



In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan

Ann Grodzins Gold, Bhoju Ram Gujar

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In the Time of Trees and Sorrows showcases peasants' memories of everyday life in North India under royal rule and their musings on the contrast between the old days and the unprecedented shifts that a half century of Indian Independence has wrought. It is an oral history of the former Kingdom of Sawar in the modern state of Rajasthan as it was from the 1930s to the 1950s.

Based on testimonies from the 1990s, this book stands as a polyvocal account of the radical political and environmental changes the region and its people have faced in the twentieth century. Not just the story of modernity from the perspective of a rural village, these interviews and author commentaries narrate this small rural community's relatively sudden transformation from subjection to a local despot and to a remote colonial power to citizenship in a modern postcolonial democracy. Unlike other recent studies of Rajasthan, the current study gives voice exclusively to former subjects who endured the double oppression of colonial and regional rulers. Gold and Gujar thus place subjective subaltern experiences of daily routines, manifestations of power relations, and sweeping changes to the environment (after the fall of kings) that turned lush forests into a barren landscape on equal footing with historical "fact" and archival sources. Ambiguous, complex, and culturally laden as it is in Western thought, the concept of nature is queried in this ethnographic text. For persons in Sawar the environment is not only a means of sustenance, its deterioration is linked to human morality and to power, both royal and divine. The framing questions of this South Asian history revealed through memories are: what was it like in the time of kings and what happened to the trees?

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