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FROM PERSONAL TO POLITICAL: SEEMAMUSTAFA'S AZADI'S DAUGHTER

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**Abstract**

This paper analyses the memoir *Azadi's Daughter* by Seema Mustafa. *Azadi's Daughter* gives a personal and political account that contributes to the political and historical understanding around the lives of Muslims in India. Recently there has been an increasing interest in the issues of Muslims. There is dearth of information regarding Muslims in India. The paper attempts to dispel many prejudiced notions against Muslims in India.

Keywords: Minority, Identity, Women's Education, Indian Politics

**Introduction**

The memoir *Azadi's Daughter* is a story of a woman's journey as a secular Muslim in Independent India. The book is not a chronological history, but an impressionistic commentary – partly on Indian politics, partly on Muslim politics. It makes an attempt to unravel the reasons for religious intolerance which have threatened the secular nature of our country. Seema Mustafa is a seasoned Indian print and Television journalist who writes extensively on Politics. She has covered communal violence and conflict in both India and abroad. She has reported and written on broad range of subjects. She is especially known for her coverage of the Shah Bano controversy, communal riots, Kargil war, and the Indo-US nuclear deal which she vehemently opposed and for which she had to resign from the Asian age. Her aim is to bring about change in the world through her writing. In *Azadi's Daughter*, she challenges the clichéd Muslim representation and attempts to alter the common perspective about Muslims. She gives an account of Indian Muslims in the modern world.

Seema Mustafa illustrates the purpose of writing the memoir in her preface to *Azadi's Daughter*, "when I first thought of writing this book in 2012, it was clear that Muslims were

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feeling the weight of being a minority in India.” (xv) Mustafa states that the Muslims being the minority in India are the most disadvantaged group facing discrimination and are not treated as equals. Therefore, Seema wanted to document “the story of inclusiveness, of pride, of secularism, of equality and rights-before they disappeared.” Thereby, rectifying the misconceptions about Indian Muslims and proving them as part of the Indian society rather than the other.

She recollects the idea of India dreamt by our founding fathers. She wonders why Muslims in India live in fear and why the harmonious lifestyle of our country is rapidly vanishing. She recalls the journey of her life as Muslim in India and takes note of all that has gone into shaping her life ideals and beliefs and presents her reasons for living in fear at the present juncture. She has outrightly challenged several stereotypes related to Muslims in this insightful memoir. She has been a journalist since the age of nineteen.

Seema Mustafa was born into a nationalist, progressive and elite Muslim family in Lucknow. Her family had strong association with the nationalist movement. The women in the family were all highly educated and modern women. Her family had liberal ideologies who always supported her to pursue her dreams and aspirations and also encouraged her to make her personal and professional choices. My mother Rafia, popularly known as Azadi as her birth symbolized the dream of her family was concerned about how she would adjust to conservative Lucknow. Seema Mustafa being a part of this family, never faced any discrimination at home and outside and she adds, “We entered our teens believing we had the same rights as men. At home and in the world”. (25)

As a child she was unaware of the language of communalism, seeing herself as no different from others. Since she lived a privileged life, she was completely oblivious to the fact that a Muslim name might arouse a hostile reaction. She had no idea that the others would face discrimination every single day on the basis of their religion. Moreover, she was never taught to discriminate or most importantly to differentiate on the basis of gender or religion. Mustafa then claims Hindu-Muslim bonding by citing several instances when Hindus have come to the rescue of Muslims in some difficult situations and how she herself faced similar experiences.

She examines the events which have slowly eroded the tolerant and diverse ethos-the government’s handling of the Shah Bano Case in the 1980s, the demolition of the Babri Masjid in the 1990, the Mass arrests and torture of Muslim youth in the aftermath of 9/11 and the 2002 Gujarat Riots. She also highlights the national identity of Muslims which is always under

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suspicion. “The partition of India on religious basis turned them into a minority in the country which they regarded as their own, notwithstanding the fact that these Muslims had the option of migrating to Pakistan.” (Bhatty 195) Muslims decided to remain in the country. In her anecdote, Mustafa writes that of her father’s five siblings the eldest brother had opted to leave for Pakistan at the time of partition while the others chose to stay back. In 1971, his only son, a Pakistan army officer was taken prisoner of war by the Indian army, and his son in law was killed when the Pakistan’s submarine Ghazi was destroyed off India’s east coast in circumstances that are not clear to this day. “The brother here shared what the brother there was going through but their tears were not for Pakistan; they were for a brother’s suffering.” (12) It was then that the author realized that one could feel sad for the relatives not for the country they live in.

In *Indian Muslim(s) After Liberalization*, Maidul Islam states, “Muslims are one of the most educationally backward and economically deprived groups.” face multiple challenges relating to security, identity and equity. The landmark Sachar committee revealed that Muslims lack behind in every aspect of socio-economic development. Their status in contemporary India is not very different from that of the Dalit in the mid-twentieth century. While, on the one hand, it was widely believed that Muslim backwardness was due to their indifference to modern education, on the other there has been continued neglect about their status.

Muslims in India have to bear the brunt of terrorism in the foreign countries. There has been mass arrest of innocent Muslim youth for ever big or small terror incident in India particularly in the states like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat. She shares some of the heart rending anecdotes which she witnessed closely as a journalist. The stories are of arrests, detention and torture of the Muslim youth who were eventually released for no charges could be proved against them.

Furthermore, the state of Muslim women in India is even more vulnerable and it is a fact that their emancipation could be a crucial step towards the development of their community. The present status of Muslim women reflects the dominance of traditional and conservative attitudes in their community. But with increasing literacy among the Muslim women, their outlook, thinking and perception have been under gradual changes and at the same time it has aided transformation in the Muslim community in India. However, it is admitted that “Empowerment of women” is one of the most important key factors for the welfare and development of any society.” (Goel 55)

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Seema Mustafa accentuates the issues related to Muslim women which are major cause of concern. The problems faced by the majority of Muslim women around the world today are those faced by the majority of women everywhere: poverty, illiteracy, political repression, and patriarchy. However, Muslim women tend to suffer not only the gender problem, but also the impoverished minority status of the Muslim community.

Muslim women are at double disadvantage with low educational status and community pressure. Their lives, movements in public places are under constant scrutiny and control. Another cause of concern in India is child marriage which is not restricted to religion. Young students who want to study further and build careers are not allowed to do so by their parents. Moreover, Marriage and Divorce rights among Muslim women are a big concern. Most importantly, there is dearth of research on Muslim women's social, economic and educational status.

Seema Mustafa highlights the issues related to Muslim women which are a major cause of concern. As a journalist she observes that women in NariNiketans were mal treated and discarded by society. Women were traumatized and helpless bearing the brunt of the violence in Gujarat. She also noticed that the women in Lucknow were afraid to opt for family planning as the religious preachers would not read the funeral prayers of women who try to control childbirth. Women were terrified in Kashmir, Hyderabad and Mumbai when their young husbands and sons were picked up for questioning by the police.

Another cause of concern in India is child marriage which is not restricted to religion. Young students who want to study further and build careers are not allowed to do so by their parents. She witnessed her young Muslim friend who sobbed day and night as her marriage was fixed to a Pakistani national. She did not want to leave India but was forced by her father to do so. She is then reminded of her father's sister who was also forced into marriage at an early age against her consent by her parents and elder siblings. She was so shattered by this incident that she never allowed her daughter to marry.

After India became independent, the constitution of India conferred equal rights on women and men with the view to improve the status of women. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but empowers the state to take special measures for protecting and advancing their interests in all walks of life and making necessary legal provisions to this effect. Besides, special committees and commissions on women have been set up from time to time resulting in policy changes and setting up of institutional structures for implementing

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programs and schemes. However, because of low levels of literacy among women they are unaware of these provisions being made available to them. Therefore, education is their dire need.

Seema shows a strange kind of division within the Muslim community in India. She says that women belonging to educated, liberal or elite families are entitled to all the opportunities to succeed in life. These women are encouraged to get educated and work. They are treated at par with women and have a share in the property. Besides, they are allowed to choose their partners. In the more conservative families women are treated equally in the house but are not encouraged to work outside. Further, in the hard conservative families, women are subjugated in the name of religion. However, presently, Muslim women are educated and employed. They are aware of their rights and have become assertive. They have a say in their marriage and divorce. However, the change is not widespread but there is a growing awareness and a desire for a better life.

**Conclusion**

Notably, a country cannot be termed as developed if any section of the society remains backward. “Those who remained backward are a concern of all irrespective of their caste and religion.”(Gujral 25) Mustafa accentuates the need for education for Muslims which is the major underlying theme that runs throughout the book. She rejects the common perceptions that are usually associated with Muslims as that of their staunch belief in the supremacy of religion over other aspects of their lives. Hence, it is very important for the Muslim community to work towards its upliftment and eliminate all the problems affecting them.

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