

**The Life and Times of Begum Qudisia Aizaz Rasul: An Exploration of Muslim Women's Self-Fashioning in Post-Colonial India:**

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This paper explores the life and legacy of Begum Qudisia Aizaz Rasul, a prominent figure of the twentieth century and the only Muslim woman in independent India's Constituent Assembly, which was responsible for drafting the nation's Constitution. It critically examines the genre of autobiographical writing, highlighting both its limitations and unique perspectives. By analysing Begum Rasul's personal papers, autobiography, and speeches in the Constituent Assembly debates (1946–1950), this study investigates how she navigated her complex and overlapping identities of class, gender, and religion. Her efforts at self-representation offer valuable insights into the ways Muslim women in post-colonial India shaped their identities, often balancing resistance to and alignment with the prevailing national discourse.

**Introduction:**

This paper examines the unique challenges faced by Muslim women in India during the early years of Independence, highlighting their dual marginalization. In the aftermath of Partition, they were not only constrained by the association of Muslims with political separatism but also burdened by stereotypes that depicted them as passive and oppressed, reinforcing their invisibility in the national narrative. While historical accounts of women's activism in post-Independence India have begun to challenge the notion of female quietism, much of this work has focused on Hindu women, leaving the political contributions of Muslim women largely overlooked. In the initial years following India's Independence, Muslim women faced a dual challenge of marginalization. On one hand, their social and political positions were constrained by the prevailing perception that equated Muslims with political separatism in the wake of Partition. On the other hand, they were also subject to entrenched stereotypes that portrayed them as silent, oppressed figures, reinforcing their image as backward and invisible within the framework of India's modernity. This historiographical neglect of Muslim women is part of a broader issue regarding the representation of women's activism in post-Independence India. While the narrative of political passivity among women during the first decade of Independence has been increasingly questioned, most recent scholarship has primarily focused on Hindu women, particularly those from elite and middle-class backgrounds. As a result, these women have gained recognition as active participants in nation-building—as activists, social reformers, and economic providers—while the contributions of Muslim women remain largely absent from historical discourse.

The article brings attention to the significant yet often neglected political figure, Begum Qudisia Aizaz Rasul, the only Muslim woman in India's Constituent Assembly. Since the Assembly debates played a crucial role in shaping national life and determining the position of minorities in post-colonial India, Rasul's contributions provide valuable insights into the role of elite Muslim women in nation-building. While her experiences may not be broadly representative of Muslim women's political participation, her life story offers a lens through which to explore the challenges and opportunities for women navigating both gender and minority status in independent India. Against this backdrop, this article brings attention to a significant but often overlooked political figure of twentieth-century India: Begum Qudisia Aizaz Rasul. As the only Muslim woman to be part of India's Constituent Assembly, Rasul played a crucial role in shaping the nation's early political landscape. Given that the debates within the Assembly were instrumental in determining the future trajectory of the Indian state, as well as the rights and

status of minority communities, an exploration of Rasul's involvement provides valuable insights into the role that elite Muslim women played in post-colonial nation-building. However, it is important to note that her experiences and interventions were not necessarily representative of the broader patterns of political participation available to Muslim women during this period. Nonetheless, her life, career, and self-representation in her autobiography offer an important window into the complexities and challenges of public life for women navigating both gendered and religious marginalization in post-colonial India.

Rasul's political career began in 1937 when she was elected as a member of the Muslim League in the United Provinces. While many of her contemporaries in the Muslim League chose to migrate to Pakistan after Partition, she made a different choice—remaining in India and eventually joining the Indian National Congress. In her autobiography, she provides a compelling account of her personal and political journey, illustrating how an elite Muslim woman emerged from purdah to actively shape the course of independent India. This article, therefore, serves a dual purpose. First, it seeks to address the selective remembrance of historical figures in mainstream nationalist discourse. While some political actors are widely commemorated, others are relegated to obscurity—often because their stories complicate the dominant narratives of Indian nationalism. By bringing Rasul's contributions to the forefront, this article aims to challenge this politics of forgetting. Second, it examines the ways in which she navigated national politics and engaged with questions of Muslim identity, minority rights, and secularism in post-colonial India. Her ability to simultaneously resist and conform to the dominant national framework provides valuable insights into both the limitations and possibilities for Muslim women's participation in political life during this period.

The structure of this article is divided into three main sections. The first section explores the politics of self-representation and the role of autobiography as a medium for shaping historical memory. By analyzing Rasul's *From Purdah to Parliament: The Memoirs of a Muslim Woman in Indian Politics*, this section highlights the significance of the historical context in which her autobiography was written, as well as the ways in which it challenges the exclusion of women from mainstream historical narratives. Although Rasul uses her autobiography as a means of inscribing herself into India's national story, she remains acutely aware of the challenges of asserting herself as a legitimate historical subject.

The second section expands on the discussion of autobiographical writing by examining the specific dilemmas and constraints faced by South Asian Muslim women. It explores how their identities were shaped by historical and socio-political forces, the compromises they had to make, and the innovative strategies they employed to navigate their positions within the broader national framework.

The final section of the article focuses on Rasul's speeches in the Constituent Assembly. One of the most striking aspects of her political stance was her firm opposition to the idea of separate electorates and reservations for both Muslims and women. Her position reflects a deeper ambivalence about the nature of religious minority identity in post-colonial India, an ambivalence that in many ways paralleled the broader uncertainties surrounding the concept of secularism in independent India. By drawing on Rasul's speeches, personal papers, and autobiography, this article seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the opportunities and constraints that shaped women's political engagement in newly independent India. It also sheds light on how Muslim women, despite structural challenges, sought to assert their agency and craft their identities in mid-twentieth-century India.

**‘The Two-faced Begum’: From *purdah* to parliament:**

Autobiography as a literary genre plays a critical role for marginalized groups such as women, religious converts, and Dalits, serving as a means of asserting subjectivity and resisting dominant power structures. It functions as a powerful tool for "talking back" against oppression. Scholar Sharmila Rege, for example, emphasizes the importance of collective representation in Dalit women's autobiographies, describing them as "testimonies" that bear witness to systemic oppression. However, Rege also warns against reducing the depiction of suffering to mere spectacle and instead underscores the necessity of a "collective voice" as an alternative to what she terms "bourgeois individualism." This collective perspective is crucial in shaping a more emancipatory Dalit feminist discourse within political and educational frameworks.

In this context, analysing the autobiography of an elite Muslim woman requires a nuanced approach, particularly when considering the "bird's eye view" she offers of history, culture, and politics. Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul's memoir, *From Purdah to Parliament*, could be interpreted as an example of what literary critic Janet Frame refers to as "the luxury of reminiscence." However, her elite status, while granting her certain privileges, also shaped her historical perspective in significant ways. Her decision to remain in India post-Partition, rather than migrate to Pakistan like many of her contemporaries in the Muslim League, played a crucial role in the kind of historical narrative she was able to construct. As an elite Muslim woman navigating a nation in transition, she occupied a position that both restricted and enabled her engagement with the political landscape. This duality allowed her to critique the promises of modernity and to historicize the paradoxes of being both a "modern" Indian and a Muslim woman. Rasul's autobiography, therefore, intertwines personal recollections with broader public narratives of the historical events that shaped nation-building in postcolonial India.

Born in 1909 and passing away in 2001, Rasul's political career spanned nearly the entirety of the twentieth century. Her foray into politics began in 1937 when, as a member of the Muslim League, she was elected to the United Provinces (UP) Legislative Council. She was among the few women who successfully contested an election without the benefit of a reserved seat and was re-elected multiple times, eventually serving as deputy president of the UP Legislative Council in her first term. In 1946, she became a member of India's Constituent Assembly, representing the Muslim League until its dissolution in January 1950, when the Indian Constitution was formally adopted. Subsequently, she was nominated to the Rajya Sabha by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1952. Rasul held various political and administrative positions throughout her career, serving in the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council until 1990 and chairing the Uttar Pradesh Minorities Commission from 1969 to 1971. Additionally, she presided over the Indian Women's Hockey Federation for nearly two decades. Despite her extensive contributions to Indian politics and society, she was only belatedly recognized by the government when she was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2000, a year before her death.

Given Rasul's long and distinguished political career, it is telling that she begins her autobiography with a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru, situating herself within the historic moment of August 15, 1947, as "one among the 74 women" who presented the national flag to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, chairman of the Constituent Assembly. Yet, despite her prominence, she remains a relatively obscure figure in India's constitutional history. While her name appears in footnotes of scholarly works on provincial politics in the United Provinces and the Constituent Assembly debates, there has been little substantial engagement with her

contributions to nation-building. This article aims to reconstruct Rasul's role in shaping postcolonial India by analyzing her interventions in political debates—particularly on land reforms and minority rights in Uttar Pradesh—and highlighting how her autobiographical narrative reveals a political self that both resisted and operated within structures of exclusion.

Rasul was the daughter of Sir Zulfiqar Ali Khan, a descendant of the ruling family of the Malerkotla princely state in Punjab. Born into a deeply polarized political environment, she witnessed firsthand the impact of colonial policies, such as the 1909 constitutional reforms, which granted separate electorates to Muslims. These measures reinforced rigid communal identities, further solidified by colonial classification systems, census practices, and the efforts of Hindu and Muslim revivalist movements. Her upbringing in a political household—one that remained peaceful amid the violent upheavals of Partition—exposed her to influential nationalist leaders, colonial administrators, and intellectuals of the 1920s. She recalls her father as a nationalist sympathizer who supported the Swaraj Party but refrained from active involvement due to his ties to a princely state and concerns over potential reprisals, such as property confiscation. This precarious balancing act between nationalist ideals and political pragmatism shaped Rasul's own ambivalent position as a "nationalist Muslim" in independent India.

Rasul married Nawab Aizaz Rasul, a landed aristocrat from the United Provinces, in 1929 and moved to Sandila, where she observed strict purdah. However, she recounts this period with nostalgia, describing the leisurely lifestyle, cultural events, and musical gatherings that defined aristocratic life. While she does not address intimate aspects of her personal life, historian Siobhan Lambert-Hurley suggests that this omission is common among the first generation of South Asian Muslim women to emerge from purdah. Their newfound public roles often came at the cost of silencing discussions about sexuality. In Rasul's case, this reticence appears to be a strategic decision to maintain a carefully curated public image, akin to the "starched sari" narratives found in communist women's autobiographies, as described by Ania Loomba. Her memoir can thus be read not just as a record of memories but as a reflection on how memories are shaped, curated, and used for self-representation.

Rasul's formal political career began in 1937 when she won a seat in the Provincial Assembly elections in the United Provinces. She officially emerged from purdah during her campaign, but her adherence to veiling remained situational. In Lucknow, she moved freely without a veil, but upon visiting her mother-in-law in Sandila, she reverted to purdah, even using a curtained palanquin to maintain modesty. This dual existence led to media scrutiny, earning her the moniker "Two-faced Begum." Yet, Rasul used this ambivalence to her advantage, blending tradition with modernity in a way that allowed her to navigate both conservative and progressive spaces. When contesting elections, she faced opposition from male rivals and a fatwa declaring it un-Islamic to vote for a non-purdah woman. However, she successfully mobilized her campaign using "petrol, postage, and publicity" and won by a significant margin, demonstrating that Muslim voters were not as orthodox as often presumed.

Despite her political ascent, Rasul remained deeply conflicted about the Muslim League's call for Pakistan. Introduced to Muhammad Ali Jinnah by her husband in 1941, she resisted pressures to fully endorse the League's separatist agenda. Her primary concern was the fate of Muslims in minority provinces like the United Provinces. She questioned whether Pakistan was financially viable and remained skeptical of its long-term sustainability. Though she joined the League's Women's Sub-Committee, she refrained from supporting the demand for Partition, a position that left her feeling politically isolated.

Rasul's autobiography reflects the complexities of her identity as a Muslim woman negotiating the demands of nationhood. The title, *From Purdah to Parliament*, suggests a linear narrative of progress, yet her story is filled with contradictions that reveal the tensions of postcolonial modernity. She both challenges and reinforces traditional notions of womanhood, navigating the public and private spheres with a keen awareness of how her positionality shaped her political agency. Her life offers a unique perspective on how elite Muslim women engaged with the shifting political landscape of twentieth-century India, making her autobiography an essential document for understanding the intersections of gender, class, and religion in the nation-building process.

### **Autobiographical dilemmas and memory-making:**

The chapter "The Road to Partition" highlights Rasul's deep sense of conviction in her choice to remain in India after Partition, despite having the opportunity to migrate to Pakistan. She recounts how prominent Pakistani leaders, including Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, repeatedly encouraged her to move, promising that she could demand any privilege she wished. However, she and her husband chose to stay in India, even as her mother and siblings, who were already in Lahore, worried for their safety and urged them to join.

Unlike other elite Muslim women who saw Partition as a chance for new political mobility, such as Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah and Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz, Rasul's decision to stay came with its own set of challenges. Her position as a Muslim woman in post-Partition India meant navigating complex questions of language, culture, religion, and national belonging.

Muslim women in politics at this time employed different rhetorical strategies, each reflecting a unique relationship with nationalist histories. Their self-representations either aligned with or diverged from dominant nationalist discourses in sometimes contradictory ways. This chapter examines the autobiographies of Rasul and Ikramullah, juxtaposing their "memory work" to understand how each woman, as a post-colonial subject, crafted her identity as both a Muslim and a woman in the face of contested national narratives. Although they wrote in different periods and under distinct sociopolitical circumstances, both sought to reconcile personal memories with larger nationalist histories.

Ikramullah's autobiography, *From Purdah to Parliament*, was first published in London in 1963 and later revised in the late 1990s and early 2000s by Oxford University Press. In contrast, Rasul's autobiography was published much later, in 2001, the year of her death, by a local publisher. The medium of language also shaped their audiences—unlike Urdu memoirs by figures such as Anis Kidwai, which documented the struggles of Muslim refugees, autobiographies written in English had different narrative imperatives and were aimed at distinct readerships.

As a literary form, autobiography inherently involves self-fashioning. It is a constructed performance, revealing deliberate choices in narration, structure, and audience engagement. If we consider autobiographical writing as a performance of selfhood, it becomes clear how these texts reflect the historical, social, and cultural forces shaping their authors. Rasul's self-representation as a "modern Muslim woman" was part of her process of integrating into the Indian nation-state. Meanwhile, Ikramullah's narrative presents her as a "modern" figure within the context of Pakistan, deliberately distancing herself from her past in pre-Partition

India. While Ikramullah's story reinforces religious homogeneity as central to her belonging in Pakistan, Rasul's autobiography is characterized by ambiguity and tension—she constantly grapples with her place in India, shifting from a once “communal subject” to an advocate of secularism.

Rasul's political past as a former member of the Muslim League made her a suspect figure in mainstream Indian nationalist discourse, while her refusal to migrate to Pakistan excluded her from that country's historical memory. This dual exclusion—her “absent presence”—is what her autobiography seeks to challenge. By embedding herself in India's nationalist history and documenting her contributions, Rasul claims legitimacy as an Indian political figure.

Her autobiography also strategically includes photographs of her political career, where she appears in traditional Indian sarees at key historical moments, standing beside figures such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Sarojini Naidu, and Rajiv Gandhi. Through these images, she asserts her role in shaping India's history, using the camera as a witness to her political legacy.

Rasul was acutely aware of the political implications of being cast as a Muslim woman without distinction. Her writings demonstrate a complex negotiation of identity, where she balances her connection to Islamic traditions with a refusal to be visibly marked by religious symbols. This tension reflects the broader challenges of how individuals reconcile their personal, religious, and national identities in the process of becoming citizens. As scholar Sidonie Smith argues, autobiographical narratives often fail to present a unified self, revealing instead the fractures between how people see themselves and how they are expected to be. These moments of rupture are precisely where an individual can assert agency.

Despite their differences, both Rasul and Ikramullah shared commonalities. Both belonged to politically influential families and were raised with a dual identity—educated in an Anglicized system while being rooted in Islamic traditions, including the practice of veiling. They navigated the constraints of *purdah*, leveraged their familial connections to enter politics, and took advantage of electoral opportunities. However, their post-Independence narratives reflect the demands of their respective nations—Pakistan and India—through competing performances of identity and belonging.

Autobiographies are not only shaped by the stories they tell but also by what they omit and how they frame events for public consumption. Rasul's memoir serves as both a tribute to India's nationalist leaders and a personal assertion of her place within that history. Since her autobiography was published late in her life, it is likely that she had already experienced marginalization in mainstream national memory. By highlighting her role as the only Muslim woman in India's Constituent Assembly, she embeds herself within the historical transition from colonial rule to an independent nation-state.

Her affiliations with the Indian National Congress and the All India Women's Conference, coupled with her distancing from the Muslim League, shape her recollection of historical figures. She repeatedly invokes the names of prominent leaders such as Maulana Azad, Nehru, and Gandhi, positioning herself within their ideological framework. In doing so, she offers a rare female perspective on major political events that were otherwise dominated by male voices.

Through her autobiography, Rasul provides an intimate view of post-Independence provincial politics in India. Her narrative captures key shifts, including the renaming of the United

Provinces of Agra and Oudh to Uttar Pradesh, the decline of Urdu, factionalism within the Congress, the rise of regional political parties, the resurgence of Hindu nationalism, and the increasing marginalization of Muslims in certain areas. Notably, from the mid-1960s onward, her tone shifts—her autobiography begins to resemble a critique rather than a tribute, particularly in her accounts of political betrayals, including those involving Indira Gandhi.

In sum, Rasul's memoir is a deeply political act. It is both an assertion of her historical role and a critique of how history is written and remembered. By situating herself alongside the towering figures of India's nationalist movement, she resists being erased from collective memory. Her life story reflects the complex process of negotiating identity in a rapidly changing political landscape, making her memoir not just an individual account but also a broader commentary on national belonging, gender, and historical memory.

### **As a Muslim woman:**

Rasul had multiple political avenues available to her—she could choose to advocate for Muslims, for women in general, or for Muslim women specifically. However, in her autobiography, she does not present herself as a dedicated representative of any one of these groups. Her political positioning is marked by a strategic ambiguity, particularly evident in her silence on contentious issues such as the 1986 Shah Bano case. This case, which involved the rights of Muslim women in matters of divorce and maintenance, was a major political flashpoint, but Rasul refrained from taking a public stand, likely to avoid straining her ties with the Indian National Congress. Instead, her autobiography emphasizes her contributions to state policy and highlights less controversial aspects of her career, such as her presidency of the All India Women's Hockey Federation in 1954. Her enthusiasm for sports is further demonstrated by her participation in a goodwill cricket match in 1952, where she dressed in men's cricket whites to bat for the President's XI against the Prime Minister's XI.

Although Rasul consistently presents herself as a modern Muslim woman, she does not explicitly position herself as a champion of Muslim rights or minority concerns in independent India. Yet, she cannot entirely evade these issues. One of the few instances where she engages with a sensitive communal matter is in her efforts to find a resolution to the Babri Masjid dispute. However, rather than framing it as a religious or minority rights issue, she approached it from an administrative and legal standpoint. She attempted to have the mosque classified as a "protected monument" under the Archaeological Survey of India Act, thereby sidestepping direct advocacy for Muslim interests. This recommendation, put forward by the Uttar Pradesh Minorities Commission, was endorsed at the national level in 1987. However, it did not gain significant momentum, as the Prime Minister dismissed it as a matter for the state government to handle.

Given Rasul's emphasis in her autobiography on her role in the Constituent Assembly, it becomes important to analyze her interventions during its debates, particularly on minority rights. Her speeches in the Assembly offer valuable insight into her political stance and serve as either a corrective to or a confirmation of her autobiographical balancing act between her Muslim identity and her allegiance to India as a secular nation. This analysis also contributes to a broader historiographical intervention, as discussions of the Constituent Assembly have traditionally focused on the voices of male leaders. By engaging with Rasul's speeches, one can gain a more nuanced understanding of how Muslim women navigated the complexities of identity, representation, and political engagement in the early years of independent India.

## **Being ‘secular, Indian, Islamic’: The ‘minorities question’ in the Constituent Assembly debates:**

This passage offers a deep dive into Rasul’s positioning within the Constituent Assembly debates, highlighting her complex navigation of secular nationalism, minority rights, and linguistic advocacy. Here are some key takeaways:

### **1. Differing Levels of Influence in the Constituent Assembly**

- Some members of the Constituent Assembly had more prominent voices, actively shaping political discourse, while others took a more subdued approach.
- Those who maintained a lower profile often aligned with secular nationalist ideals, as this stance was seen as the least disruptive to national unity.
- Rasul’s position on minority rights, though seemingly restrained, should not be dismissed as mere conformity; rather, her advocacy for Urdu and rejection of Muslim reservations exposed contradictions in the nation-building process.

### **2. Rasul’s Stance on Minority Safeguards**

- During the 1948 debates on separate electorates and reservations for religious minorities, Rasul, a vocal representative from the United Provinces, firmly opposed these provisions.
- She argued that reservations perpetuated division between minorities and the majority rather than fostering goodwill.
- In her view, integrating minorities fully into the majority community was in their best interest, ensuring they became part of a unified secular state.
- Her argument implied that Muslims in India should abandon separatist tendencies and place their trust in the goodwill of the majority.

### **3. Challenging the Victim-Perpetrator Narrative**

- At first glance, Rasul’s statements may appear to promote assimilation by encouraging Muslims to conform to dominant cultural norms.
- However, she challenged the notion that political safeguards for minorities were acts of generosity by the majority.
- Instead, she emphasized that Muslims, as full citizens, deserved equal rights—not as a favor but as a matter of justice.
- By shifting the responsibility onto the majority to ensure fairness, she reframed the debate on minority rights.
- Her perspective resonates with arguments made by East Bengali Hindu refugees, who rejected state aid as mere charity and instead demanded rights based on their sacrifices for the nation.

### **4. Loyalty, Religion, and National Identity**

- Rasul argued that loyalty to the nation should not be equated with religious identity.
- She pointed out that Muslims who remained in India had consciously chosen to prioritize the country's welfare.



- The responsibility for fostering trust and goodwill, she asserted, lay with the majority community.
- She carefully framed separatism as a broader social issue rather than an inherent trait of any religious group, subtly addressing widespread suspicions about Muslim loyalties.

### **5. Post-Partition Political Climate and the Need for Secular Positions**

- The political landscape of post-Partition India shaped the positions taken by Muslim leaders.
- The assassination of Gandhi, the abolition of princely states, and declining Muslim influence in government heightened the need for Muslim politicians to reaffirm their commitment to secularism.
- With the dissolution of the Muslim League in India, Muslim politicians aligned themselves with the Congress Party to avoid being viewed as separatists.
- Historian Mushirul Hasan has noted that Muslim leaders who remained in India were often absorbed into Congress's secular framework.
- Leaders like Rasul had to navigate these realities, presenting themselves not as Muslim representatives but as members of a unified Indian republic.

### **6. Diverse Expressions of Muslim Belonging**

- Although many Muslim leaders, including Rasul, adopted a secular nationalist identity, other forms of Muslim belonging also emerged in post-colonial India.
- Scholars like Taylor Sherman, Ornit Shani, and Rohit De have shown that Muslim communities resisted exclusionary narratives by using creative strategies to assert their place in the nation.

### **7. Absence of Alternative Political Safeguards for Minorities**

- The demand for separate electorates and reserved positions for Muslims in government was ultimately abandoned.
- The Constitution did not introduce alternative mechanisms to protect the political interests of religious minorities.
- Scholar Rochona Bajpai argues that political safeguards for minorities and marginalized groups (such as Scheduled Castes and Tribes) were intended to be temporary measures aimed at eventual integration rather than long-term protection.

### **8. The Challenge of Creating a Secular State in a Religious Society**

- The framers of the Indian Constitution grappled with the challenge of establishing a secular state in a deeply religious society.
- Two competing approaches emerged:
  1. A strict separation of religion and state, which included proposals to ban outward religious symbols and dress.
  2. A model of secularism based on equal respect for all religions, recognizing India's diverse religious landscape.
- Many members of the Assembly emphasized strengthening the identity of citizens based on individual rights rather than religious affiliation.

- The nationalist elite, including Nehru, viewed religious identities as remnants of a pre-modern past that should be erased through modernization and development.
- Opposition to minority safeguards was framed in the language of justice and equality, rather than as an outright dismissal of minority concerns.

### **9. Rasul's Position as an Advocate for Her Constituents**

- Rasul's rejection of separate electorates should not be interpreted as an abandonment of Muslim concerns but as an effort to position Muslims as equal stakeholders in the Indian republic.
- Her personal background and regional ties influenced her stance.
- She referenced the historical legacy of her family in Malerkotla, a princely state known for its history of Hindu-Sikh-Muslim harmony.
- By invoking this legacy, Rasul sought to present herself as a representative of shared cultural heritage rather than as a minority leader.

### **10. Support for Urdu and Linguistic Rights**

- While opposing religious-based reservations, Rasul strongly advocated for the protection of Urdu.
- She argued that linguistic minorities should have the right to receive primary education in their mother tongue.
- Other prominent figures, such as Zakir Husain, also defended Urdu, portraying it as a secular language rather than an exclusively Muslim one.

### **11. The Debate on Hindi vs. Urdu**

- The Assembly witnessed heated debates over linguistic identity.
- While Hindi was promoted as the national language, Urdu was increasingly marginalized due to its perceived association with the Pakistan movement.
- Despite efforts by Rasul and others to secure recognition for Urdu in Uttar Pradesh, the state government refused to establish more Urdu-language schools.
- Urdu advocates sought to redefine the language in secular terms, but the political climate made this difficult.

### **12. Religious Instruction in Schools**

- Rasul proposed that religious instruction should not be completely barred from state-run schools, provided it was not imposed on students.
- However, this position was met with resistance from representatives like Renuka Ray, who argued that religious instruction contradicted state neutrality.

### **13. Final Compromise on Language Policy**

- The Assembly settled on a compromise:
  - Hindi in the Devanagari script was designated as the official language of India.
  - English would continue to be used for government purposes for 15 years (Article 343 of the Constitution).
- Despite Rasul's efforts, Urdu was not given official recognition as a regional language in Uttar Pradesh.

#### **14. Continued Advocacy for Urdu**

- Even after failing to secure constitutional recognition for Urdu, Rasul remained committed to its promotion.
- As chairperson of the Minorities Commission in Uttar Pradesh, she pushed for:
  - More Urdu teachers in schools.
  - Financial support for junior high schools.
  - Coaching programs for Muslim students.

#### **15. Unresolved Minority Issues in the Constitution**

- The Constituent Assembly debates did not fully resolve the question of minority rights.
- Although the Constitution protected the right of minorities to establish their own educational institutions, broader questions about religious freedom and equal citizenship remained contested.
- Rasul's personal writings reveal an ongoing struggle to reconcile her individual identity with the broader national framework.

#### **Conclusion:**

##### **1. Urgency of Addressing Religious Nationalism and Minority Rights**

- There is an increasing need to critically reflect on the growing dominance of aggressive religious nationalism in India.
- This resurgence has serious consequences for minority communities, threatening their rights and freedoms.
- The decline of liberal democratic structures, coupled with rising intolerance towards marginalized groups, has made it essential to examine issues of belonging and citizenship.

##### **2. Historical Parallels: Minority Challenges in the 1950s**

- A look back at the early years of independent India reveals that struggles over belonging and inclusion were just as pressing for minorities in the 1950s.
- The political career of Begum Aizaz Rasul provides a valuable lens through which to analyze the complex interactions between religion, secularization, and democracy.

##### **3. Rasul's 'In-Between' Position on Minority Rights**

- Rasul occupied a contradictory position:
  - She strongly advocated for linguistic rights, particularly the right to speak in one's mother tongue.
  - At the same time, she opposed political protections for religious minorities, such as separate electorates or reservations.
- This ambivalence reflected the broader tensions within India's interpretation of secularism, where inclusion often coexisted with exclusionary policies.

##### **4. The Limits of Secular Citizenship in the Indian Constitution**

- While the Constitution aimed to establish a secular, inclusive state through common citizenship, it did not effectively create conditions for genuine secularism.
- Instead of eliminating religious and caste identities, legal provisions reinforced and solidified these distinctions.
- The legal framework for minority rights was shaped by gendered perceptions of religious communities, leading to categories like ‘Indian Muslim’ or ‘Muslim woman’ that failed to acknowledge the internal diversity within these groups.

### **5. Unequal Approaches to Religious Reform**

- The Assembly members actively debated reforms within Hindu society, particularly regarding caste and gender equality.
- However, when it came to minority communities, the Constitution’s framers were cautious not to interfere with religious traditions.
- For instance, Muslims were allowed to retain their personal laws, unlike Hindus, who were subjected to state-led reform initiatives.
- This selective approach reinforced religious distinctions rather than fostering a truly secular legal system.

### **6. Understanding Self-Formation as Political Resistance**

- Examining Rasul’s personal life and political career sheds light on the ways in which individuals navigated dominant power structures while simultaneously resisting exclusion.
- Her life demonstrates that participation in mainstream politics did not necessarily mean passive acceptance of existing hierarchies.
- Instead, self-formation—shaped by personal experiences, political struggles, and historical context—became an act of resistance.

### **7. The Role of Autobiographical Writing in Reclaiming Muslim Women’s Political Agency**

- By revisiting the life of Rasul, this study highlights how autobiographies are inherently selective and strategically constructed.
- Muslim women have historically used personal narratives to challenge their marginalization and assert their role in shaping India’s national identity.
- Rasul’s story underscores the importance of reclaiming forgotten voices in Indian political history, especially those of minority women.

The article underscores the continuing relevance of debates on secularism, religious identity, and minority rights in India. Rasul’s complex position reflects the paradoxes within India’s approach to secular democracy—offering inclusion through common citizenship while maintaining legal and social distinctions between communities. Her life serves as a case study in understanding how individuals navigate and challenge structures of exclusion, making a lasting impact on India’s democratic and secular ideals.

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