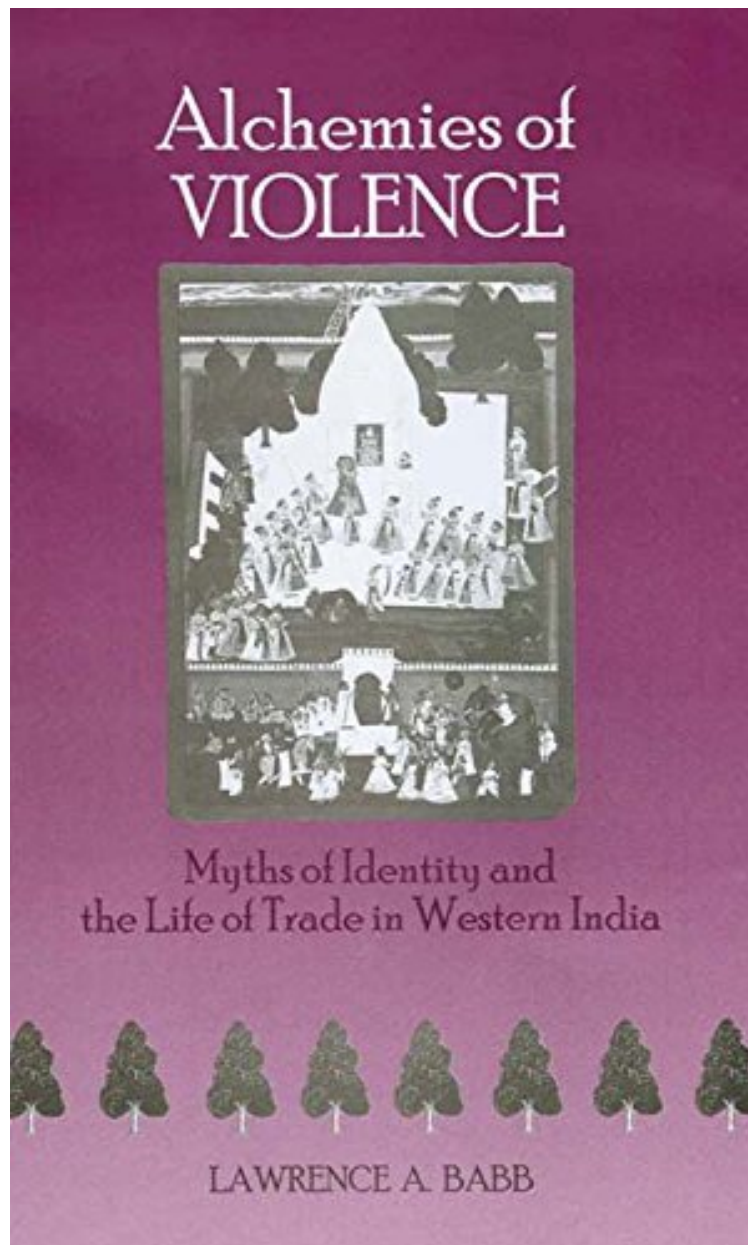


Alchemies of Violence: Myths of Identity and the Life of Trade in Western India

Lawrence A Babb

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of Identity and the Life of Trade in Western India:

The several trading castes known generically as `Marwaris` are among the most powerful and wealthy groups in India. While they have spread throughout India and beyond, their homeland is Rajasthan. This absorbing book explores their origin myths and the manner in which these myths construct and express their social identities. Lawrence Babb draws attention to the special problems of self-definition faced by these groups and shows how myth engages these problems by using a distinctive symbolism drawn from the Vedic rite of sacrifice. According to the author, origin myths utilize sacrifice as a master metaphor for creative power and social order. At a broader level, this book deals with three interrelated themes: the nature of India`s caste system; the special character and specific place of trading castes in Indian society; and the role of myth as a repository of socially important knowledge. A unique feature of this book is that it is based mainly on the literature published by caste and religious associations supplemented by oral material.

About the Author Dr Lawrence A. Babb is currently Professor of Anthropology and Asian Studies at Amherst College, Massachusetts, where he has spent most of his career. His previous books are *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India* (1975), *Redemptive Encounters: Three Modern Styles in the Hindu Tradition* (1986) and *Absent Lord: Ascetics and Kings in a Jain Ritual Culture* (1996). He has also co-edited *Media and The Transformation of Religion in South Asia* (1995) [with Susan S. Wadley] and *Multiple Histories: Culture and Society in the Study of Rajasthan* (2002) [with Michael Meister and Varsha Joshi].