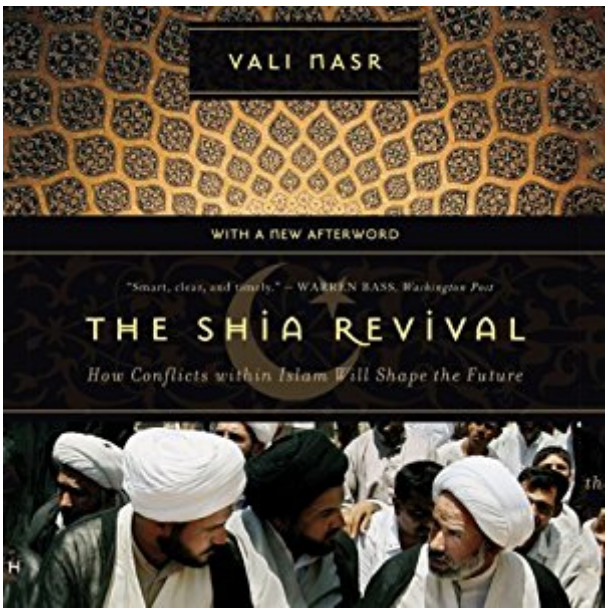
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The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape The Future



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Synopsis

Profiled on the front page of the Wall Street Journal, Iranian-born scholar Vali Nasr has become one of America’s leading commentators on current events in the Middle East, admired and welcomed by both media and government for his "concise and coherent" analysis (Wall Street Journal). In this "smart, clear and timely" book (Washington Post), Nasr brilliantly dissects the political and theological antagonisms within Islam. He provides a unique and objective understanding of the 1,400-year bitter struggle between Shias and Sunnis, and sheds crucial light on its modern-day consequences-from the nuclear posturing of Iran’s President Ahmadinejad to the recent U.S.-enabled shift toward Shia power in Iraq and Hezbollah’s continued dominance in Lebanon.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition
Listening Length: 8 hoursÃ Â andÃ Â 47 minutes
Program Type: Audiobook
Version: Unabridged
Publisher: Audible Studios
Audible.com Release Date: July 11, 2013
Whispersync for Voice: Ready
Language: English
ASIN: B00CWJHXSO
Best Sellers Rank: #21 inÃ Â Books > Religion & Spirituality > Islam > Shi’ism #73 inÃ Â Books > Audible Audiobooks > Religion & Spirituality > Islam #97 inÃ Â Books > Religion & Spirituality > Islam > Theology

Customer Reviews

The book is written by a Persian/ Iranian, but that is not something that comes across in the reading. The book is about 9 chapters and 250 pages of text. As I see it, every chapter had something that was significantly useful to know. In order to keep the review readable, I’ll select one or two points from each chapter.Chapter 1 ("Who are The Shia?): Here we get a brief overview of the details of the historical schism that made the Sunni and Shia who they are and the names and dates. We learn that although most of the Shia are in Iran, that a good chunk of them are also in Arab and South Asian countriesChapter 2 ("The Making of Shia Politics"): Lots of information here. A bit more on the detailed training and ordination of Shia clergy (though I could have done with a little more), as well as some patterns on the spread of Shia Islam (for instance, how it got from Azerbaijan to

Iran), and a bit more on the different subsects (Twelvers vs. Fivers).Chapter 3 ("The Fading Promise of Nationalism"): This chapter is a retake on something that we have heard before, which is that the Arabs/ Persians have already tried Nationalism/ Communism/ etc before and that it didn't work and so now Islam is the last choice left standing.Chapter 4 ("Khomeini's Moment"): Here there is a synopsis of the recent history of Iran, including: the overthrow of Reza Pahlavi (who was actually only the shah for a generation and not many centuries) and subsequent rise of Khomeini. Pahlavi's fatal mistake, it seems, was not making friends with the clergy ("men of words") in order to ensure the stability of his regime. Nasr also gave a characterization (again, a very neutral one) of Khomeini (and the mullahs) as people who were primarily scholars and men of words who were not worried about the nuts and bolts of running a republic. Before reading this, I didn't know that Khomeini had aspirations of pan-Islamism of which he himself was the leader. The dynamics of the mass movement in this chapter filled in some details and reminded the reader of things that have been written inÃ Â The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements (Perennial Classics)Chapter 5 ("The Battle of Islamic Fundamentalisms"): Here we learn that Shia fundamentalists and Wahhabi fundamentalists are not the same things by dint of the fact that the ideological differences between the two groups are just too great. In the Western mind, these two orthodoxies are the same thing. But in point of fact, they are two very different things. Madrassas are something that are a byproduct of Saudi Arabia's funding of institutions in various Muslim countries (particularly Pakistan and Afghanistan) in order to counteract Shia influence (p.157). Who knew? (Many readers might have thought that they were homegrown remedies to inadequate educational funding).Chapter 6 ("The Tide Turns"): Here is a discussion about the changing fortunes of the Shia in Iraq after Saddam is toppled from power. Nasr maintains an even tone (and does not go into denouncing the Americans for their lack of understanding of the dynamics of the sectarian divide) and also introduce us (with effusive praise) to the role pragmatic cleric, Sistani, whose efforts and restraint explain much of the success of keeping Iraq from falling into outright civil war.Chapter 7 ("Iraq: The First Arab Shia State"): This chapter gives us the details on the Iraqis pulling it together as a nation with deep sectarian rifts. Other tidbits of information: Oh! So that's why the Iraqis hated Saddam Hussein so much (=multiple tortures and executions of anyone who got in the way)! Before, I had been under the misimpression that Iraq's government was secular (from readingÃ Â Statecraft : Strategies for a Changing World). But Nasr recast the war between Iran and Iraq and a battle between Sunni and Shia, and many of the policies of Saddam Hussein as being motivated by Sunni chauvinism, and showed that said chauvinism was also very corrosive inside the country as well.Chapter 8 ("The Rise of Iran"): Though written 10 years ago, a reader can find

an explanation here for a lot of things. 1. The nuclear bomb that Iran has is something that they see as a "Shia Bomb" (p. 223), and that their melodramatic ranting against Israel (and the United States) is more diversionary (in order to not alarm their Sunni neighbors). The picture that Nasr gives us of the country is one that is seeking modernization and separation of government from religious affairs (the Persians want to be pious and religious, but they are just tired of having a country run by theocrats). They also seem to differ sharply from the Arabs (and the author does not make this direct comparison, but only hints at it) in that they are interested in Philosophy and Mathematics and engagement with Western ideas and training.Things that I would have liked clarified:1. I would like to know a bit more on the differences between Sunni and Shia ulama ("clergy"). Nasr lets us know (p. 70) that the clergy in Shia places are lawyers more than anything else, and that they go about dealing with religious affairs in a very litigious way, issuing rulings and the like. How does this compare with what Sunni clergy do? He uses the word "ulama" to refer to Sunni clergy several times throughout the book, but might they not be the same things as Shia clergy?2. I could have done with a one page glossary of terms (and whether they were Farsi/ Persian words or Arabic words). We know that "Ayatollah" is Farsi (because we've never heard it to refer to anything other than Shia clergy), but what about "ijtihad," etc? (Arabs to whom I have spoken have recognized nearly all the words that I have referenced here, but not in the way that the author uses them).This book was WELL WORTH the purchase price and the time spent reading it. Highly recommended!

The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future by Vali Nasr argues ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The reality that will shape the future of the Middle East is not the debates over democracy or globalization that the Iraq war was supposed to have jumpstarted but the conflicts between Shias and Sunnis. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Not only does Nasr supply ample evidence to make this book accessible to both academic and less formal audiences, he supports his assertions with a mix of primary and secondary sources. Sprinkled with dialogue from Iraqi war generals and ample use of secondary sources centered around historical Shia and Sunni events, NasrÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s work is both compelling and riveting, offering an unparalleled look into the deeply layered world, and the ancient conflict between the Shia and Sunnis in the Middle East. This is both an enlightening an emotional treasure to explore.

In Vali NasrÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s book The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future, he addresses an issue that is gaining increased importance in the modern analysis of global Islam: Sunni and Shia relations and which he also states is going to shape our future. Vali Nasr, a

Middle East scholar writer, foreign policy adviser and commentator in international relations describes how Shia and Sunni differs from each other and how U.S military actions towards the war against Saddam and Iraq, and the willingness to expand democracy to the world the east countries, might lead to a Shia resistance. This is a world portrayal that offers an understanding of the ancient conflicts and the struggle that Middle East is facing within the world of the Muslim religion. Nasr points out US involvement in this situation and how US as a country have to gain more knowledge and respect towards this world dilemma and conflict that effects more people that a person without the knowledge in the subject wouldnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t have known about. Nasr goes from talking about history to our present situation and how we need to act in the future, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“What is clear is that the future for the Middle East will not be brighter than the past so long as the shadow of sectarian conflict hangs over it. This is the conflict that will shape the futureÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (Vali Nasr). This is a book that should be read by anyone who does not have the knowledge about the Shia difference. Nasr writes in a way that make it easy to understand and he approaches the subject in a way that makes it very interesting and makes one think about our current situation.

In The Shia Revival, Vali Nasr argues that the United States of America must rethink foreign policies regarding the Middle East, as the Muslim world is a changing climate. To support this argument, Vali Nasr has meticulously researched the majority of The Shia Revival, using sources such as well-respected newspapers (The Washington Post, The New York Times, and the Los Angeles Times, for example), PhD dissertations from respected institutions, books published by those same institutionsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ presses, Human Rights Watch Reports, and respected periodicals like Newsweek and Smithsonian. While Nasr uses a myriad of exceptional sources in support of each chapterÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s central theme, The Shia Revival does rely quite a bit on the authorÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s own unvalidated firsthand reports. Another issue facing The Shia Revival is that it would best be prefaced by a rudimentary understanding of Islamic leaders and customs. While I did enjoy the book, I had a very difficult time following the overwhelming cast of characters of the Islamic world. In general, the book would be a great read for those highly interested in, if a bit uninformed of, the issues facing the current climate of the Muslim world.

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