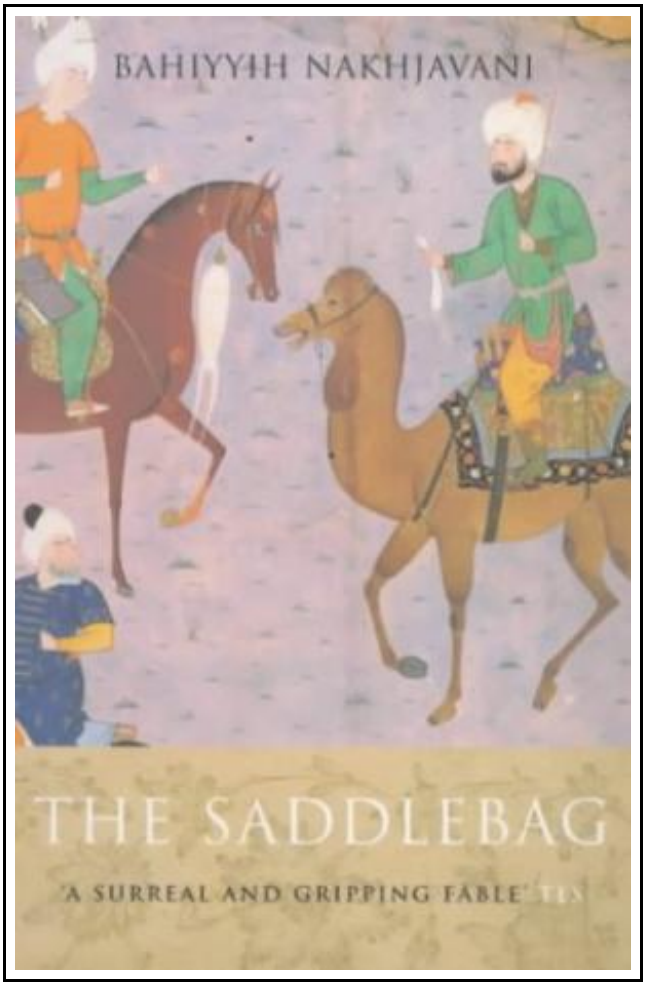
The Saddlebag



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THE SADDLEBAG

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2001. Soft cover. Book Condition: New. Nakhjavani chronicles a day in the life of nine 19th-century characters traveling between Mecca and Medina in this engaging first novel. Though they come from a wide variety of religious, national and socioeconomic backgrounds, all find themselves in the same caravan when it is beset by a sandstorm and a brutal bandit attack. Each chapter recounts these events from the perspective of its title character, a device Nakhjavani uses skillfully; not only does she avoid the tedium that could result from multiple retellings, but she also turns the bit player in one narrator's story into the complicated hero of another. For example, a sleazy Indian money changer, who would have remained a caricature in a lesser novel, becomes in Nakhjavani's hands a brave figure with a heartrending backstory. As this Indian and the other sojourners experience the outward horrors of the day, Nakhjavani shows how God uses their respective religious orientations and the secrets bundled in a saddlebag to reveal life-changing truths to each of them. The novel's Baha'i message is beautifully rendered in these tales of multiple paths leading to one destination, and its characters connect through encounters reminiscent of those in Michael Ondaatje's tales of unlikely soulmates whose unions bridge vast cultural divides. Nakhjavani's anachronistic style reads as if she were adapting 19th-century folktales rather than writing original fiction, and this quality, rather than its vaguely didactic raison d'?tre, sets the novel apart from the bulk of contemporary literary fiction and adds immensely to its charm (Amazon).

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