

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Aṭhar Fārūqī.** *Muslims and Media Images: News versus Views.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. xiv + 354 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-569495-6; \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-806925-6.



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Since 9/11, much of the Western media's portrayal of Muslims and Islamic views has proven controversial, as the depiction of the Prophet Mohammad in Danish newspaper cartoons so violently showed. Yet, the negative attitudes toward Islam and Muslims in Western media and politics are neither entirely new nor did they merely happen as a reflection of 9/11. In the 1980s, for example, Edward Said argued that negative images of Islam in Western media portrayed the emergence of political Islam as a potential threat to Western politics and interests.[1] In a geographical expansion of work on this issue, Athar Faruqi has collected essays on the images of Islam in an Indian context, showing that 9/11 affected not only how Muslims are perceived and portrayed in the West but also in India. Faruqi starts from the premise that, "being Muslim in today's world often means carrying a special burden of suspicion and prejudice on the one hand, and social, political, and religious conservatism on the other" (p. 1). The volume shows effectively that Muslims in India encounter problems in their representation common to Muslims in other places, facing contention and misunderstanding regarding their views.

This collection of nineteen articles, written by Muslim and non-Muslim academic scholars, journalists, and editors, all from various disciplines and backgrounds, dis-

cusses the images of Muslims in the media and also analyzes negative attitudes toward Islam that are both initiated and perpetuated by the media. Some of the writers are well-known figures in Indian media, serving as editors-in-chief for leading daily newspapers and magazines in India, such as the daily newspapers *Hindustan*, *The Hindu*, and *The Pioneer*, and *Outlook* weekly news magazine. Most of the authors agree that there are some negative images of Muslims in the Indian media. Further, they discuss the various reasons for these negative portrayals, identifying the conflation between Muslims as people and Islam as theology as a major problem.

The book examines the political, economic, cultural, and educational components that affect Muslims's views and their everyday practices, and is divided into four sections. The first section explores Indian English-language media's portrayal of Muslims, concluding that images of Muslims in these media are different from those in other Indian languages. Since English-language media reaches both a national and international audience, these newspapers try to be more liberal and balanced. Section 2, "Transcending Boundaries," examines the world that surrounds Muslims and their relationship with other peoples. Susan Maitra's article, "Islam and the West: Ominous Misunderstandings," discusses the demonization of

Muslims as enemies of civilization by the Western press that has transferred to Indian media. Meanwhile, Estelle Dryland argues that the relative paucity of discourse on Muslims in the media leads to misunderstandings regarding Muslims and their views. This has emerged partially due to the lack of Muslims journalists. The diversity of the Muslim community and its interpretations of Islam also plays a vital role in perpetuating misunderstandings. The authors suggest that shifting societal views and improving the representation of Muslims in the media begins with Muslims themselves collaborating with other minorities and working to educate people.

Section 3, "Muslim Journalism: A Phenomenal Dichotomy," investigates Urdu media in India. The authors find that the difference between English-language and Urdu-language media stems from the English-language media's more balanced and professional presentation of Muslims. However, only a small percentage of Indian Muslims read an English newspaper. Although there are approximately 160 million Muslims in India, their fragmentation places them at a disadvantage. Most importantly, Muslim journalists have not encouraged Muslims to participate in civic life. Chandan Mitra, editor-in-chief of the English Delhi-based newspaper *The Pioneer*, claims in his article that the Urdu press does not want to play a role in social change and modernization. Ather Faruqi, meanwhile, in "Urdu Press in India," addresses the lack of Muslim journalists and writers in Indian journalism. Faruqi argues that when Muslims write in Indian media, they speak to other Muslims in their language, Urdu; they do not usually target others, and that is the part of the problem.

Finally, section 4 is devoted entirely to an analysis of

Indian films and Bollywood and discusses how financial difficulties led a film by a Muslim director, "In Custody," to convey negative images of Muslims. The book thus not only investigates the presence of negative images of Muslims in Indian media but also makes arguments regarding why or how some Muslims involved with the media allow these negative images and perceptions to continue, with Bollywood as the key example. The authors do not suggest that Muslims and Muslim media in India never contribute to reforming the images and representations of Islam, but rather that work thus far is insufficient. Thus, the book concludes that both the media and Muslims, together, should work to change the negative portrayal of Muslims in Indian media.

There are some limitations and weaknesses in the work's analysis. The book focuses primarily on the English media in India vis-à-vis Indian Muslims and mainly examines print media with some attention to Bollywood, as television and radio were excluded. Moreover, some articles assume the reader's familiarity with the specific issues, which makes it clear that the book is intended for an Indian audience. Nevertheless, the work provides a rich and nuanced picture of the negative media images of Muslims, but in an Indian context where Muslims are a large minority rather than in a Western context where Muslims are a significantly smaller minority. This book will primarily be useful for scholars of India, but could serve as a helpful comparison for those working on Muslims in a Western context.

#### Note

[1]. Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (rev. ed., New York: Vintage, 1997).

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