

# Review: Shikwa-e-Hind; The Political Future of Indian Muslims by Mujibur Rehman

[hindustantimes.com/books/reviewshikwaehind-the-political-future-of-indian-muslims-by-mujibur-rehman-101728054138668.html](https://www.hindustantimes.com/books/reviewshikwaehind-the-political-future-of-indian-muslims-by-mujibur-rehman-101728054138668.html)

October 4, 2024

Mujibur Rehman's erudite book *Shikwa-e-Hind* ostensibly takes its title from the famous poems *Shikwa (Complaint)* and *Jawaab-e-Shikwa (Reply to the Complaint)* by leading Indian Muslim philosopher and Urdu poet Muhammed Iqbal, where Iqbal complains to God about the condition of Muslims in this world and God replies (especially since Iqbal was facing heat from the orthodox at his sceptical *Complaint*). Indian Muslims in our own time have much to complain about, even if, increasingly, they seem to be complaining less. Many who did — especially during the Shaheen Bagh protests against the CAB and NRC — are still behind bars. While Rehman points out the “Muslim abandonment politics” of the Rightist parties, he also appears to have omitted the very mention of Muslim political prisoners such as Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, Gulfisha Fatima and numerous others in his book on the political future of Indian Muslims.



Women protesting against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) at Shaheen Bagh, in New Delhi, on Sunday, January 12, 2020. (Burhaan Kinu/HT PHOTO)



360pp, ₹999; Simon and Schuster

Muslim complaints are often made against the perceived partisanship of the state towards the Hindu Right, including perceived impunity for lynch mobs, extra-legal state actions such as demolitions of homes without due process, or framing of laws regarding freedom to love, cohabit and marry, and the right to citizenship that are all perceived to be discriminatory. Thus, I suspect, the title *Shikwa-e-Hind* (the *Complaint of India*, where Hind is the diminutive of Hindustan, from the Persianate millennium of India) also gestures towards the Right Wing's often-invoked Islamophobic bogie of *Ghazwa-e-Hind* (supposed Jihadist conquest of India). Especially, since this book attempts in its own way to create a bulwark against Islamophobic politics. Rehman states that "Hindu politics is guided by the simple logic: MUSLIMS NO MORE," and that "the long-term goal is mainly to de-Islamise India."

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Contrary to the perceived importance of Indian Muslim's Political Future implied by the subtitle of Rehman's book, his claims for the future may be summed up from the concluding lines to the tome that follow some surface comparisons with Afro-Americans and Dalits, "the political future of Indian Muslims that would give the community a political voice of its own directly depends on the future of Indian democracy. Without the healthy political future of the world's largest religious minority, Indian Muslims, and Indian democracy will remain incurably wounded [sic]." The book appears to say little else about the future political paths available to Indian Muslims, including directions for organisation, besides this everyday comment, and general pessimism.

The author also does not lay claim to any new field research. The book does provide a comprehensive socio-political history of Indian Muslims, utilising an impressive list of scholarly works and creating a well-rounded sense of the community's modern past. The book's claim to originality is in making certain political-philosophical claims (which turn out to be mainly interpretive about the past and NOT the future). The chief one here is that Indian Muslims have faced three key political moments in modern history. The first is the

uncertainty that Indian Muslims felt realising that Mughal rule was over forever and replaced by British rule upon the quelling of the 1857 revolt. The second moment is 1947, which comes with the promise of equal rights in a secular state. So far so good. It is with the identification of the third “moment” that I become sceptical, or at least confused. Rehman writes, “This new era of Hindu Right domination presents high risks for the political future of Indian Muslims. I describe it as the inauguration of the third political moment for Indian Muslims...” Can an era be a moment? Or is he referring to the moment at the start of the era? When is that starting moment? While the last quotation was from the Introduction, where he also points to the Ayodhya movement beginning in the mid-1980s, Rehman returns to the third moment in the Conclusion to assert, “The most significant chapter showing the adverse relationship between Hindu majoritarianism and the Indian Muslims begins with Gujarat. With the BJP becoming Gujarat’s ruling party in 1995...” What about the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 then? Is that not a significant, singular political moment for Indian Muslims? Or is it all one moment from the mid-1980s till now? — From the governments at the centre of Congress to Third Front to NDA, back to UPA and BJP Majority and now NDA? A 40-years-long undifferentiated ‘moment’? While Rehman does refer to 1992 elsewhere, at no point does he seem to categorically differentiate 1992, 2002, 2014 or 2024. Surely, not all of it is even one phase, forget one moment.



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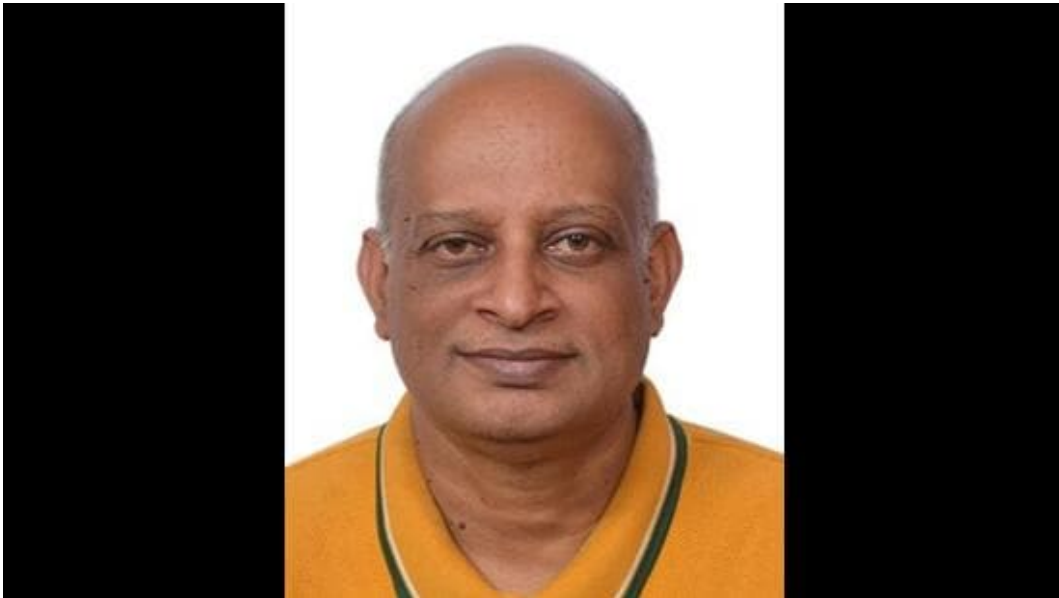
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What I am implying is that there is little convincing and novel theorization to be found in Rehman’s book. Its strength is its comprehensive journalistic, or literary survey-like collection of scholarship on Indian Muslims to elucidate their political trajectory thus far, and not much further beyond a commonsensical pessimism. He does use Hannah Arendt’s idea of a citizen’s rights to point out how that is being lost for Indian Muslims. In the same chapter, he focusses on Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat as BJP’s laboratories where this denial of rights is being perfected, while contrasting the Yogi and Modi models. It is to Rehman’s credit that he lays emphasis on the political history of south Indian Muslims with special focus on each southern state, in the following chapter.



Author Mujibur Rehman

The chapter on violence, again using Arendt's idea of the banality of violence, traces a useful history of riots in India to conclude that the violence under BJP regimes is of a new kind, that is structurally replacing Dalits, as the target of active violence directed over a longer history, with Muslims. The following chapter on Muslim women guides the reader over the debates on Muslim Personal Law and the Uniform Civil Code to conclude that Muslim women, like other women, are the most vulnerable within their community. In the chapter Shaheen Bagh and the Future of India's Citizenship Debate, the author provides us with another damning verdict about Muslim future claiming the protest did not make any real dent in the BJP's commitment to the Citizenship Amendment Bill, which became an act soon after. The chapter on Muslim backwardness traces different debates on the topic across different scholarship and responses of the Hindu Right.

The breadth of the book is impressive, but its journalistic shorthand and impatience to publish appears to give rise not only to numerous copy and grammatical errors, which I will refrain from citing in detail here, but also leads to graver argumentative errors such as the haze over three key political moments. To give a second example, while the book appears to have been published in June 2024, and so presumably went to press prior to the 2024 general election results, possibly even the voting, yet, Rehman chooses to comment on the general elections, without knowing the results: "secular fightback appears rather feeble or some would say almost non-existence [sic]. The unravelling of the INDIA alliance prior to the 2024 election is a good example of the commitment to fight for secular India that was so dear to India's founding fathers." The limited, yet important success of INDIA against the BJP, that was projected by all exit polls to gain a full majority, already renders Rehman's book dated, and badly so. The political future of Indian Muslims with far more Muslim MPs in parliament than in 2014 or 2019 is already brighter than the recent past and Rehman's projections.

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