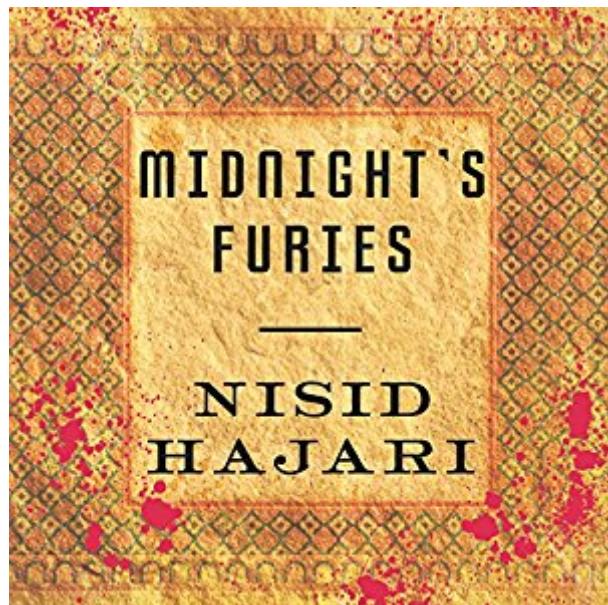


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Midnight's Furies: The Deadly Legacy Of India's Partition



Synopsis

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 that 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

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 11 hours and 43 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Tantor Audio

Audible.com Release Date: August 25, 2015

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B013TO8Y4W

Best Sellers Rank: #115 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Asia #130 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Colonialism & Post-Colonialism #278 in Books > History > Asia > India

Customer Reviews

Nisid Hajari's "Midnight's Furies" is a frightening look at the ethnic cleansings and boneheaded politics that helped create modern day India and Pakistan. While most modern writers on both sides concentrate solely on the Kashmir, Hajari goes further into the conflict by including the bloodbaths that occurred in the Punjab and bringing the political background that made this possible. A star off for bringing in minor players that overtly complicate the book and for not providing a bit more

background on historic Muslim-Hindu-Sikh relationships before World War I, but overall a disturbing but important book. 4 stars. As Hajari notes, save for the uplifting story of Gandhi most Westerners know little about India's evolution from vassal to independent state. Unfortunately, there is good reason for this: the story of the birth of Pakistan and India is not one that most of its participants want told, as it involved ethnic cleansing and mass murder that can only be compared to Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, or any number of countries following World War I. How did this happen? The political leadership on both sides initially presented fairly firm positions but by all accounts were capable and interested in compromise, but after several incidents, those positions hardened from political posturing to outright hatred. That gave cover for tolerance and, at times, direct encouragement for lower class proxies in the battle to encourage those who weren't coreligionists to flee, by fire, brutal violence, or simply outright murder. What started in the Punjab - readers may be surprised to learn Delhi was once a strongly integrated city, for instance - spread throughout the border regions, and the result was horrific.

Rather than focus on the years that preceded India's independence from British rule and the reasons for its partition into two nations, "Midnight's Furies" looks at the violence that preceded and followed the partition in order to understand how India and Pakistan view one another today. Nisid Hajari, a journalist specializing in Asian affairs, focuses not on "why the sub-continent split, or who was to blame for the massacres, but how the experience of Partition carved out a such a wide gulf between India and Pakistan." Inevitably, the book does touch on reasons for the partition and who killed whom, but it primarily discusses the roles of rival politicians Jawaharlal Nehru, president of the Indian National Congress and first Prime Minister of India, and Mohammed Ali Jinnah, president of the Muslim League and first Governor-General of Pakistan, and their reactions to the horrific riots and massacres that Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs traded 1946-1948. Coverage of the violence begins in August 1946 with the Great Calcutta Killing a year before India achieved independence and continues through countless back and forth massacres, including those by Muslims of Sikhs and between Hindus and Meos in the Punjab, the Sikh war bands that preyed on Muslims in retaliation, and the invasion of Kashmir by marauding Panthan tribesmen supported by Pakistan, targeting Hindus and Sikhs. One gets the impression of an unbreakable stream of barbarism, as non-Muslims are forced to flee Pakistan and Muslims fleeing some parts of India are not able to make it alive to their destinations in Pakistan. The author follows the violence, the politics surrounding it, and the negotiations through the first of many virtual wars between India and Pakistan, until the end of 1948.

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