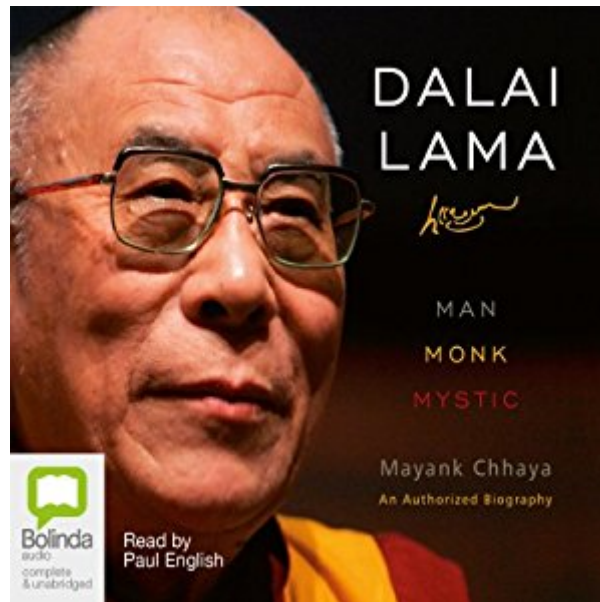


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Dalai Lama: Man, Monk, Mystic



Synopsis

An authorized biography of one of the world's greatest spiritual leaders. Written with the full co-operation of the Dalai Lama, this fascinating, up-to-date biography captures the public persona and enduring mystery behind one of the world's most important spiritual leaders.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Mayank Chhaya's Dalai Lama: Man, Monk, Mystic pays tribute to the man who has captured the world's attention with his advocacy for Tibet and dedication to nonviolence. The author offers a unique perspective as he approaches the subjects of Tibet, Buddhism, and the Dalai Lama himself with a sense of awe and admiration. As an Indian journalist, Chhaya is able to provide readers with ample background information regarding the ongoing conflict between China and Tibet as well as offer insights into the Dalai Lama's life in exile in India. That the biography is infused with personal anecdotes that the Dalai Lama shared with the author in series of interviews sets it apart from other accounts of the life of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and makes it appropriate for audiences with different levels of familiarity with the subject. Even when the author lauds the Dalai Lama's strides toward increasing awareness of the Tibetan cause, Chhaya is still able to convey the humble nature of this leader and make it clear how this revered leader perceives himself. However, at some parts of the biography, the high regard this author has for this Buddhist monk becomes a little too apparent and reaches levels that the Dalai Lama would probably not approve of. Mayank Chhaya responds to the idea that the Dalai Lama is Gandhi's successor by explaining how the Dalai Lama

has had to face more significant challenges and essentially asserting that the Dalai Lama has managed to surpass Gandhi's achievements. Chhaya claims that Gandhi "was up against an imperial power in precipitous decline. The Dalai Lama, on the other hand, has no defined context of a country to operate from...He remains the only leader of consequence for his cause, unlike Gandhi" (166). While the Dalai Lama undeniably faced many hardships in his cause to preserve Tibetan culture and stand up to the Chinese, it is not necessary for the author to diminish the accomplishments of Gandhi to achieve this purpose. In another instance, the author includes an interview with a young girl who asserts that "the Dalai Lama is far more universal in his message than the pope" (220). While it is clear that the author is attempting to convey the perception that the Dalai Lama is very accessible and down-to-earth, this argument could have been more effective by discussing the Dalai Lama in his own right rather than comparing him to other famous proponents of peace.

As the spiritual leader of the once-obscure religion of Tibetan Buddhism, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama has become revered by people in all parts of the world for his sincerity, openness, common-sense, teaching of non-violence, and spirituality. In "Dalai Lama: Man, Monk, Mystic" (2007) the Indian journalist Mayank Chhaya has written an informative if somewhat limited biography of this charismatic spiritual leader. At times, the focus of the book seems to be more on the political conflict between China and Tibet rather than upon the life of the Dalai Lama himself. In his concluding chapter, Chhaya points out that for all the media attention he receives and the people he attracts, the Dalai Lama is difficult to know intimately. But with its focus on externals, this book still constitutes a good introduction to the Dalai Lama. Chhaya does a good job of placing his biography in a proper context by giving an overview of Tibet's geography and history, and its interactions over the centuries with Buddhism, China, and India. Many Westerners have become fascinated with the religion of Tibetan Buddhism. Chhaya describes himself as an agnostic. He points out how the spiritual teachings of Buddhism in Tibet became joined with the much earlier religious traditions in Tibet which featured animal sacrifice, nature worship, and shamanism. He also points out, and perhaps exaggerates, the difficulties which many Westerners, with their skepticism and science, have with the Buddhist teaching of rebirth. The author's treatment of Buddhist teachings shows well the dispassion and objectivity which characterize his biography. Chhaya also discusses well, the current Dalai Lama's predecessor, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, who began the process of modernizing Tibet. He shows how the current Dalai Lama was discovered in a remote Tibetan village at the age of 3 brought to Lhasa, and assumed the spiritual and temporal responsibility of the

Dalai Lama as an adolescent. China invaded Tibet in 1950 and in 1959 the Dalai Lama was forced to flee to India. He has not been back to Tibet since that time but has instead tried to work for a nonviolent resolution of the dispute with China and to preserve the essentials of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan culture. The Dalai Lama received the Nobel Prize in 1989. Most of the book is given over to a summary of the China-Tibet conflict and of the Dalai Lama's role in trying to secure a peaceful solution. Chayya offers a balanced, circumspect view of this conflict, which does not permit of a clear-cut solution. The Dalai Lama does not advocate an independent Tibet; rather he seeks spiritual and local autonomy for Tibet under the general government supervision of China. His position is too timid for some, too radical for others. For all the sympathy the Dalai Lama's cause has engendered, it has secured only a small place at best on the international political agenda. With all the attention the book gives to the Tibet-China controversy, Chayya is too short in his consideration of the spiritual, internal dimension of the Dalai Lama and his teaching. He does point out some of the internal spiritual divisions within Tibetan Buddhism, as it involves the worship of spirits, and he points to the great appeal of the Dalai Lama's teaching to those of other faiths -- as well as to those who profess no faith at all. He offers a portrayal of the Dalai Lama -- with his sense of humor, kindness, and interest in the sciences, that is consistent with much other readily accessible public information about him. Yet I finished this book glad that I had read it but feeling that I wanted to know more about the Dalai Lama, his teachings, and the factors that contributed to making him what he is. Chayya has written a worthwhile book about an inspiring spiritual leader. But I think that many of the Dalai Lama's own published books (I would have liked Chayya to have told more about them) offer better insight into what the Dalai Lama is about. Robin Friedman

This book was incredibly disappointing. It had relatively little to do with the Dalai Lama. The first 194 pages the reader suffers through is entirely on the political history of China and Tibet. In fact, his departure from Tibet covered less than a full page. This is followed by a few pages on His Holiness with a subsequent chapter where his not mentioned until the very last sentence. The final chapters of the book are of the same political topics as the first 194 pages. I somehow finished it, still waiting to read about the "Man, Monk, Mystic" but unfortunately it wasn't to be found anywhere in this book. Dreadful.

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