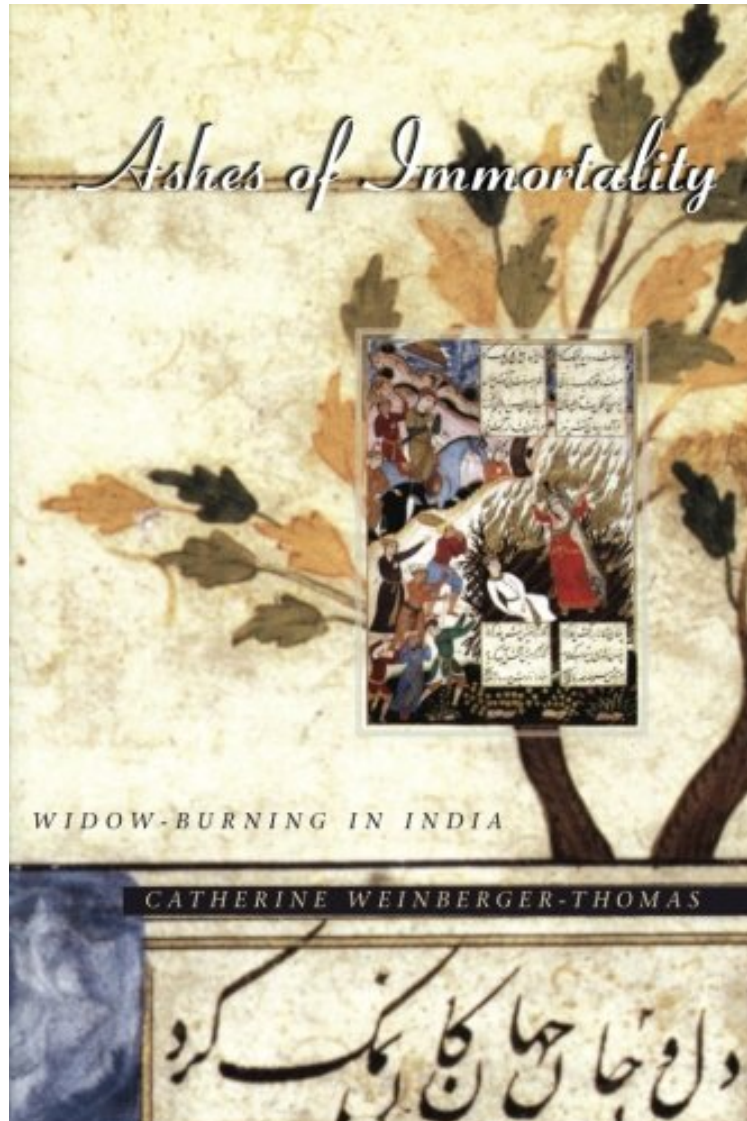


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Ashes of Immortality: Widow-Burning in India

Catherine Weinberger-Thomas

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Catherine Weinberger-Thomas : Ashes of Immortality: Widow-Burning in India before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ashes of Immortality: Widow-Burning in India:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A history of the practice of widow burning in Hinduism By Jeri When the British conquered India, they came face to face with practices they could neither understand or condone. Chief among them was the age old custom of sati, widow burning, in which the dead man's widow entered her husband's

funeral pyre and burned to death..When the British began to condemn and try to outlaw the burning to death of widows it actually "triggered a spectacular increase in such sacrifices between the years 1815 and 1828 in the region of Calcutta" (p 42).To the frustration of British officials, many of the women did not want their help. They looked upon their deaths as a trial by fire which proved their love for their husband and their innocence at his death - accusations of poisoning of elderly husbands being a common slur. It also gave honor to themselves and prestige to their families. One woman, when questioned as to why a woman could be induced to kill herself, answered, "Without a man, a woman is nothing" (p 170).Still, it was also true that there were many cases where the woman involved did not want to die. The pressure from relatives could be unrelenting, however. Some women were simply forced to kill themselves.In The Laws of Manu it was said that self sacrificial death "is not killing" (p 76) and could gain the devotee a greater chance of liberation from the endless repetition of life cycles. Above an image of Bhairava was a high pinnacle with a drop of 90 feet. Bhairava "required an annual sacrifice" (p 77) of one man. In the Narmada Khanda it was written that anyone who committed incest or murdered a parent could become sinless again by killing himself this way.Widow burning does continue, even today. "Between 1943 and 1987, some 30 women in Rajasthan ...immolated themselves on their husband's funeral pyre" (p 182).I should note that this book is not easy to read. Whether the translation is poor or not, I don't know, but the sentences ramble.2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Not for BeginnersBy Rub Da DuckAfter reading Mala Sen's "Death By Fire" book which contained information of infanticide and widow burning India, I became entranced with widow burning that I wanted to know more-however, I picked the wrong book. "Ashes of Immortality" is a good book filled to the brim with history and knowledge of widow burning. However, to fully appreciate this book one needs to be familiar with the caste system of India, Hinduism, and a already knowledgable background of widow burning-for these reasons, I stopped reading the book.I will also mention that I stopped reading this book because how the author wrote. I know this book was translated, but none the less, how the author wrote was just a nightmare. Her paragraphs were always congested with poorly written sentences, with words I never heard ,while she jumped from thought to thought. I had to reread paragraphs and even sentences to understand thier potential.In Conclusion: this book is not for the faint of heart. If your a newbie like me in the widow burning interest, avoid this book and keep looking (thats what Im doing). For people who are familiar with the Indian culture and practices, you may find this book interesting. For those who want a second opinion, scroll back up and read the first Editorial Review done by Jay Bernstein-I wish had read his review before I bought this book :P

"At last, she arrives at the fatal end of the plank . . . and, with her hands crossed over her chest, falls straight downward, suspended for a moment in the air before being devoured by the burning pit that awaits her. . . ." This grisly 1829 account by Pierre Dubois demonstrates the usual European response to the Hindu custom of sati sacrificing themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands-horror and revulsion. Yet to those of the Hindu faith, not least the sati themselves, this act signals the sati's sacredness and spiritual power.Ashes of Immortality attempts to see the sati through Hindu eyes, providing an extensive experiential and psychoanalytic account of ritual self-sacrifice and self-mutilation in South Asia. Based on fifteen years of fieldwork in northern India, where the state-banned practice of sati reemerged in the 1970s, as well as extensive textual analysis, Weinberger-Thomas constructs a radically new interpretation of sati. She shows that their self-immolation transcends gender, caste and class, region and history, representing for the Hindus a path to immortality.

From Library JournalThe spectacular phenomenon of Indian women committing suicide by entering their dead husbands' funeral pyres strains the limits of cross-cultural understanding. In an effort to unravel the complex symbolism surrounding this disturbing practice and its innumerable variations, Weinberger-Thomas (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales) has studied mythology, philology, scripture, art, pamphlets, published eyewitness accounts, court records, mass media, and interview data. The sacrificial widow's motivation is explained in terms of her sense of guilt at her karmic liability for her husband's death. By unleashing her ghost upon her enemies, she may also use suicide to protest or redress perceived mistreatment or injustice. Finally, she can redeem, purify, and immortalize herself through her sacrifice. Weinberger-Thomas's analysis is objective, balanced, and sophisticated. Unfortunately, however, she provides no unifying framework or overview: cases are recounted repetitiously and without a clear direction, and vital facts are sometimes hidden in the disorganized structure, while narratives are embellished with anecdotal and seemingly inconsequential details. Although erudite and readable, this book is difficult to navigate. It is also aimed at specialists and advanced readers. Recommended only for academic and larger public libraries.-Jay H. Bernstein, Fordham Univ. Lib., Bronx, NY Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. A major achievement, both in the historical and cultural information it presents and in the interpretive challenges it presses forward. -- Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Summer 2001A powerful, moving, and disturbing book. -- History of Religions, November 2001Engaging and lucid....A stimulating study that treats readers to some engaging, if at times provocative, reflections on sati immolation. -- Current Anthropology, June 2002The learning and range displayed is formidable. -- Journal of Religious History, June 2001Weinberger-Thomas's work is arguably the most

multifaceted and definitive study of widow-burning available. -- CHOICE, July/ August 2000
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