



Rebel Sultans: The Deccan from Khilji to Shivaji

Manu S. Pillai

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‘Deftly and with great vividness, Manu S. Pillai takes us through 400 years of roiling history and returns the Deccan to the centre of our attention – where it belongs.’ SUNIL KHILNANI

‘Minutely researched and yet instantly accessible . . . Rebel Sultans will bring the fascinating history of the medieval Deccan to a whole new generation of readers.’ WILLIAM DALRYMPLE

‘In this lively study, Manu S. Pillai does a superb job of re-orienting the narrative of late medieval and early modern South Asia towards the Deccan.’ MUZAFFAR ALAM

‘In Rebel Sultans, the Deccan is presented in seven engaging chapters, each focused on a pivotal moment, character or symbol, that together trace the dynamic history of the region and convey its unique flavour.’ NAVINA NAJAT HAIDAR

In 1707 when Emperor Aurangzeb went to his grave, the Mughal empire began to crack into a hundred fractured pieces. It was the lure of the Deccan that drained this conqueror’s energies, putting him on a course of collision with his most threatening adversaries. After all, the Deccan was a land that inspired wonder. Its treasures were legendary, and its kings magnificent. It was a horizon of rousing adventure, attracting talent from beyond oceans. A traveller here could encounter bands of European snipers, available for military hire, or forbidding fortresses where African nobles scaled the heights of power. Diamonds and pearls lay heaped in the Deccan’s bazaars, while in its courts thrived Persians and Marathas, Portuguese and Georgians, presiding over a world of drama and betrayal. A thousand fortunes were made in the Deccan, drawing the formidable envy of generations of Mughal emperors.

In Rebel Sultans, Manu S. Pillai narrates the story of the Deccan from the close of the thirteenth century to the dawn of the eighteenth. Packed with riveting tales and compelling characters, this book takes us from the age of Alauddin Khilji to the ascent of Shivaji. We witness the dramatic rise and fall of the Vijayanagar empire, even as we negotiate intrigues at the courts of the Bahmani kings and the Rebel Sultans who overthrew them. From Chand Bibi, a valorous queen stabbed to death, and Ibrahim II of Bijapur, a Muslim prince who venerated Hindu gods, to Malik Ambar, the Ethiopian warlord, and Krishnadeva Raya on Vijayanagar’s Diamond Throne – they all appear in these pages as we journey through one of the most arresting sweeps of Indian history. Unravelling a forgotten chapter in our medieval past, Rebel Sultans reminds us of a different age and a different time in the Deccan – one that ended an empire and rewrote India’s destiny.

Rebel Sultans: The Deccan from Khilji to Shivaji Details

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From Reader Review Rebel Sultans: The Deccan from Khilji to Shivaji for online ebook

Tasneem Ali says

Personally.. I didn't enjoyed this book. It's more like a text book which reminded of class room study.

Surabhi Chatrapathy says

Growing up in India, you are made to believe (thanks to the education system) that the grandest aspect of Indian History was the Mughal Empire. Though true in it's time, it was not the only region, and empire that changed the course of history in India.

To remind us of this and tell us the tales of Deccan India, is Rebel Sultans by Manu S Pillai.

If all history books were written with such wit , humour and reason, history would be more accessible and enjoyable for all. Stretching from 1200s to 1700s, the books encompasses the story of Deccan India in it's prime.

A politically poignant read for today, the book logically explains with sufficient backing, how most of the renowned religious clashes and wars were more political than religious. It educates us about the culture of the Deccan and the Persian influence on art, architecture and cuisine.

The book illustrates how the Deccan was truly a space for cultural and religious assimilation. The shrewed and sometimes unfortunate decisions that led to large scale changes in the region, the hilarious and pride driven demands of the Sultans, the secret conversions, the contribution to art and literature, the wealth of the region, are all aspects of the book.

I cannot stress how important this book is, in the wide range of literature written about India and it's history over the years.

Its looks at the region's history with the most objective lens possible. A lens we to have forgotten to use in popular and political discourse today.

Giving credit to their poetic prowess, the author does not shy away from pointing out poetic exaggeration as compared to facts. It is very difficult to string together an objective picture in history. But this work clearly reflects the amount of research and effort that has gone into bringing this book together. Manu Pillai has unearthed an almost forgotten part of India and it's history.

Liju Kuriakose says

Yet another beauty from Manu Pillai. The book, much like his previous one, is a page turner and would leave the reader amused at the sheer brilliance of the writer.

Recommended!

If you haven't read The Ivory Throne, that should be read first. Not that this book needs that introduction, but I think the author will be better appreciated with that one.

Avishek Bhattacharjee says

Once again writing in an eloquent and lucid style, Pillai holds his readers spellbound through a sweeping narration of a new era beginning from the end of the 13th century with grand kingdoms of Vijayanagar, Bahamanis, Adil Shahis, Qutb Shahis and Nizam Shahis holding sway and creating an impressive scenario that ironically became their nemesis with the mighty Mughals ruthlessly crushing them by the beginning of the 18th century. "Rebel Sultans " is a must read for an academic as well as for a wider perspective purpose.

Jazz Singh says

An absorbing account of the history of the Deccan. Manu S Pillai writes history as if he's telling a story. From the greatness of the Vijayanagar and Bahmani rulers in the early 1200s to the ascendancy of the 'Turks', as the Muslim rulers were called, the fate of the Bijapur, Golconda, and indeed, the whole of that region is recounted in great detail and, sometimes, amusing nuggets.

Ameya Joshi says

There are many fine reviews of this book which I have now read, so at the cost of this appearing a cop-out, just jotting down the highlights:

- Yes, this is indeed "pop history" as someone on GR put, simplified for an audience without the patience to dig through academic tomes but yet backed up with an impressive set of references for those who do dare look things up and give us a certain amount of confidence. 99% of us won't though...
 - Most of us have heard of all of these characters in the history we learnt in school. Most of us also wouldn't be able to draw a dynasty other than the Mughal's straight with it all being a jumbled mess. What this book does is to at least create that high level structure in your mind and set the 'context' - you do now know who is in who's team, or which are the teams even...
 - It is however easy (and tempting) to get lost in the details beyond a point. I almost wanted those summary boxes ("Key Points") we had in our school textbooks somewhere in the narrative.
 - Yes, the fact that kings did not divide on religious lines in that era is a very relevant point to emphasize and take away. Also yes, this was repeated a few times too many perhaps.
 - Maps. The book needed more maps. Lots of them. To be able to connect history to the geography of today is one of the best ways to make it come alive no?
 - The dry humour and irreverence in general is a most excellent way of writing history. Yeh dil maange more.
 - To have 2 full books out before you're 28 just makes the rest of us feel bad about our lives... :-)
-

Sajith Kumar says

A run-of-the-mill narrative with rebellion only in its title..!

Well, that about sums up the book and also the disappointment in one neat sentence. Deccan has been a major theatre of political drama right from the dawn of history. A colourful chapter in that eventful run of history was played out between the years 1300 and 1700 CE in which the northern sultans took an active interest in subjugating it. Two attempts were made in the Sultanate and Mughal periods each. Both were doomed to eventually fail which in turn set in motion the rise of a powerful Hindu state in the form of Vijayanagar in the fourteenth and the Marathas under Shivaji in the seventeenth centuries. In the latter instance, Aurangzeb's disastrous Deccan campaigns sapped the lifeblood of the empire and initiated the liquidation process of his bigoted government in particular and the crumbling of Mughal power in general. This book covers the extraordinary events in the Deccan (which is confined here to the modern Indian states of Maharashtra, Telengana and Northern Karnataka) from the invasion of Ala ud-Din Khilji to the years of Shivaji which extends to four centuries of intrigue, annexation, battles, wars of succession and in general, the flow of history. Manu S. Pillai is a talented young historian who had served in the literary team of Shashi Tharoor. He earned wide acclaim for his maiden title on the royal House of Travancore and remains one of the most promising writers in the budding stage.

While in the north the sultans tended to be more hidebound within religion, the Deccani dynasties were somewhat more cosmopolitan in outlook and accommodative of the Hindu natives. Akbar was the only Mughal sovereign who maintained truly cheerful relationships with Hindu rulers. In the case of Deccan, many such potentates are indicated by Pillai. Hasan Gangu, also known as Ala ud-Din Bahman Shah, who founded the Bahmani kingdom in Gulbarga, abolished jizya (the hated poll tax forced on Hindus) in his territories. This happened a full 225 years before Akbar was to repeat the same thing in the north. He visited Ellora caves with a Brahmin guide to marvel at the sculptural wonders. Another ruler of the same dynasty, Taj ud-Din Firuz Shah appointed Brahmins to high administrative positions as well as absorbing local Hindu chiefs as amirs of the aristocracy. The forefathers of Marathas, including the father and grandfather of Shivaji, were in the service of Bijapur and Ahmadnagar sultans. The most famous of them all is Madanna, the prime minister of the Qutb Shahis of Golconda.

Some sultans went a step further and engaged his subjects at a spiritually higher level. Ahmed Shah Bahmani is still venerated by the Lingayat community as a reincarnation of the mystic Allama Prabhu. His death anniversary (urs) is celebrated with pomp and splendor. Ibrahim Qutb Shah so favoured the Telugu language that he is known as Malikbrahma or Abhirama. However, Pillai notes that occasional destruction of temples continued unabated even in the midst of such tolerance. It is a mistake to conclude that the frequent wars and battles between Muslim sultans and Hindu rajas were of a religious nature. Even though he lists out a long line of Muslims respected and revered by Hindus even now, it is striking that not a single case of the other way round, that is, Muslims venerating Hindu chiefs and nobles is reported! Ibrahim Adil Shah II comes very close to enlightenment as he endowed temples, affirmed the rights of Hindu pilgrims and Portuguese Jesuits were allowed to establish missions in various parts of his kingdom. In his copper coins, he assumes the epithet of *ablabali* (friend of the weak, in Sanskrit). A number of his firmans began with an invocation of Goddess Saraswati. He took it as an honorific to call himself Saraswati's son. He was closely identified with the goddess of vidya (knowledge) that at one point, he renamed his capital city Bijapur as Vidyapur. Ibrahim II's eclecticism is amply evident in the *Kitab-i-Nauras* which he penned.

Manu S. Pillai repeatedly points our attention to the perpetual discord between kingdoms of Deccan. When the region first experienced an Islamic onslaught by the end of the thirteenth century, the pre-existing Hindu

dynasties of Yadavas, Kakatiyas and Hoysalas were at each other's throats. The same story repeated a century and a half later when the Bahmanis disintegrated into five branches – Adil Shahis of Bijapur, Nizam Shahis of Ahmadnagar, Qutb Shahis of Golconda, Imad Shahis of Berar and Barid Shahis of Bidar – who wasted no opportunity to fight among themselves. The author has included dynasty trees of all the five, even though only the first three had had any real significance and impact on events. When once they combined to defeat Vijayanagar in 1565, their glory was at its zenith. But the spirit of union didn't last long and in a few decades, the Mughals snapped all of them up. By the time of these sultans, Deccan was a place that attracted job seekers from many parts of the known world. Persian nobles had a natural advantage as the court was Persian in style and language. Even Ethiopian slaves such as Malik Ambar rose steadily in the ranks and attained lofty positions. This led to the formation of two factions in court. The local aristocrats were called Dakhnis and the Iranians and Central Asians were called Afaqis, loosely translated as locals and westerners. This division again caused strife.

As noted earlier, this book is dishearteningly short of any original observations. Primary materials have not been gone into when the author researched for this work. For a description of Vijayanagar, Robert Sewell's 'A Forgotten Empire' is abundantly dipped into, but whose authority is built on shaky grounds. The book includes several old photographs of monuments and tombs taken in the nineteenth century. This offers a delightful review on the very good state of preservation they are now bestowed with. Pillai claims that Hindu kings accepted the title of 'Suratrana' which is a transliteration of the Muslim sultan. This is contested in learned circles as the Sanskrit term also means 'protector of gods'. The author affirms that the term marked their place in a wider world and a changed geography where that term carried tremendous potency. The episode of Shivaji and the rise of Marathas is relegated to the epilogue, but Pillai assures us that the sudden growth of Maratha power is quite another story. Perhaps his next book may be on this topic! The book hosts a sizeable section of Notes and a good bibliography. Most of the very old books in the list of references can be downloaded freely from Archive.org.

In spite of all this, the readers can not quite shrug off the feeling that a golden opportunity was wasted by the author.

The book is highly recommended.

Sahil Pradhan says

Manu S. Pillai narrates the Deccan's story from the end of the 13th century to the dawn of the 18th. We travel from the age of Alauddin Khilji to Shivaji's ascent and witness Vijayanagar's rise and fall intrigues at the Bahmani kings' courts and the scheming of the Rebel Sultans who overthrew them.

Three years ago, Manu Pillai wrote one of India's quirkiest and most charming contemporary history books. *The Ivory Throne: Chronicles of the House of Travancore* is an absorbing deep dive into court intrigues of what is now Kerala "from the era of Martanda Varma, the masterful warrior king, down to India's liberation from colonial rule two centuries after his passing. It is the story of those intervening years when the region became a smoldering cauldron of social, political and cultural contestations, which would leave in their wake a new land so different from its incredible ancestor in the era of the Zamorins and the Portuguese." Driven compulsively over nearly 700 exhaustive pages by the author's evidently limitless passion and commitment, there is an intriguing wrinkle. Pillai started his research when still a teenager, and was only just 25 when his book was published (it deservedly won the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puruskar).

Still conspicuously short of his 29th birthday, this rather remarkable young author is back with *Rebel Sultans: The Deccan from Khilji to Shivaji*, which promises – as per the prominent front cover blurb by Sunil Khilnani – to reposition “the Deccan to the center of our attention – where it belongs”.

Pillai’s second book is not as weighty, literally and figuratively, as his first, a sweeping, multiple-narrative telling of Kerala’s engagement with the first colonial invaders. It does not have much new insight or analysis and presents no original framework of understanding. It is a manifestly less ambitious project that dances around the more complex questions of historical scholarship that would conceivably weigh down his style and purpose. But that does not make *Rebel Sultans* any less hardworking — 58 pages of notes and 13 pages of bibliography attached to 220 pages of main text are impressive by any standard. And it is dazzling storytelling. Pillai has employed an extraordinarily powerful imagination and a prodigious talent with words to write a genuine thriller that is near impossible to shut before reaching the end. Finally — and this must be said — unlike some joke historians who have of late inflicted insufferable, and at times dangerous, bilge on us, Pillai’s style, in addition to its gloriously evident flamboyance, is also both honest and intelligent, and entirely devoid of any pompous pretense.

But when one reads both the literary works of Pillai together, one gets a sense of commonality and even difference, while the first book was flamboyant, rich and well researched, the second book feels sometimes dry and textbookish type- but still it is better than one!. That would be the only critic I would give about the book. But the flow of facts and its well interpretation overcomes the dryness.

The history is the present in India today. Everyday life is replete with references, shouted down from pulpits or by six talking heads boxed inside a television screen, of the glory of past civilizations of one faith that were ravaged by marauding invaders of an opposing faith – all stories with neat edges, reasons, and justifications for what happens in India today. The history of the Deccan, for example, is often foddered to push the idea of a crusade fuelled by religious passion, and the popular narrative often rests on the shoulder of Shivaji, the 17th century Maratha king recast as a Hindu conqueror, whose ancestry is sensitive enough for a large public library to be ransacked at the faintest possibility of a slight.

But in *Rebel Sultans*, Manu Pillai takes great pains to paint a picture of this fascinating region that is far messier – one that doesn’t give itself to easy generalizations, or narrative building. Through engaging prose and extensive footnoting (the annotation and bibliography take up almost 100 pages), Pillai takes the reader through kings who sailed from alien lands and rose to great power in the Deccan, sultans who painted their nails red and wrote paeans in praise of the goddess Saraswati, and rulers who had “skin the colour of coal”— in the process establishing Deccan as a riveting place where the potential of upward social mobility was possibly far more than today, albeit through gruesome bloodshed and fratricide.

This book is about the sultans and not about the inhabitants of the sultanates. It speaks about the fabulously rich persons and the treasures they possessed, but not about the teeming millions who lived in the Deccan. It doesn’t speak about the produce or the food of the region. The horror of wars, even at this distance, is chilling and the author gives us but a glimpse of it. This was what Adil Shah did to his own domain to slow the advance of the Mughal army: “The embankment of the tanks were demolished, poison and carrion were thrown into the wells, trees and loft building near the fortress were destroyed. Similar outrages were committed by the warring emperors, sultans, and kings year after year. The author also mentions in passing of the terrible famine of 1630: “Life was offered for a loaf, but none would buy; rank was to be sold for a cake, but none cared for it (and) the flesh of a son was preferred to his love”.

What makes me love the book is the prose of the author. I have been struggling hard for over 50 years to write non-execrable stuff and here is an unassuming young person, effortlessly writing elegant, illuminating prose. I do envy him.

Padmashri says

Bought the book after all the social media hype. But I felt that the narrative could be better. The first part of the book reads much like a history 'text' book, a bit confusing though the interest builds up well.

Enjoyed reading from where Malik Ambar makes a debut and the narrative become somewhat better. Interesting to read about the Dakhnis and Persians and of course the Golconda part really keeps you glued to the book.

Manu Pillai certainly gives a nice peak into the history of Deccan and its many fascinating characters, Rama Raya, Malik Ambar, Aurangzeb and his advent into Deccan.

Roselyn says

As someone who is from Kerala Manu's first book - The Ivory Throne: Chronicles of the House of Travancore had invoked a sense of curiosity in me, I had heard much raving reviews about it on social media. His first book was about the last queen of Trivandrum - Sethu Lekshmi Bai. So when his second book which was launched last month arrived, I was thrilled.

Synopsis :

This book mainly talks about why its important to understand Deccan- a land which is often forgotten and not given the due credit for the vital role it played in shaping Indian history. Deccan was a coveted place even before advent of Shivaji Bhonsle. The principal event in this book span about 500 years from the formation of Delhi Sultanate to the decline of Mughal Empire all fitted in around 200 pages. And yet while reading this book I felt how detailed these 200 pages were. There is another 100 pages dedicated to detailed notes and bibliography.

The book talks in detail about how the revolt against Delhi Sultanate of Muhammad bin Tughlaq led to the formation of Bahmani Sultante in 1347. Delhi Sultanate would later crumble and split into five branches which were collectively called Deccan Sultanates. These dynasties would rule the kingdoms of

Bijapur - Adil Shah

Golkonda - Qutb Shah

Ahmadnagar - Nizam Shah

Bidar- Barid Shah

Berar -Imad Shah

The book also talks about the wars - Battle of Raichur and Battle of Talikota that were raged by these dynasties against Vijayanagar Empire (Sangama dynasty).

My thoughts :

Vested Interests :

In India where history is often twisted by people for their own vested interests . This book is a reminder to never glorify Kings as Gods who were just mortal humans. The Kings who ruled then, had their own mighty interests which mostly was in expansion of their provinces. The book talks about how the greed for throne could make one swap religion from Hinduism to Muslim, or shift ideologies between Shiism and Sunnism for personal interests. I was shocked to read several instances of the practices of parricide and blinding of siblings among newly elected Kings for securing their thrones. It was interesting to learn that under Islamic laws a blind man was ineligible to rule.

Their are examples of Muslim Kings who were influenced by Hindu culture and left traces of this culture in several historical buildings left in India. The history also tells example of Hindu Kings who would were open-hearted to the Muslims who were present in their kingdom.

For instance Vitthala temple has a column which shows a turbanned Muslim warrior. There are literary books which shows Bahmani Sultan was Ashvapati -Lord Of horses. Vijayanagar empire is claimed to be formed as resistance against Muslim invasion, but in was actuality it was formed by its founders who took advantage of strong commotion against Muslim Kings to form an empire of their own. We learn Firoz Shah of Tughlaq Dynasty employed a huge number of Brahmins and local chiefs for everyday administration of his kingdom.

Story of Deccan :

Reading this book helps one understand how Deccan played a pivotal role in the Indian history. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea mentions Deccan as a southern country abundant in cotton and onyx. The rulers sought Deccan for its wealth.

Deccan would also provide a home to huge number of migrants from Persia and other parts who were imported by Bahmani Sultanates via Arabian Seas. Bahmani Sultanates just like Delhi Sultanates believed in superiority of Persian artistry hence sought them, in plently yearly. Persian arts mixed with local art can be seen in surviving monuments by these kings.

Dakhani language was a contribution of Deccan Sultantes.

Exaggeration of the Chroniclers :

The book also show how chroniclers would exaggerate much to win favors from kings. The below excerpt made me chuckle -

Ghiyasuddin Balban, the ninth Sultan, for instance, never set foot in the south. Yet he felt impelled to have his power flaunted in a classical idiom of hyperbole to a very Indian audience : a Sanskrit inscription from his reigns proclaim how, when

he issued forth on a military expedition ... the Gaudas abdicated their glory; the Andhras, through fear, besought the shelter of the caves; the Keralas forsook their pleasures; the Karnatas hid themselves in defiles; the Maharashtras gave their places; the Gujaratas resigned their vigour; and the Latas dwarfed themselves into Kiratas.

And all this when Keralas and Karnatas had, in all likelihood, no clue who Balban was or what exactly about his expedition was so earth shattering. (Pg 26)

To be honest i had difficulty in getting through the book as I felt overwhelmed by the multitude of kings and interesting facts referenced about them. I had difficulty in remembering and chronologically placing the events in my head. So when I reached half of the book, I re-read from the beginning and sought help from internet which helped me grasp more compared to my first read. This is a book which needs to be savored slowly, if you lack knowledge about Deccan or any of these dynasties.

My post favorite part among the book was getting to know about the Peacock Throne , the history of Hyderabad, The Great Table Diamond, and about the origins of Kohinoor mines. I highly recommend this book whether you are history nerd or not, trust me you will feel so much smarter once you read it. The research data comprised in this book is not something you would be able to get easily on internet these days.

It made me feel proud to be an Indian- we are country of such rich history.

Hashin Jithu says

Very well researched, simple language. Contains a lot of strong arguments in favour of our pluralistic past. I found it wanting for a bit more depth and an adequate coverage of cultural history.

For all matters, the emphasis is on how the high culture - the court and its machinations - was pluralistic and effectively a tussle between the higher classes that acted as arbitrators of power for houses that coveted the respective thrones.

The history of the subalterns is neglected. It is indeed a daunting task, but a chapter (or more) dedicated to such a telling would have been commendable - provided the lengths gone by the author to unearth many a neglected tales and facets of political expediency that made these multi-ethnic kingdoms which emerged as melting pots of a flowery Deccani culture.

Will suggest this book to people interested in reading the real political history of India and as in the words of Prof. Sunil Khilnani - this book brings back the history of Deccan to where it belongs - centre.

Shivam Chaturvedi says

I had the great pleasure of listening to Manu Pillai live earlier this year - at the 2018 Jaipur Literature Festival. It was at a session where he was talking about his book called the Ivory Throne - and came across as someone who was extremely knowledgeable, insightful and with that carefree sense of humor that inevitably seems to creep in when you've read and seen so much of the past that almost everything in hindsight seems like a bit of a joke.

Those characteristics then have crept right into this second book of his (haven't read Ivory Throne yet though). The book is a certified page turner, with a sum total of zero pages that are close to remotely boring. History was always my favorite subject, even back in school when the content was drab NCERT books. *Rebel Sultans* is nowhere remotely like that, and I believe someone even with a minor penchant for reading would be able to make through this book without any effort.

And while it is most certainly a pop-history book, made for a generation of people like me who rely on condensed versions of history, simplified if not over-simplified, the author throws in enough notes and bibliography for anyone seriously interested in the topic to be able to research further. And as an honest assessment, the leaps of faith, that any author of a history book must make, appear grounded in reality, and the book itself is a v2.0 of a pop-history book, i.e. definitely not your routine oh-everything-just-fits-in-a-perfect-mould-and-is-funny-too.

To his great credit, Manu Pillai brings alive the sordid, funny and glamorous world of medieval Deccan, populated by a remarkable cast of characters. I for one had always heard of the Bahmani Sultans, and the Qutb Shahi and the Adil Shahi dynasties. But in my mind (and this is after hours spent reading Wikipedia articles) they were always a jumbled up whole - never distinct from one another. What I take away from this book then is this clear distinction of their individual histories, an understanding of the key players of these

dynasties, and how each of them contributed to the story of the Deccan before Marathas overpowered every story emanating from that region.

So all in all, I walked away an extremely happy history lover, gladly consuming every interesting tidbit lying around in these pages (and there's no dearth of them) - serious and funny alike. The author needs to be lauded for his impeccable research and writing style - there *is* a lot of information packed within this book. But almost at no point do you really feel overburdened with information.

The only thing in the vicinity of a complaint is the author's almost persistent drumbeat that a religious divide in the medieval ages is a modern myth. Its true that politics and power always were and always have been the real reasons for bloodshed, with those in upper echelons only happy to use religion as a frontal motive. He props up several evidences with regards to this, which all make sense, but he ends up overdoing that a little. And while there are compelling evidences to indicate that religious divisions were comfortably forgotten when questions of power were concerned, the plethora of evidences that indicate clear persecution along religious lines is conveniently ignored in framing this story.

While not all Muslims are/were bad, and not all Hindus are/were good (as some would conveniently have you believe), unnecessary mongering for India being the paragon of communal harmony in the medieval ages - and that religious persecution was only a means to power is an almost equally naive view. Which unfortunately for some reason is one of the foundation pillars of this book (among many others ofcourse). And so if Mr Pillai was a little more accepting of the truth, I believe a spectacular book would have become even better.

Having said that, it deserves no less credit for lighting up my weekend mornings (and a couple of late nights too) with two of my favorite things in life - Books and History. PS - the cover art is DOPE.

Hrishikesh says

Severally disappointed.

On the face of it, the subject matter of the book was deeply fascinating. Our view of history is so overwhelmingly Delhi-centric, that I looked forward to a well-written, concise, and readable history of the Deccan. Unfortunately, I was disappointed.

One reason for my disappointment is that the subject matter is extremely complex. From "Khilji to Shivaji (Maharaj)" is a period of about 7-odd centuries. Justice cannot be done to such a vast period in a span of 200-odd pages: the author ought to have either expanded on his length, or ought to have focused on a specific period in this entire epoch.

While this period saw quite a few era-defining individuals, it also had its fair share of court intrigue and toppling-of-titular-heads-with-regular-frequency. Which is true of almost any period in history. However, this book rarely rises above being a series of court conspiracies. There are perfunctory references to cultural or social history, but these references hardly added much to my understanding.

I also did not enjoy the writing style. The use of dry humor seemed a little forced and did not come naturally. I believe that it is an instrument that should be resorted to only if one is a master of the subject, and carries that critical gravitas.

All-in-all, a book that promised much, and to which I had looked forward to with much enthusiasm; but ultimately, unsatisfying. It started off well, but nose-dived by the middle.

Pallavi Sareen says

3.5 stars because I am not much into history but this book was good. I haven't read Manu S Pillai's *The Ivory Throne* and read this book because I basically have little to no knowledge about history. So when I started reading the book, I had expected it to be boring text that just went on and on but instead, I got stories of individual characters told in a good narrative.

I am sure I would have enjoyed it more if I had already known a little background about them, but what I did read astonished me. There were some clever kings, some fools and some kickass crazy ones.

It talks about Deccan's History but not as a collective whole but broken down and shown like a story in parts. I really enjoyed some of the stories like 'Kiss my Foot' and certain elements like the king who put a Quran next to his throne so the Muslims could bow without abandoning their customs. That just added such a human touch to the story. Because usually when we read about history, it is presented in an emotionless way. Even the blood of thousands, pillage, ransack, slavery, everything is written in a way to just present facts and not evoke any emotions.

But the author doesn't do that with this book. The King who knowingly that his death would ruin the kingdom, still gave the reigns of it to a twelve-year-old boy, showed me such a humane facet of history that I might forget the names but I'll carry those stories with me.

Moreover, the illustrations and paintings just made the book more interesting as it broke the monotony of the text. The book in itself is simplified for more easy understanding and even a history novice like me could understand what the hell was going on. But I was also flipping the pages every once in a while to read the notes for a deeper insight, or just to look at the pictures again. It is easy to get bored after a couple of pages with a book like this, but if you keep going with it, in the end, it is just worth dragging yourself to flip that next page. One thing is clear and that is that the author has really done his research with this book.

If you already enjoy reading history books, this will be a gem in your collection and if you are like me, and aren't much into it, you can still read and understand it for a better understanding of the history of Deccan. I personally would not have picked this book, but now after I have read it, I am wondering if I should read *The Ivory Throne* as well.

P.S- The hardcover is so beautiful! When I took that dust jacket off, I was so happy with its look. This will probably be my most photographed book on my Instagram stories.

Sunjoy Shekhar says

Immensely readable.
