communal clashes."

The book does not merely limit itself to diagnosis. There is a prescription as well. The author is convinced that "the global war on terror cannot be allowed to exploit existing fault lines in the country". He also suggests that "India Muslims must be freed from the clutches of their clerics just as Hindus need to turn away from communal politicians". Well said but the crucial question remains unanswered : How to go about it?

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### **Gokulakrishnan Saravanan says**

This book changed my view about Indian Muslims in a good way ..Thank you Saeed Naqvi for that

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### **Vibhor Jain says**

A good perspective on the view from the 'other' side. The book highlights the circumstances post independence of India which have influenced Muslims in India (mostly in the negative way). The role of various political parties and leaders has been elaborated who have (mis)utilized the Muslims for their votes and exploited them.

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### **Raghu says**

Ever since the Hindu nationalists came to power in Delhi in 2014, India has seen sustained pressure on its Muslims, Christians, Dalits and the Tribal people to defer to the dictats of the upper caste Hindu vision of India. Violence has been unleashed on Muslims for eating beef. It is par for the course now to hear ruling party members openly questioning the Indian Muslim's patriotism or his rights as an Indian citizen. It is only natural that the Indian muslim would have felt more alienated since 2014 than before. This book, by the veteran journalist Saeed Naqvi, is a sort of personal memoir. Along with his family history, the author embellishes it with commentaries on the 'lost' composite culture of Awadh, India's partition, communal riots in independent India, proselytization of Hindus, the consequences of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and the Kashmir conundrum. I have read much of what Naqvi has written over the years. This book though, is different from what I expected. The tone is pessimistic and so are his views on secular India's

future and the Muslim community's place in it.

The book opens with chapters on Awadh, where Naqvi grew up, and talks about the syncretic culture of the place and the author's family history. There is much reminiscing of Wajid Ali Shah, the last ruler of Awadh, and his writings on his exile away to Calcutta by the British rulers. I found these chapters quite absorbing for their exposition on Shia Islam, the traditions associated with the times and its glory. The author then moves on to the partition of India in 1947. He effectively blames Nehru and Patel as the principal villains responsible for India's partition. He casts serious aspersions on Nehru's commitment to secularism and castigates even Mahatma Gandhi for mixing religion with politics. Even Gandhi's commitment to an unified India is doubted. The Congress party also comes under attack for its 'phony' secularism. Naqvi alleges that the Hindutva project was started right after 1947 by the Congress party. After this, the author deals with proselytization of Hindus and discusses the 1981 Meenakshipuram mass conversion episode in Tamilnadu in this context. Then, there are two chapters on the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the many communal riots in independent India. The chapters on the various Prime Ministers of India surprised me by the strong endorsement of an RSS man like Atal Behari Vajpayee rather than Pandit Nehru. The final chapter traces the 'Kashmir problem'. The book ends with an epilogue which tries to make some amends for the earlier negative prognosis for India and its muslims. There are suggestions as to what both Hindus and Muslims can do to integrate better.

To me, it seems that the author himself is confused about his own emotions regarding India and the Muslim citizen's future in it. On the one hand, he keeps returning to the Ganga-Yamuni culture of syncretism that he experienced in Awadh and seems to think that partition was a betrayal of this idyllic India. On the other hand, he contradicts himself in the epilogue. He concludes that the truth about India is that we have lived in an un-institutionalized apartheid for centuries and that people are segregated by caste, religion and class. I wish the author had been courageous enough to question more deeply even his much-loved syncretic, Ganga-Yamuni culture. Had he done so, he might have realized that most of our inter-faith relationships are largely contractual. Except for a small educated elite, they are not the result of a deep understanding of each other's culture. They flow more out of the needs of the context in which they live. For most Hindus and Muslims, Hindu-Muslim harmony is not experienced as living deeply within each others' culture. This is probably the main reason why such gory violence erupted during partition and still keeps erupting periodically in politically engineered communal riots. Indian culture specializes in 'othering' its own people. Dalits have been othered for millenniums and so have OBCs (other backward castes) been. During the Mughal rule, most non-muslims probably felt 'othered'. Under British rule, most Indians must have felt 'othered'. Syncretism was probably experienced only in small pockets of exclusivity.

Though I don't agree with the author dumping the entire blame on Nehru and the Congress party for partition, I can understand the alienation he feels as an Indian muslim and sympathize with his disappointment over Pandit Nehru. However, there are as many viewpoints on this issue as there are actors involved in partition. The causes range over Nehru, Patel, Jinnah, the Muslim League, the Congress Party, the British, the Second World War and so on. I doubt there could ever be a consensus on who was primarily responsible. I think the author has left this discussion a little incomplete by not dealing with the question of whether the broad Muslim elite was really inclined to live in a Hindu-majority India. In this context, journalist M.J. Akbar identifies a 'theory of distance' amongst the Muslim elite in India from the 18th century onwards. This theory holds that Hindus and Muslims are different people and that Muslim interests and way of life in India can only be secured by Muslims living as a separate 'nation'. Interestingly, this idea was propounded not by the Deoband Dar-ul-Uloom, the primary clergy of South Asia, but by the Muslim educated elite. The reasons for this primarily were the sharp decline of Mughal power in India under the British from the 18th century onwards and the consequent rise in British India of Hindus, who embraced the English language and modernity through education in western science and values. The Muslim elite stayed

mostly away from English and modern education denouncing them as something 'foreign and despicable'. Additionally, the decline of the Ottoman empire in Europe also contributed to the feeling amongst the Muslim elite of the erosion of power and influence. M.J. Akbar says that this idea of a separate nationhood has always been there with Indian Muslim elite since the 18th century. Author Naqvi is one of the Muslim elites in India. He should know if this is plausible. If so, then why put all the blame on the Congress Party and Nehru?

The other criticism the author raises is about Mahatma Gandhi mixing religion with politics and thereby unleashing a dangerous trend. Naqvi quotes Jinnah as having warned the Mahatma on this decades before independence. But then, the author writes approvingly of Maulana Azad, who also believed that there is no contradiction in mixing religion and politics. Azad, as a Deobandi cleric, maintained that the Quran was the true guide for religion and politics. If Azad could be hailed for seamlessly merging his Islamic loyalties with secular Indian nationalism, why can't the same latitude be extended to Gandhi as well?

As for the rest of the commentaries on the demolition of Babri Masjid, Kashmir, proselytization and communal riots, there are no new insights in the book. Much of it is along expected and well-worn lines. But I am always surprised by Muslim scholars putting communal riots and the Babri Masjid destruction on an even keel. Surely, the barbarism in communal riots is infinitely more damaging to the lives of the ordinary muslim compared to a mosque being demolished far away from their home.

Finally, I wonder how widespread today this sense of alienation is among Indian muslims. After all, Saeed Naqvi, with all due respect, is part of the elite among Indian muslims. One does not know how much his sense of betrayal and 'otherness' resonates among the ordinary Indian muslim. Does the middle-class, educated young muslim see hope for his future in India? What does the poor muslim labourer feel? If they share the despondency of the author, then it is ominous for the country's future. On the other hand, if they see the current Modi-Shah-Bhagwat rule as a bad dream that would end in 2019, then there is hope for all secular Indians that the psychological damage can be healed. I, for one, believe this is what will happen.

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### **sharmili priyadarsini says**

It is an extremely well researched and well written book, that carefully argues how the Indian muslims are treated as "the others" for the electoral politics. The Author Saeed Naqvi has made it clear that the intolerance against the muslims did not just peer in the recent decades but has been gradually infested in the minds of people since the partition. He recollected his early memories how congress used the partition card to acquire the power. His days as a journalist under almost all the Prime Ministers of India after independence except for Nehru and Modi, the riots happened in various places of India and how muslim are victimised. Congress' stance especially Rajiv Gandhi's strategy to cover the hindu votes by using Ram Rajya card and shadow support for Babri Masjid demolition. Governments using the international war against terror as an opportunity to conspire against Indian muslims and holding them into judicial custody to later proved innocent; How this creates the insecurity in the minds and livelihoods of Indian muslims and so on.

It is a must read for everyone who, sadly ,see India as a Hindu nation, prejudiced, ignoring the sentiments of the other communities and the secular image of the nation.

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### **Shantanu Gharpure says**

Turfatar yeh hai, ki apna bhi

na jaana, aur yun hee

Apna, apna kehke humko

sabse beygaana kiya

-Saeed Naqvi

More of an autobiographical account by renowned journalist Saeed Naqvi on the plight of Muslims in India. His personal biases should be taken into account, but he does make a larger point that of seclusion and isolation. How partition, and West-sponsored war on terror has led to this 'otherizing' of Muslims in India. Predominantly North Indian perspective because the author is from Awadh, but he manages to give a good insight into Islam in southern part of this country. An insightful read for every Indian I feel.

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### **Nandakishore Varma says**

The Oxford Dictionary defines the 'Other' as 'that which is distinct from, different from, or opposite to something or oneself.' In the late twentieth century, the Palestinian scholar Edward Said analysed this phenomenon. From this issued his seminal work, Orientalism, on the 'affiliation of knowledge and power'. This is how the West created an image of the East as the 'Other'. The supremacist ideology of imperialism is structured on this platform. Looked at through this lens, it helps us see how, in India, an entire community, which comprises over 14 per cent of the total population, has come to be seen as the Other, as something exotic, backward, uncivilized, even dangerous.

Branding a people as the hated "Other" is nothing new in world history. The most famous instance, of course, is the Jew whose misfortunes continued throughout the Middle Ages, right up to the Holocaust where it culminated. The most popular whipping boy of the current century is the Muslim. He is considered a terrorist by default and treated with fear and hatred in almost all the places where he is not in the majority.

Being from a liberal, middle-class, upper-caste Hindu family, I was bought up on the myth of "tolerant" India, where all faiths and beliefs existed in a blissful state of peaceful co-habitation. I was rudely awoken from this utopian dream on December 6, 1992 when a mob of crazed Hindu fanatics destroyed the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, U. P., claiming that it was built on the site of a destroyed temple of Lord Rama. Then on, I have seen atrocities against Muslims escalating, one riot after another, until it has culminated in the current situation where the lynching of Muslims is common in India.

How did this happen? How did Muslims become the hated other? This is what veteran journalist Saeed Naqvi, attempts to find out in this book.

The problem is, in that, it is an epic failure.

He says at the outset that it is his personal experiences of alienation and hostility that he is talking about - but then goes on to talk about history, page after page after page. It seems as though the author is not decided

whether he wants a scholarly book on the historical injustices that Muslims suffered, or a poignant one about his personal journey - and in the end, it ends up as neither.

Naqvi talks about the partition from a historical viewpoint - naturally, since he was too young to have an analytical view of it - and places the fault squarely on the "Hindus" in the Congress - Nehru, Patel and even Gandhiji. Mountbatten, of course, is a thoroughgoing villain. The only genuine person in the Congress is Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad. And what is even more surprising is his finding that Jinnah actually didn't want the partition! He only wanted to use it as bargaining counter for Muslims to get a better deal, but because Nehru & Co. wanted a "Hindu" government in place, they hurried through with partition.

The same was the case with Kashmir. The author says that Nehru and Mountbatten in collusion cheated the Kashmiris into joining the Indian Union. And he talks about the ethnic cleansing of Jammu which, according to him, was way more brutal than what happened to Kashmiri Pandits.

Swaminathan Anklesaria Aiyar wrote an article in the Times of India on 18 January 2015. It placed the tragedy of the Pandits in its proper perspective. Aiyar clubbed it with another ethnic cleansing in the state that is almost never mentioned. Entitling his piece 'A Tale of Two Ethnic Cleansings in Kashmir', Aiyar wrote: 'Today, Jammu is a Hindu majority area. But in 1947 it had a Muslim majority. The communal riots of 1947 fell most heavily on Jammu's Muslims; lakhs fled into what became Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. That turned Jammu's Muslim majority into Hindu majority... In sheer scale this far exceeded the ethnic cleansing of Pandits five decades later.'

He may be correct, of course - I have to read up more on the secondary sources to form my own views. But in all these descriptions, he seems to harbour a feeling of prejudice towards the "Hindus" who deprived the Muslims of their rightful due.

Similarly, Naqvi waxes lyrical about the Lucknowi lifestyle, about Wajid Ali Shah et al, and says that those days were branded decadent purposefully by the British. He exudes a sense of the aristocratic superiority of the Shia as compared to the commoner Sunnis, and laments the land reforms which took away their wealth. Overall, it sounded to me like privileged whining.

I agree 100% with what he wrote about the riots and pogroms - mostly preplanned with the collusion of the authorities: also about the Muslim youth who are targeted and incarcerated as criminals on the shakiest of pretexts. But in none of these analyses does he give his own experiences except in the most oblique fashion. It is rather like reading a compilation of newspaper reports.

The only refreshing thing I read was Naqvi's take on Narasimha Rao, whom he considers a Brahmin bigot who knew about and condoned the destruction of the Babri Masjid. I had read a similar opinion about him in another book on the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, so maybe Mr. Rao has another face other than that of the neoliberalist messiah he is made out to be.

Rao was also paranoid about the Brahmins' declining power nationally and within the Congress. This was another reason for him to instinctively checkmate Arjun Singh, a Thakur, from playing a larger role in north Indian politics. He was more comfortable playing the politics of accommodation with Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a Brahmin, even on the issue of Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi. When the demolition began, he and Home Minister Shankarrao Chavan did what they were best at—indulging in deep thought. When Chavan described Vajpayee as Rao's 'Guru', Vajpayee, with warm familiarity, called him 'Guru Ghantal' (Guru

of Gurus). Lal Krishna Advani declared Rao the best prime minister since Lal Bahadur Shastri. As it turned out, these leaders of the BJP were the main beneficiaries of Rao's handling of the situation.

My final verdict: I agree with Saeed Naqvi's premise about the "other"ing of Muslims; but the case he has presented is very weak because it smacks throughout of personal prejudices. But we should listen to such mild voices, because, if we give in to religious intolerance:

Muslims aren't the only ones who will lose, every Indian will. It doesn't matter if you are Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Christian, Jain or atheist—a country divided by sectarianism or shaped along communal lines will no longer be India. It will be a different country, a retrograde nation ruled by belief, superstition and authoritarian impulses, a replica of failed states and religious dictatorships around the world where tyranny has displaced democracy, human rights, justice and liberty for all.

Oh yes. Yes indeed.

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### **Muhammad Raza says**

Excellent book written in the perspective of Muslims of Awadh / UP. I really enjoyed the first chapters giving a real insight of the cultural values of Awadh highlighting the inclusiveness. I can relate a lot to the stories we have heard from our parents and grandmother who migrated from Awadh to Pakistan.

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