

Forest Futures: Global Representations and Ground Realities in the Himalayas

Author: Mawdsley, Emma

Source: Mountain Research and Development, 29(1) : 105

Published By: International Mountain Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1659/mrd.mm049>

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Forest Futures: Global Representations and Ground Realities in the Himalayas

By Antje Linkenbach. London: Seagull, 2007. xii + 329 pp. £ 16.99. ISBN 9781905422524.

In this book, Antje Linkenbach argues that the clamor of global interest in the Chipko movement (including among national, urban elites within India) has drowned out local voices and led to grassroots agendas being appropriated and subverted by nonlocal narratives of gender and the environment. Her work is based on meticulous and long-standing ethnographic engagement in India's Garhwal hills, and she seeks to validate her argument through detailed anthropological enquiry into the structures, cosmologies, and lives of the villagers of Nakoli Village in western Garhwal. Her analysis is also based on interviews conducted with various figures involved with the Chipko movement(s) and throughout the region. Her work reflects on the power inequalities of narrative, discourse, and representation; on academia and its shortcomings; on forest policies from the colonial time to the present; and on local narratives of the "everyday forest."

What gives the book its strength is Linkenbach's long field engagement. She contrasts herself with more fleeting visitors, arguing that they are unable or unwilling to discern complex local realities, including subaltern social constructions of the forests and therefore of the politics and morals of their use. Her account of Nakoli, although not always cogently folded into the wider text and argument, is written with insight and empathy. In terms of her analysis of the assemblage of protests and discourses usually labeled as "the" Chipko movement, Linkenbach points, first, to differences in leadership and support and in regional

agendas and variations, and second, to urge the centrality and importance of grassroots development agendas—hospitals, schools, and roads, for example. The book speaks interestingly to the debates over a new State of Uttarakhand (within the federal Union of India). At the time of the main period of fieldwork upon which Linkenbach bases this work (1993–1996), this was the subject of an enormous mobilization in the hills. Among other issues, protestors raised the historical exploitation of the region's forests by both the colonial and postcolonial states; and, among other narratives, they drew upon the grammars and strategies of the earlier Chipko movement(s) in pursuing these demands. The new State was in fact created in 2000. Linkenbach touches interestingly on the extent to which the Chipko protests were instrumental in creating a stronger sense of a regional public sphere that might have played a part in creating the ground for these later struggles, although she does not elaborate extensively on more recent developments (including post-2000 shifts and/or continuities).

While the book will certainly be of interest to Himalayan anthropologists, social movement theorists, and other regional specialists, there are a number of problems that present themselves. The first is that Linkenbach is too assertive about the originality of her argument, namely, that "Chipko" has been problematically appropriated. Other authors, notably Hari Priya Rangan (1996/2004, 2000), have done much to skewer the external "mythologizing" of Chipko, particularly by ecofeminist and neo-traditionalist authors, whose romanticizing sensibilities appeal to elite, urban audiences. Rangan's work is detailed and insightful and has been very well received. Linkenbach's research is informed by the sheer depth of her village-based work, and her approach to these debates has been somewhat different (although not entirely unique) from that of others who have commented on Chipko. But

it is hard to see why she has not acknowledged the work of others who have taken a line similar to hers.

A second problem is that, oddly, the more subordinated voices of Chipko—the men and women who, she rightly points out, are often overlooked—do not have an especially strong presence in this book either. Despite claims to the contrary, the discussion of the Chipko movement(s) and protests centers, like most other accounts, on the celebrated figures of Sunderlal Bahuguna and Chandi Prasad Bhatt and on the differences in their goals, styles, and positionings. The many men and women who made up the next "tier" of leadership and the more numerous ordinary villagers and townsfolk who were involved in the protests are not strongly represented in this account.

In sum, this book is certainly a good critical addition to the work that has emerged over many years on the Chipko movements. Although the anthropological fieldwork that underpins these claims is rich and insightful, the various parts of the book are not always entirely fluently stitched together, and it is a shame that Linkenbach has not critically engaged with the work of theorists who take a line similar to hers. Nonetheless, Uttarakhand and Chipko enthusiasts will still wish to add this book to their collection.

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AUTHOR

Emma Mawdsley
eem10@cam.ac.uk
Department of Geography, University of
Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 3EN, UK

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