

# Wajid Ali Shah: The Last King of Awadh

Wajid Ali Shah (1822-1887) was the eleventh and last Nawab of Awadh, a wealthy and powerful state in northern India. He was a renowned patron of art and culture, and his court in Lucknow became a renowned center of cultural exchange. During his reign, he encouraged the development of Kathak dance, Hindustani classical music, and other art forms. However, his reign was marked by political turmoil and British intervention, and he was eventually deposed and exiled to Calcutta in 1856.

## Early Life

Wajid Ali Shah was born on July 30, 1822, in Lucknow, the capital of Awadh. He was the son of Nawab Amjad Ali Shah and Malika Sarfaraz Mahal. He received a traditional education and was trained in various arts, including poetry, music, and dance. From a young age, he displayed a keen interest in the arts and a passion for patronage.



### Last King in India: Wajid Ali Shah by Rosie Llewellyn-Jones

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

Language : English  
File size : 8987 KB  
Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 313 pages  
Lending : Enabled



## **Reign**

Wajid Ali Shah ascended to the throne of Awadh in 1847, at the age of 25. He was a benevolent and compassionate ruler who was deeply concerned with the welfare of his people. He introduced several reforms, including the abolition of sati and the establishment of modern schools and hospitals. However, his reign was also marked by political instability and British interference.

## **Patron of the Arts**

Wajid Ali Shah was a renowned patron of art and culture, and his court in Lucknow became a vibrant hub of artistic activity. He was an accomplished poet and musician himself and wrote over a hundred ghazals and composed numerous thumris and qawwalis. He also established several institutions dedicated to promoting the arts, including the Constantia Theatre and the Bhulbhulaiya Palace.

## **Kathak and Hindustani Classical Music**

Wajid Ali Shah played a pivotal role in the development of Kathak dance and Hindustani classical music. He invited renowned dancers and musicians to his court and provided them with patronage and support. Under his patronage, Kathak flourished and became an integral part of Awadhi culture. He also patronized musicians such as the legendary sitar player Bahadur Khan and the vocalist Faiyaz Khan, who contributed to the development of Hindustani classical music.

## **British Annexation and Exile**

In 1856, the British East India Company annexed Awadh, citing the Nawab's alleged misrule and incompetence. Wajid Ali Shah was deposed

and exiled to Calcutta, where he spent the rest of his life under British surveillance. Despite his exile, he continued to patronize the arts and remained a respected figure among the Indian elite.

## Legacy

Wajid Ali Shah's legacy as a patron of art and culture is immense. He transformed Lucknow into a flourishing cultural center and played a crucial role in the development of Kathak dance and Hindustani classical music. His patronage helped preserve and transmit these art forms to future generations. He is remembered as a benevolent ruler, a passionate artist, and a true patron of Indian arts and culture.

Wajid Ali Shah was a complex and fascinating figure, a lover of the arts and a victim of political circumstances. His reign was characterized by both cultural brilliance and political turmoil, but his legacy as a patron of art and culture continues to inspire and influence generations of artists and art enthusiasts.



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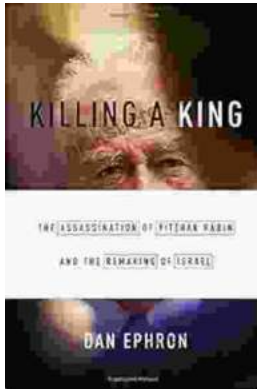
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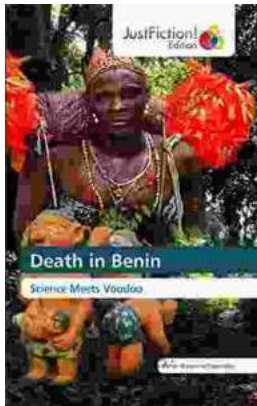
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