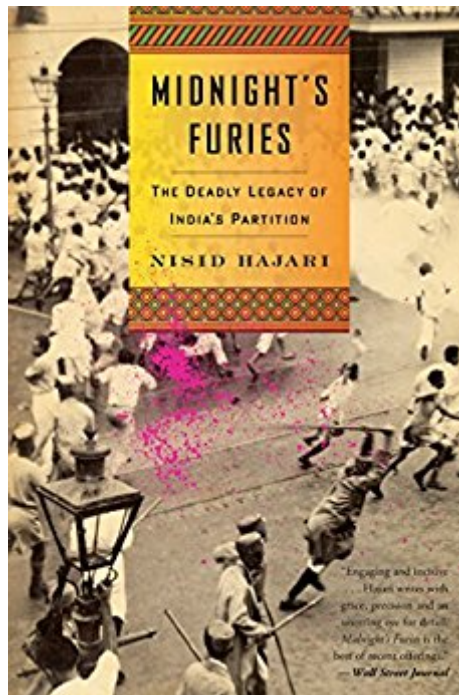


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Midnight's Furies: The Deadly Legacy Of India's Partition



Synopsis

Named one of the best books of 2015 by NPR, , Seattle Times, and Shelf Awareness

A few bloody months in South Asia during the summer of 1947 explain the world that troubles us today. Nobody expected the liberation of India and birth of Pakistan to be so bloody — it was supposed to be an answer to the dreams of Muslims and Hindus who had been ruled by the British for centuries. Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi's protégé and the political leader of India, believed Indians were an inherently nonviolent, peaceful people.

Pakistan's founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, was a secular lawyer, not a firebrand. But in August 1946, exactly a year before Independence, Calcutta erupted in street-gang fighting. A cycle of riots — targeting Hindus, then Muslims, then Sikhs — spiraled out of control. As the summer of 1947 approached, all three groups were heavily armed and on edge, and the British rushed to leave. Hell let loose. Trains carried Muslims west and Hindus east to their slaughter. Some of the most brutal and widespread ethnic cleansing in modern history erupted on both sides of the new border, searing a divide between India and Pakistan that remains a root cause of many evils. From jihadi terrorism to nuclear proliferation, the searing tale told in *Midnight's Furies* explains all too many of the headlines we read today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is somewhat more in depth than could have been anticipated. The chapter about Kashmir and Talib assault of Sprinagar revealed to me that there is history out that US analysts has perhaps overlooked, given that it was launched from Abottabad. There is much accounting about the personality of Jinnah as directed at the British Imperial leadership and Nehru as well as Sardar Singh. These events did not get as much description in "Freedom at Midnight" or Indian Summer.

The Indian subcontinent had spent roughly 200 years under British rule when World War II approached and the desires for independence began to emerge with great vigor (the British East India company had ruled from about 1757 to 1858, followed by the British Raj where the British Crown ruled the subcontinent, from 1858 until the independence of Pakistan and India). As the conflicts in Europe flared into full-scale war, the British Army made use of Indian troops (India at this time referring to the entire country as then defined). Those troops fought alongside Britain's own soldiers in battle, while on the subcontinent the two movements that would develop into the driving forces behind independence - the Indian National Congress, and the Muslim League - gained strength. Britain needed that support from India, but also saw that independence was inevitable as soon as the war ended. The Muslim league was led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and the Indian National Congress was led by Jawaharlal Nehru with support and spiritual backing from Mahatma Gandhi. A great number of other leaders and key personalities also played major roles in the development of the independence movements and the subsequent partition and fighting that took place, but the personalities of Jinnah and Nehru decided many of the key positions their respective parties took during this time. And this is what I found most interesting about this book. It seems clear, according to the author, Nisid Hajari, that the stubbornness of both Jinnah and Nehru, and the inability of those two leaders to work together for the benefit of their peoples, was perhaps the most significant single element in how the early history of these two independent countries developed. In fact he suggests more than once that it could have been possible for a united India to have emerged at this time, if different leaders had been in place, ones who could have compromised and worked together with a much greater degree of trust and respect than what Jinnah and Nehru had for each other. This is a great shame given how history has developed in the subsequent 60+ years, particularly (I would say) for Pakistan which has been far less successful economically and politically than has India. Another strong impression that I receive from this book is that, once Britain

decided that India should be given its independence, the involvement of Britain in helping to provide some guidance to that process, so that it could proceed peacefully and with respect to both the Hindu and Muslim peoples of India, was slim and decreased to the point where Britain essentially withdrew and simply left the people of India to their own devices. Instead of a united and independent India, what happened was a series of violent and horrific ethnic killings, provoked by sometimes almost trivial events on both sides, that began and then escalated and finally led to such mistrust and hatred that any hope of the peoples staying together in one country were lost as a result. The descriptions of how formerly peaceful neighbors would suddenly turn on one another, simply because one was Muslim and the other Hindu, are striking and chilling. It brings to mind other similar circumstances this world has seen in other areas in subsequent years. In interviews recently, when Hajari has been discussing this book, he has also expressed his view that the foundations for much of the current behavior of Pakistan - its support of insurgent groups in Afghanistan for example - can be found in this early history. He suggests that Pakistan's principal preoccupation since this time has been its historic enemy India, and that just about all of its decisions regarding involvement in conflicts outside of Pakistan can be connected to this distrust and fear of India. I'm not convinced about that, but in reading the book it's not at all the main point anyway. I felt that I took away from this book a much greater understanding of the events of the period of roughly 1946 through 1948 or 49. Gandhi was assassinated on January 30, 1948. Jinnah had been very ill and finally died on September 11, 1948. Nehru was the only leader of those top three to still be healthy and in power. Pakistan was running out of money and from a practical standpoint really unable to continue to pursue any aggression against India. The countries began to settle into the divided condition that persists today, with the Kashmir region still unresolved and with the area of Eastern Pakistan later splitting off in 1971 and forming the current country of Bangladesh.

One of the best histories of the partition that I have ever read. It was particularly good at dealing with the formation of Pakistan which many histories of this region give short shrift.

Great account of the tragedies of the partition of India. Stubborn, idealistic politicians, well intentioned at first, and self centered in the end, ruined themselves, their country, and the lives of its citizens. Especially interesting is its account of the prototype and portent of the Muslim Jihad usage we see so much today.

A very readable account of a bloody and violent period. This is not a tale of great men arising from turbulent times, but a story of the extreme emotions and strains at the birth of modern India and Pakistan. The central personalities are discussed fairly objectively, the book does not promote heroes, the violence is overwhelming and in fairness to the author probably beyond true explanation. Nonetheless the extent of communal hatred is portrayed. Some interesting connections with today's events, such as Islamic terrorism are established.

Pakistan has about 100 nuclear warheads and India about 150. The muslims vs the Hindus. This area of the world is fomenting and bristling with morbid hatred. This book explains the past and present animosity and the ramifications possible in today's combative world. The author knows his subject well thus making this a great read.

Incredible feat of reporting, synthesis, and writing. Absolutely indispensable for anyone who wants to understand the world we live in today.

For a single volume, this is best book I've read concerning partition, the events that led up to it and those following. The writing is clear, direct, while concise. The major players are defined with both good and bad characteristics - all within the confines of a broad ranging topic.

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