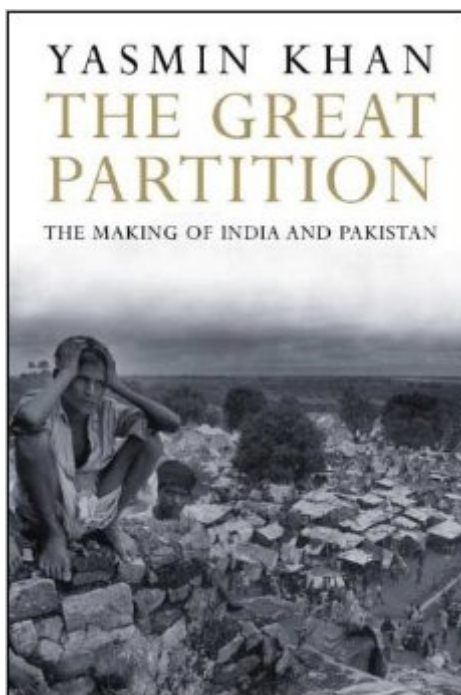


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The Great Partition: The Making Of India And Pakistan



Synopsis

The Partition of India in 1947 promised its people both political and religious freedom through the liberation of India from British rule, and the creation of the Muslim state of Pakistan. Instead, the geographical divide brought displacement and death, and it benefited the few at the expense of the very many. Thousands of women were raped, at least one million people were killed, and ten to fifteen million were forced to leave their homes as refugees. One of the first events of decolonization in the twentieth century, Partition was also one of the most bloody. In this book Yasmin Khan examines the context, execution, and aftermath of Partition, weaving together local politics and ordinary lives with the larger political forces at play. She exposes the widespread obliviousness to what Partition would entail in practice and how it would affect the populace. Drawing together fresh information from an array of sources, Khan underscores the catastrophic human cost and shows why the repercussions of Partition resound even now, some sixty years later. The book is an intelligent and timely analysis of Partition, the haste and recklessness with which it was completed, and the damaging legacy left in its wake.

Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Yale University Press; 10.6.2008 edition (November 5, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0300143338

ISBN-13: 978-0300143331

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.8 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars See all reviews (38 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #151,444 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 in Books > History > Asia > Pakistan #76 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Ideologies & Doctrines > Nationalism #119 in Books > History > Asia > India

Customer Reviews

I was born and brought up in India and I have a keen interest in South Asian history. Out of the 15 or so books on partition that I read (sometimes just skimmed through!), this book is undoubtedly the best. (Patrick French's book 'Liberty or Death' is also VERY good, but it covers lot of other issues- not just Partition and is quite long!). If you have an appreciation for good English writing, this book will be a pleasure to read- but don't expect something that panders to popular stereotypes about

India/South Asia or interesting anecdotes about eccentric Indian kings or leaders- this is a serious work of scholarship suitable only for the deeply interested casual reader. The author appears to be a first rate scholar who has a very impressive command over the subject matter- she sometimes manages to convey more in a couple of paragraphs than some other historians will do in entire chapters. I needed all my prior knowledge of Indian history to begin to understand how good this book really is! In the interest of brevity, I will mention only two major strengths of this book relative to other general accounts of the Partition of India.¹ This is history from the bottom up- instead of focusing on the discussions between leaders of the Indian National Congress, Muslim League and high ranking British officials leading up to the partition, the author concentrates on how the politics related to the partition played out on the streets of India- the fears, insecurities and expectations of the common people and how politicians sought to engage them. The majority of studies on Partition concentrate only on the 'elite politics' aspect- what Nehru, Jinnah or Mountbatten did or didn't do or say etc.

Please don't consider this book "objective" history. It's gotten great press, and it contains some valuable information, but reader beware: Yasmin Khan has a definite pro-Muslim bias. Her version of Partition is one deliberately shaped to make Muslims appear the victims of Hindus. Khan is smart enough not to make overtly prejudiced or inflammatory statements--how credible a historian would she be in that case? Her biases comes through in her selection of the facts. She repeatedly portrays Hindus carrying out violence during the Partition, while Muslims are for the most part terrified victims--running from this village, slaughtered in that town. Naturally she must describe Muslim violence to some extent, in the interest of credibility and conscience, one hopes, and to some extent she does portray the violence against Hindus as well, but the preponderance of her examples describe Hindus perpetrating violence and Muslims suffering at their hands. In one chapter, almost every attack noted is carried out by Hindus. I kept waiting for an example of Muslim violence and was shocked her sympathies for Muslims were so blatantly displayed. Khan is the granddaughter of a Muslim League politician of the 40s, and though she describes herself as being distant from those politics, not all her loyalties can be left behind. Curiously, in some instances when Khan describes atrocities committed against Hindus, she will not name the group who commits them. Instead of using the noun "Muslim," the attack on Hindus is simply described as if carried out by an anonymous force. Where she can, she will avoid assigning blame to Muslims and will spare them the slightly mocking tone she occasionally uses with Hindu leaders. Khan's biases are insidiously wrought, and her dishonesty is subtle.

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