

BOOK REVIEW

Another India: The Making of the World's Largest Muslim Minority, 1947–77

By Pratinav Anil. London: Hurst, 2023. 432 pages. Hardback, £25.00 GBP, ISBN: 9781787388086.

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Overview

Pratinav Anil's book, *Another India: The Making of the World's Largest Muslim Minority, 1947–77*, provides a unique perspective on the history of India's Muslim minority following the tumultuous decades following the country's independence in 1947. Anil, a noted scholar in the field of India history, offers a comprehensive study of challenges faced by India's Muslim minority during this transformative period. Through meticulous research and nuanced analysis, Anil unravels the multifaceted experiences of this minority population and explores the distinctive trajectory it followed in the post-independence era.

The central premise of the book, encapsulated in the phrase “another India,” underscores the idea that the experiences, challenges, and trajectory of India's Muslim minority markedly diverge from the dominant narrative of post-independence India. This divergence, as Anil elucidates, is rooted in the traumatic and transformative events of 1947, particularly the partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. The lingering consequences of this cataclysmic division left an indelible mark on the Muslim minority, setting them on a distinct path that warrants in-depth exploration. It presents a persuasive argument that India's Muslim minority constitutes a complex and distinct aspect of the nation, frequently marginalised within the broader post-independence narrative.

It highlights that the historical journey of India's Muslim minority cannot be understood through the lens of the broader national narrative alone. Instead, it necessitates a nuanced examination that takes into account the unique set of challenges and opportunities that this community faced in the aftermath of partition and the subsequent nation-building processes. By adopting this perspective, Anil examines the individual experiences and collective history of India's Muslims, drawing attention to their distinctive trajectory, which unfolded alongside the dominant narrative of post-independence India. In doing so, the author not only illuminates the complexities of their historical journey but also underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of the India's diversity of identities.

Another India moreover challenges the prevailing perception that the partitioning was a one-time, isolated event with time-limited repercussions. The study underscores the enduring scars, memories, and psychological trauma that continue to affect India's Muslim minority. This approach represents a notable departure from earlier works that predominantly concentrated on the immediate political implications and territorial consequences of partition. By emphasising the persistent emotional and psychological aftermath of this seismic event, Anil uncovers a facet of history that had remained relatively unexplored in the existing literature.

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Histories and power struggles

In *Another India*, Pratinav Anil effectively highlights the complexities and constraints faced by Muslim leaders within the Congress during the post-independence era. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and the promises of a secular democratic state, disparities in areas such as education, employment, and living conditions continued to persist. Muslim leaders' ability to address these disparities and advocate effectively for the community's broader interests was often curtailed by various factors.

Anil effectively highlights the complexities and constraints faced by Muslim leaders within the Congress during the post-independence era. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and the promises of a secular democratic state, disparities in areas such as education, employment, and living conditions continued to persist. Yet Muslim leaders' ability to address these disparities and advocate effectively for the community's broader interests was often curtailed by various factors. These leaders often came from aristocratic backgrounds and were profoundly influenced by the cataclysmic events of partition, leaving them in a state of dislocation and introspection. As they grappled with a complex political landscape characterised by divisions within the Congress. These divisions within the Congress, often influenced by the differing perspectives of prominent Hindu leaders, created intricate dynamics that further limited the political agency of Muslim leaders.

By including this aspect, the book is able to further explore the choices made by Muslim leaders and their impact on the community. The book thus provides context to understand the factors behind the elevation of specific leaders within the Congress and the consequences of their policies on the experiences and challenges faced by the Muslim minority. Furthermore, incorporating this aspect contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the book's central argument regarding the Muslim minority's distinct trajectory in post-independence India. The Muslim community was effectively "abandoned" by most Muslim leaders in the Congress, which sheds light on the complex political dynamics within the Muslim community and their relationship with it. It elucidates the intricate interplay of politics, identity, and agency within the Muslim minority during the post-independence period.

Anil shifts the focus from political manoeuvring to the personal experiences of ordinary people during the partition of India in 1947, offering a vivid portrayal of their sufferings and resilience. He then leverages this distinctive human-centred approach to delve into complex political dynamics within the Muslim community, and also those of Hindus and Sikhs during the harrowing partition. It also sheds light on their relationship with the Congress party, offering insights into the intricacies of politics, identity, and agency within the Muslim minority post-independence. This unique perspective adds an emotional dimension to the narrative, enabling readers to connect with the history on a deeper level. It amplifies the voices of those who lived through this tumultuous period, vividly portraying their sufferings, sacrifices, and resilience in the face of unimaginable horrors.

Socioeconomic disparities faced by India's Muslim minority

Alongside his discussion of politics, Anil discusses the social and economic marginalisation faced by India's Muslim population. Despite the constitutional guarantees of equality and the promises of a secular democratic state, disparities in areas such as education, employment, and living conditions continued to persist. Anil's work serves as a poignant reminder of the limitations of India's secular democracy in addressing the concerns of marginalised communities. The book highlights the persistent challenges faced by the Muslim minority and encourages readers to reevaluate their assumptions about progress and equality.

Importantly, Anil excels in debunking the mythology that Muslims under Nehru's India "never had it so good." He provides a compelling account of the riots that persisted during Nehruvian India, demonstrating that, despite making up under a tenth of the national population, Muslims bore a disproportionate share of the violence and suffered considerably. The forced expulsions, such as those from Assam to East Pakistan, highlight the challenges that the Muslim community faced.

This incisive exploration of the persistent socioeconomic disparities faced by India's Muslim minority, coupled with a thorough examination of the historical context, prompts readers to reevaluate

their preconceptions about progress and equality in the country. The book compels readers to confront the shortcomings of the Indian state in addressing these challenges, challenging the idealised notions of secularism and equality enshrined in the nation's founding principles. By seeking a deeper understanding of these complex issues and a critical perspective on India's sociopolitical landscape, *Another India* is a thought-provoking and informative read that sheds light on the lived experiences of a marginalised community.

Reimagining history: challenging established narratives

Anil's *Another India* distinguishes itself by offering a more nuanced perspective on the experiences of India's Muslim minority in the post-independence era. It goes beyond presenting an alternative perspective. It actively challenges established narratives, enriching our understanding of this historically significant period.

One significant aspect of this distinction is the book's holistic perspective. Notably, there has been a lack of research on the Muslim working class, petite bourgeoisie, and other marginalised groups. This limitation makes it challenging to fully comprehend the experiences and concerns of these subaltern Muslims during the period, hindering a comprehensive analysis of their predicament and their role in shaping the broader interests of the Muslim community.

Earlier works like Christophe Jaffrelot and Laurent Gayer's *Muslims in Indian Cities* (2012) and Ayesha Jalal's *The Sole Spokesman* (1994) often focused on the role of leaders like Jinnah or the All-India Muslim League, overshadowing the experiences of the common Muslim. These works primarily studied the political manoeuvrings and decisions made by prominent leaders, shaping the broader historical narrative.

In contrast, *Another India* complements these earlier works by placing the everyday experiences and perspectives of ordinary Muslims at the forefront. It uncovers the emotional and personal experiences of those directly impacted by historical events, shedding light on the resilience, sufferings, and sacrifices that often remain overshadowed in broader political analyses. The meticulous analysis of identity politics within the Muslim community is particularly notable when contrasted with the overarching political landscape depicted by authors such as Christophe Jaffrelot in his work, *India's Silent Revolution* (2003). The book delves into the intricate tapestry of communal and national identities, shedding light on the decisions undertaken by Muslim leaders as they navigate the intricate web of these complexities. The exploration reveals a profound understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play within the Muslim community, offering a fresh and insightful perspective on this multifarious aspect of Indian politics.

Anil's work effectively connects various facets, including politics, identity, and socio-economic challenges, providing readers with a more holistic view of the history of India's Muslim minority. By doing so, it offers readers a more holistic view of how these aspects intersect and influence each other in shaping the Muslim minority's collective history. This interconnected narrative provides a richer understanding of the challenges they faced and the complex factors that moulded their experiences.

In terms of cultural and intellectual contributions, *Another India* highlights the work of authors like Mushirul Hasan and Gail Minault, who have explored the rich cultural heritage of India's Muslims. Anil's work further emphasises the challenges faced by the Muslim minority in preserving and promoting their cultural and intellectual traditions in a rapidly changing socio-political landscape.

A rich tapestry or a northern narrative?

One limitation of the book is its concentrated focus on North India, which inadvertently narrows the book's scope. India's Muslim population is exceptionally diverse, not only in terms of religious practices but also in cultural, linguistic, and socio-political dimensions that vary across regions. By primarily centring on North India, the book may not fully capture the rich tapestry of experiences and

narratives of Muslims in other parts of the country. These regional variations are pivotal because they contribute to a multifaceted and complex understanding of the Muslim minority's interactions with local cultures, politics, and socio-economic conditions.

Moreover, regarding the constraints faced by Muslim leaders within the Congress, there is a need for a more comprehensive elaboration and contextualisation. Enhancing the depth and persuasiveness of the argument can be achieved by providing specific instances and examples where Muslim leaders in the Congress encountered impediments or found their capacity to champion the broader interests of the Muslim community curtailed. The incorporation of concrete, real-life illustrations would offer readers a more nuanced understanding of the intricate complexities and restrictions that beset these leaders during that transformative period.

For instance, South India, with its distinct social fabric and historical context, presents a unique perspective on the Muslim minority's experiences. The region's long history of interreligious interactions and cultural exchange has shaped a different narrative for its Muslim communities. Similarly, West Bengal, known for its syncretic traditions, provides insights into how Muslims have coexisted with other religious groups, contributing to a diverse socio-political landscape. Kerala, with its strong emphasis on education and communal harmony, showcases a contrasting model of development and integration for Muslims.

The Northeast, with its complex history of tribal and ethnic diversity, offers a separate narrative of how Muslims have integrated into a heterogeneous socio-political environment. The interactions between these diverse regions and their Muslim populations have played a crucial role in shaping the nuanced dynamics of Indian society. Therefore, a more comprehensive regional analysis in "Another India" would have explored these unique historical experiences and challenges faced by Muslims in these regions, contributing to a more holistic understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and contributions of India's diverse Muslim population.

Another India goes beyond presenting an alternative perspective; it actively challenges established narratives of post-independence India, including the traditional histories associated with Nehru's India. Anil's work offers a profound and nuanced perspective on the experiences of India's Muslim minority during this era, shedding light on how these experiences reshape our understanding of this historically significant period.

Conclusion

Another India offers a fresh perspective on India's Muslim community in the post-independence era. Diverging from earlier works that primarily focused on political and social aspects, this book takes a holistic approach, connecting various facets of India's Muslims' cultural and intellectual contributions. Through meticulous research and nuanced analysis, Pratinav Anil unveils the multifaceted experiences of this minority population, challenging established narratives of post-independence India. Notably, the book sheds light on the limitations faced by Muslim leaders within the Congress, particularly regarding their ability to advocate effectively for the broader interests of the Muslim community. This aspect highlights the complexities of identity politics and the delicate balance that Muslim leaders within the Congress had to maintain during that transformative period.

Furthermore, this scholarship constitutes a significant contribution to existing literature, enriching our knowledge of India's diverse and intricate tapestry. Anil's human-centred approach, extensive research, and thoughtful analysis make the book essential for those interested in understanding the interplay of identity, politics, and social change in India's post-independence history. It encourages readers to reassess their perceptions of the Muslim minority, reevaluate their understanding of India's secular democracy, and prompts crucial discussions about contemporary challenges and opportunities for India's Muslim minority. In the realm of South Asian history and identity studies, it stands as a valuable addition, calling on us to reevaluate our understanding of secularism, diversity, and inclusive nation-building in the world's largest democracy, making it a must-read for anyone seeking to fathom the intricate and nuanced history of India's Muslim minority during this significant period.

Another India provides valuable insights, shedding light on various aspects of their experiences, such as their engagement with identity politics, communal dynamics, and their role in shaping the socio-political landscape of India. This scholarly endeavour deepens our appreciation of the past and sparks crucial discussions about contemporary challenges and opportunities for India's Muslim minority. Through a judicious exploration of their political agency and social narratives, the book serves as a catalyst for informed dialogues on the broader issues of diversity, secularism, and inclusive nation-building in the world's largest democracy.

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