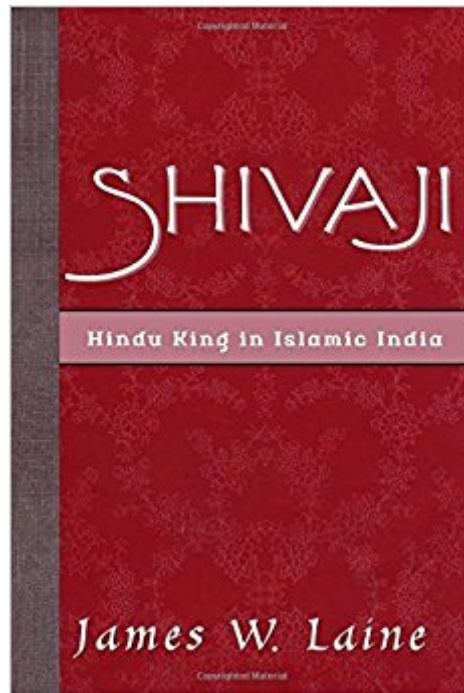




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Shivaji: Hindu King In Islamic India



Synopsis

Shivaji is a well-known hero in western India. He defied Mughal power in the seventeenth century, established an independent kingdom, and had himself crowned in an orthodox Hindu ceremony. The legends of his life have become an epic story that everyone in western India knows, and an important part of the Hindu nationalists' ideology. To read Shivaji's legend today is to find expression of deeply held convictions about what Hinduism means and how it is opposed to Islam. James Laine traces the origin and development of the Shivaji legend from the earliest sources to the contemporary accounts of the tale. His primary concern is to discover the meaning of Shivaji's life for those who have composed-and those who have read-the legendary accounts of his military victories, his daring escapes, his relationships with saints. In the process, he paints a new and more complex picture of Hindu-Muslim relations from the seventeenth century to the present. He argues that this relationship involved a variety of compromises and strategies, from conflict to accommodation to nuanced collaboration. Neither Muslims nor Hindus formed clearly defined communities, says Laine, and they did not relate to each other as opposed monolithic groups. Different sub-groups, representing a range of religious persuasions, found it in their advantage to accentuate or diminish the importance of Hindu and Muslim identity and the ideologies that supported the construction of such identities. By studying the evolution of the Shivaji legend, Laine demonstrates, we can trace the development of such constructions in both pre-British and post-colonial periods.

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Customer Reviews

"A succinct, cogent study that is admirably well organized and consistently insightful. Though brief, it makes a significant contribution to the study of Indian history and religious studies."--Journal of the American Academy of Religion

"Shivaji is a succinct, cogent study that is admirably well organized and consistently insightful. Though brief, it makes a significant contribution to the study of Indian history and religious studies. In one of the first studies to trace the longitudinal developments in the biography of a major precolonial figure of India, Laine employs an innovative approach that could well be adapted to other figures. In addition, Laine makes valuable observations about the precolonial history of 'Hinduism'"--Journal of the American Academy of Religion

James W. Laine is a Professor of Religious Studies at Macalester College.

Excellent book

Being recently in India for the first time, many doubts invaded me during the visit and after it referring to the characteristics of Indian different races. All the people I asked there couldn't give the answers to my questions (probably linguistics troubles affected the comprehension because my original language is Spanish and Indian people speak English non understandable to me and my companion) so I started to investigate after the trip and found this book about Shivaji a hero and king of Maharashtra Region who represent (I'm starting to know now) an unavoidable reference to the modern society of India. I'm starting to read this book and I expect to fill many lagoons I have in my mind about this "rich" country.

I wish Laine had gone beyond the legends and myths and stuck to the actual history. He has not done that. He has failed to point out with emphasis that Shivaji like so many other Kings wanted power and territory which he was successful in doing. He was never against Muslims although he may have been against Muslim Kings. Even if it was some other Hindu if not Afzal Khan, Shivaji would have still gone with tiger claws to a peace meeting and tore him in the embrace. We cannot judge his deeds now. His top officials were all Muslims even his commander in chief and the court language was Persian and definitely never Marathi. In his time Hindu Muslim was never an issue. It was only when the British took over they exploited the religious differences and followed the policy of divide and rule and most unfortunately The Congress party did the same and introduced communalism that was the cause of so many problems. The major problems have been partition of the country, invasion of Hyderabad and the Kashmir problem all based on The Hindu Muslim

issues. Laine unfortunately could not do justice to history.

The main thesis of this book is that history is bunk and that the writing of history is a modern attempt to recreate the past to mirror our own perceptions of the present. In a supreme irony the author does not realize he has fallen in his own net. The book sets out to prove that the Hindu Nationalists have stolen Shivaji, the king of the Marathas, and made him into a legend in order to be anti-Muslim. But the true story of Shivaji was supposedly different. According to this book Shivaji was a diveristy loving, multi-cultural, moral relativist and perhaps even a secular-humanist, who loved Islam and didn't really care about Hinduism. It is nice to project our own modern loves into the past but nothing could be further from the truth. Shivaji was a warrior king who desired to assert the independence of his people, Hindus, from a colonial power, Mughal Muslims. He was a freedom fighter. If he was tolerant, that was by accident. He was not 'Davy Crocket' as the author tries to paint him. Legends about him don't abound with him fighting bears, but rather with him waging a war of independence. The documents, both Muslim and Hindu, attest to the authenticity of his life. Sometimes modern historians should be mature enough to accept that some legends are real, they aren't all cynical manipulations by modern politics. Seth J. Frantzman

The fundamental confusion is synthesized in the sub-title. James W. Laine attests to a cultural crossroads in India where two cultures were grappling with one another in terms of being at times comprehensive and at times confrontational. Generally, looking in on a situation from the outside, without being part of it, or being within it, is not conducive to an understanding of human relationships since humans in a time/place frame have their own rationales and it is questionable that "objectifying" them is going to make them any more accessible. Only conceptual arrogance can convince otherwise: We cannot oblige everyone to think the way we do. In other words, our terms are not the only ones to think in. "Our" traditions and "our" rationales, talking of the U.S.A., could easily become the laughing stock of the world. In *Studies in Classic American Literature*, apparently suppressed in 1923, the year of its publication, D.H. Lawrence does a good job of it. He argues that hypocrisy, ably portrayed in the works of Fenimore Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, and others, will be the seed of our destruction. I believe that the purpose of Laine's thesis crumbles when he confuses the thesis of historical perfection with human frailty. The imperfection of human beings is all too well known. Laine recurs to his youthful miscomprehension of Davy Crockett as a regional or national hero seen as a villain, he assures us, in the eyes of Mexican status quo. And evidently the scenario does present confrontational issues that, however, cannot be resolved in terms of pseudo

terminology brought into existence by contemporary situations, e.g. "Anglos as Illegal immigrants," (pp.89-90). -- Both of which terms belong in the XXth and XXIst centuries and can only be applied retroactively to create conceptual inaccuracy. Riots? Destruction? have to be seen as an indispensable reaction to intrusive arrogance. (Look at what happened in Los Angeles in 1992 when the wrongdoers were whitewashed.) The really muddy part of Laine's presentation becomes quagmire when he talks about being allowed "to entertain certain unthinkable thoughts." (p.90, 2nd paragraph). Shivaji appears to have risen above personal limitations to represent a non personal ambition of unity for his people and shouldered the responsibility of guiding and governing them by their own ideals and principles. In spite of his recurrent cynicism Laine provides the answer he is seeking in his quote from Sivabharata (p.98): all men formerly fearful now reached their goals. Certainly that would not have occurred had Shivaji not liberated the nation. A more complete rating would be: Content- 4 stars, Style- 2 stars, Viewpoint- 0 stars.

Wrong history is told

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