



# The Way Things Were: A Novel

By Aatish Taseer

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**The Way Things Were: A Novel** By Aatish Taseer

**An absorbing family saga set amid the commotion of the last forty years of Indian history**

*The Way Things Were* opens with the death of Toby, the Maharaja of Kalasuryaketu, a Sanskritist who has not set foot in India for two decades. Moving back and forth across three sections, between today's Delhi and the 1970s, '80s, and '90s in turn, the novel tells the story of a family held at the mercy of the times.

A masterful interrogation of the relationships between past and present and among individual lives, events, and culture, Aatish Taseer's *The Way Things Were* takes its title from the Sanskrit word for history, *itihasa*, whose literal translation is "the way things indeed were." Told in prose that is at once intimate and panoramic, and threaded through with Sanskrit as central metaphor and chorus, this is a hugely ambitious and important book, alive to all the commotion of the last forty years but never losing its brilliant grasp on the current moment.

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## **The Way Things Were: A Novel By Aatish Taseer Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

### Review

“Aatish Taseer's ambitious, searching, highly readable novel of ideas is many things at once: a stinging, sharply observed chronicle of upper-class drawing room politics; a grappling with the modern Indian state; and an argument of how language shapes the ambitions and self-image of an entire culture.” ?Hanya Yanagihara

“A timeless, masterful epic.” ?Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

“A ravishing tale of modern India . . . Weighty material-Sanskrit scholars and the politics of Indira Gandhi for starters-is leavened with humor, humanity and passionate romance. A serious saga you can't put down.” ?People, "The 12 Best New Books"

“Under normal circumstances, I am a dog-earer of books . . . A mediocre book will have a few such scars. A great one will look ragged. But I *wrecked* my copy of Aatish Taseer's new novel, *The Way Things Were*, folding the corners of so many pages and planting so many scraps of paper amid the chapters that it sits now, swollen, on my desk like a patient after gum surgery.

There are a lot of books which take small things and make them epic; fewer which can encompass the scope of the epic still make time for the small, personal details. Almost no book can do both. And there are very few books out there that you can open, knowing nothing, stab down a finger and find a line or a paragraph lovely enough, even in isolation, to be worth scrawling down somewhere or tattooing on your neck.

*The Way Things Were* does it all. Pinballs, in fact, between the close and the epic with remarkable alacrity and balance. Taseer is a writer at the peak of his skill, giving the finger to hubris and rarely putting a foot wrong as he churns through a literary minefield of multiple narrators, nested time frames, 40 years of messy, modern Indian history, and a central motif which rests on the cognates and etymological contortions of a dead language . . .

There is, astoundingly, among all these hundreds of words, rarely a dull moment . . . And rarely a page without something beautiful to behold.” ?Jason Sheehan, *NPR Books*

“Taseer's book is a cut above the rest. Colonialism, racism, sectarian violence, class tension, and the rise of the Indian nouveau riche are all handled with a delicate touch. This is a difficult book to put down, and readers will enjoy every minute of it, as well as learning about contemporary Indian culture.” ?Publishers Weekly (starred review)

“Taseer is fascinated by language to the point that his characters speak in fully formed philosophical paragraphs . . . what they say here . . . about India, love, family and the accommodations inherent in every life, is intensely engrossing. What [Taseer] has done with great intelligence and elegance is to deliver a novel of ideas in the guise of a very human story.” ?Michael Prodger, *Financial Times*

“[*The Way Things Were* is] a novel where characters are 'encircled by history' . . . Taseer's great gift is to locate the fault line--of both individuals and a nation--in the midst of epic upheavals.” ?Vanity Fair

“Taseer's wide and analytical perspective has something in common with contemporaries Amit Chaudhuri

and Neel Mukherjee, but his style--at once highly intellectual and deeply poetic--is unique . . . This immense and intense [novel] . . . is a substantive contribution to new writing from the subcontinent.” ?Amanda Hopkinson, *The Independent*

“*The Way Things Were* is [an] ambitious novel, in which Taseer seeks to reconcile the ancient mysteries of classical Vedic culture with the overcrowded, politico-religious minefield of modern India.” ?Alfred Hickling, *The Guardian*

“*The Way Things Were* . . . shows [Taseer] to be both an accomplished novelist and commentator. In delving beneath the surface, he has vividly exposed the quarrels and quandaries of an India undergoing rapid historical and social change.” ?Will Nicoll, *The Spectator*

#### About the Author

Aatish Taseer was born in 1980. He is the author of the memoir *Stranger to History: A Son's Journey Through Islamic Lands* and two novels: *The Temple-Goers*, which was short-listed for the Costa First Novel Award, and the highly acclaimed *Noon*. His work has been translated into more than a dozen languages. He lives in New Delhi and New York.

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