

★ **Midnight's Borders: A People's History of Modern India****Suchitra Vijayan**

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Suchitra Vijayan's complex history *Midnight's Borders* shows how India's policies have fueled border conflicts, with devastating effects.

Vijayan uses precise language to explain the implications that India's contested borders have for the region's inhabitants. Her text begins with a historical overview, showing how the British India devolved, fracturing to become India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. It demonstrates the impact of sloppily drawn, arbitrary boundaries within each region, where borders cut through villages, farms, and houses. These rendered many people "stateless," as have interpretations of citizenship fueled by nationalism, ignorance, and hatred. Such problems, Vijayan shows, have been compounded by prejudicial policies, religion, misogyny, vengeance, and violence.

To understand this complex history, Vijayan traced India's 9,000-mile border herself, finding its issues reflected in the people she encountered. She contrasts the Indian history she learned in school with what she discovered among people living in the contested regions and those who've been forced to flee. The book documents how people's lives changed forever because of border policies.

The book is evocative when it comes to the sights and sounds of the affected communities, illuminating the stories of people who struggle to survive in border areas, and the losses that they faced at the hands of corrupt officials who decide who belongs within India's boundaries and who doesn't. It depicts the traumas that result from immense power imbalances in liminal spaces and profiles people who've migrated to find work, marry, or escape violence; many are now in prison or are no longer able to return to the places of their births or heritage.

*Midnight's Borders* is timely, first-rate journalism made human; it recounts the deep personal consequences of colonialism and forced national identity.

WENDY HINMAN (January / February 2021)

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