

RESOURCES BOOK REVIEWS

emphasize the complexity of Indian civilization. He perhaps wisely avoids altogether the minefield that is Indian historiography. The book also includes a useful bibliography and a section on further reading.

The real strength of this book, however, is its conciseness. *India: Brief History of a Civilization* covers all that its title implies in just over two hundred pages. Although some will surely criticize the book for not spending enough time on certain things, Trautmann has managed to include a veritable cornucopia of material, all very nicely accompanied by many useful maps and effective drawings of well-known artifacts, buildings, and persons. Given Trautmann's expertise in language, this important and interesting topic seems to get a bit more time than one might expect in a book such as this.

Meanwhile, historical topics such as the Partition and the 1857 Uprising get very little time. Occasionally, this reader was distracted by some unnecessary details, such as how the monsoon works—not just how it works in India but how heat inversions in general work. Sometimes the book is perhaps too dense. At times it is so full of detail that I suspect some readers will find it difficult to absorb the material or distinguish between the critical and the merely interesting. However, Trautmann does get right up to the twenty-first century, even if, as advertised, he prefers to dwell much more on the past, the distant past in particular. Thus, teachers who tend to emphasize more recent Indian civilization and history, say the past five hundred years, will likely want to provide supplementary material. In that sense, *India: Brief History of a Civilization* would serve very well as a text in an introductory course on Indian civilization, especially one that is more concerned with the origins of Indian civilization rather than the course of modern Indian history. *India: Brief History of a Civilization* may not be the perfect text for a survey or introductory course on India. But Trautmann is to be applauded for rising to the challenge and producing a worthwhile addition to the field. ■

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Afghanistan: Multidisciplinary Perspectives

A Far Away Home

BY HOWARD FABER

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168 PAGES, ISBN: 978-1608080519, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by David E. Huebner



A *Far Away Home* is a candid portrayal of life in Afghanistan over the past fifty plus years. In some countries such a story might be mundane or trivial. However, the life of protagonist Ali takes us through successive oppressors—the Soviets and the Taliban—and the entrance of the US military into Afghanistan in 2001. This is a novel that alternates between anguish and despair to hope and triumph in the face of odds most Americans never face!

While this novel is geared toward middle school students, it resonates well with high

school students. The sentences are uncomplicated and to the point, yet provide vivid pictures and intriguing stories of growing up, living, and surviving in Afghanistan over several recent decades. Indeed, as an adult, I found the saga of Ali's upbringing, with all the struggles and challenges he faced, captivating!

Ali encounters severe handicaps from his birth: a "bent" left leg; the lack of medical help available in the small town of Sharidue, teasing children who mock his handicap; and crude, hand-made crutches. In 1965, when he was eight, Ali and his father, Hassan, make their way in a treacherous journey to Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, to seek corrective surgery for his misshaped leg. But, the trip ends in disappointment with a doctor's diagnosis that there are no available medical procedures in Afghanistan to correct such a deficit. However, with the surprise arrival of medical personnel in Sharidue not long after Ali's trip to Kabul, Ali is able to secure life-changing surgery to correct his medical condition.

Although we might think that Ali's life of ingenuity and resourcefulness does not begin until after this critical surgery, his constant creativity is first noted with the advent of Sharidue's small and new hospital. To get supplies to Sharidue, an airfield is built out of sheer rock over difficult terrain. But Ali stretches beyond the traditions of his village. In a culture accustomed to using cattle for clearing land, Ali suggests horses, and it works! Besides taking up the challenge from the American pilot "Dan" to learn how to fly, Ali manifests his quick inventiveness throughout the novel—from his plan during his teen years to ambush Russian soldiers, to his resistance tactics against the Taliban, to commitment to excellence as Sharidue's only carpenter, to the sweeping of airplane tracks off the runway to fool the Taliban—Ali is a master of quick thinking and ingenuity!

The book takes us through Ali's years of living in neighboring Iran (you will have to read the book to find out how he ended up there), where he marries and has children, his subsequent return to Afghanistan early in 2001, and his role as the village leader and spokesperson to deal with US troops after 9/11. He ignites the courage of his village with his pledge to resist the Taliban and conceives of several plans to thwart the Taliban's attempts to storm Sharidue.

I thoroughly enjoyed the many anecdotes and life lessons in *A Far Away Home*. This quick-read novel is an engaging story of overcoming severe physical challenges, resisting oppressors, and making a better life for Ali's people and family in Sharidue. It is a rewarding story of leadership, hope, love of family, and the struggles of a faraway people. ■

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ERRATA

On page 62 of the spring 2012 issue, in the first paragraph of the article by Jeffrey L. Richey titled "Western Civilization with Chinese Comparisons," an editing error resulted in miscasting the fifth sentence. The sentence should have read, "Either the West was presented as an ideal Confucian meritocracy, in which emperors were selected for their moral worth and were dismissed once calamities cast doubt on their eligibility to rule, or as a romantic paradise over which the Daoist goddess, the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu), presided." The editors sincerely apologize for the error.